

Casting Judas: Interracial Intimacy in *Jesus Christ Superstar*

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Jesus Christ Superstar (JCS) by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice first debuted as a staged musical in 1971, and was turned into a film production in 1973. In 2000 Gale Edwards and Nick Morris directed a second film adaptation. On Easter Sunday 2018, *JCS*, directed by David Levaux and Alex Rudzinski, was broadcasted on NBC as a live musical television special. Each of these three productions incorporates different configurations of *interracial intimacy* among the characters of Judas, Jesus, and Mary. These different characterizations and configurations of race construction produce differing commentaries on race and interracial relations. Despite the emergent scholarship of critical race theory in theater and film studies, there is surprisingly little literature on the configurations of interracial intimacies in *JCS*. In this thesis, I draw on critical race theory and gender studies to explore how race inflects representations of intimacy in *JCS*, focusing on the characterization of Judas across these productions. As I critically compare how Judas relates to Jesus and Mary, I observe how portrayals of intimacy produce implicit racial constructions that reveal repressive subjectivity formation narratives of the Euro-American imaginary.

Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction.....	1
2.0 Literature Review	7
3.0 Judas 1973.....	11
3.1 Heaven on Their Minds 1973.....	13
3.2 Everything’s Alright 1973.....	20
3.3 The Last Supper 1973	26
4.0 Judas 2000.....	34
4.1 Heaven on Their Minds 2000.....	37
4.2 Everything’s Alright 2000.....	40
4.3 The Last Supper 2000	46
5.0 Judas 2018.....	53
5.1 Heaven on Their Minds 2018.....	53
5.2 Everything’s Alright 2018.....	57
5.3 The Last Supper 2018	60
6.0 Conclusion	63
Bibliography	65

List of Musical Examples

Example 1: Ostinato guitar riff from “Heaven on Their Minds” Act I, No. 2, mm. 1-3	14
Example 2: “Heaven on Their Minds” Act I, No. 2, mm. 1-5	15
Example 3: “Heaven on Their Minds” Act I, No. 2, mm. 15-22	16
Example 4: “Heaven on Their Minds” Act I, No. 2, mm. 91-102	18
Example 5: “Everything’s Alright” Act I, No. 5, mm. 5-10	21
Example 6: “The Last Supper” Act II, No. 14, mm 94-99	29
Example 7: “The Last Supper” Act II, No. 14, mm. 122-123	29

1.0 Introduction

Jesus Christ Superstar (hereafter called *JCS*) by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice first debuted as a staged musical in 1971, and was turned into a film production in 1973. In 2000 Gale Edwards directed a second film adaptation. On Easter Sunday 2018, *JCS*, directed by David Levaux and Alex Rudzinski, was broadcasted on NBC as a live musical television special. Each of these three productions incorporates different configurations of *interracial intimacy* among the characters of Judas, Jesus, and Mary. Despite the emergent scholarship of critical race theory in theater and film studies, there is surprisingly little literature on the configurations of interracial intimacies in *JCS*.¹ As the narrative of *JCS* is primarily written from the perspective of the character Judas, I too will focus primarily on his characterization and how he relates to Jesus and Mary. I was drawn to the idea of intimacy while reading interviews of the creation of *JCS*, the premise of which was Webber and Rice's question: "How could Judas betray someone he clearly loved?"² This abstract question of love is embodied in these three productions. In *JCS*, a story of love and betrayal in ancient Israel becomes inflected with the racial politics of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In this thesis, I draw on critical race film studies and gender studies to explore how race inflects representations of intimacy, focusing on the characterization of *JCS*'s protagonist across the 1973, 2000, and 2018 productions. As I critically compare different

¹ Examples of the emergent scholarship in theater and race: Susan C. Cook, "'Pretty Like the Girl: Gender,' Race and 'Oklahoma,'" *Contemporary Theatre Review* 19, no. 1 (2009): 35-47. Todd R. Decker, *Show Boat: Performing Race in an American Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Raymond Knapp, Mitchell Morris, and Stacy Ellen Wolf, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

² *Jesus Christ Superstar*, DVD, directed by Norman Jewison, 1973 (Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2004). This interview was found in a bonus feature titled, "Special Features: Exclusive Interview with Master Lyricist Tim Rice."

characterizations of Judas, I will observe how portrayals of intimacy produce implicit racial constructions that reveal repressive subjectivity formation narratives of the Euro-American imaginary. The limited availability of the original score has led other to rely on recordings and self-transcriptions.³ The music from *JCS* has primarily circulated not in musical scores or even recordings, but through frequent airings of the 1973 film adaption on television and in video recorded versions. In my analysis, I primarily use the official 35-part orchestral score used for the staged production. As the three productions that I will be analyzing have no published full scores available, I rely on the score used in the staged production and, in a few cases, my own transcriptions from the films.

The definition for the term *interracial intimacies* is not universally agreed upon or understood. In this thesis, I am writing from a distinctly American viewpoint, with its continuing legacy of anti-miscegenation customs and laws. Among *JCS*'s lead characters in each production there is always a white actor and a black actor. When observing the affective quality of Judas's relationship to Jesus, I have chosen to use the term *intimacy*, as opposed to love, because of the embodied reciprocity with which intimacy is more closely associated. By using the term intimacy rather than love, I turn to Lauren Berlant's definition of intimacy as a generator of an aesthetic of attachment.⁴ Judas's characterization shifts and adjusts according to each of these three productions. As these three productions consist of different racially constructed cast members, even when race is not explicitly programmed into the script the staging of intimacy, I argue, produces a commentary on race.

JCS has been performed in the US and Europe with varying interpretations, and characterizations since its staged premiere on Broadway in 1971. With the circulation of *JCS* in

³ Jessica, Sternfeld, *The Megamusical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁴ Lauren Gail Berlant, *Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 5.

the homes of America by way of television airings and video recordings, the 1973 film adaptation has become the definitive performance and solidified into a static text. In the following analysis, I analyze the film adaptations and television special as film texts.⁵ Adapting the words of a Shakespearean scholar, “in the case where film mediates our encounter with a [I replace *Shakespeare* with *JCS*] text the forces of the present historical moment are vividly interlaced with those of the past.”⁶ The first film adaptation was produced in the US, with lead roles played by Americans. The second film adaptation was produced in the UK, and this brought changes in interpretation, such as vocal performativity that aligned with classical musical theater as opposed to the 1970s rock and gospel vocality. Just as the first film adaptation was brought to the living rooms of America through television, the 2018 NBC production was broadcasted on television, and so bears a similar static nature to the film adaptations. The 2018 production blended US pop and rock stars, as well as seasoned Broadway actors in the leading roles. This blend pushed *JCS* towards that of the American mega-musical, but also incorporated pop concert interactivity.

These three static versions of *JCS* characterize Judas in significantly diverse ways. Compounding this complexity are the divergent interracial intimacies that Judas must navigate in each production. For examples, Judas 1973 is a black man (Carl Anderson), opposite a white Jesus (Ted Neeley) and Asian American Mary (Yvonne Elliman).⁷ Judas 2000 is a white man

⁵ Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell, *A Dictionary of Film Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 179. *Film text* can be defined as the internal structure and organization of any one film. I am using the alternative definition of film text as a film that is conceptualized as a system of meaning.

⁶ Douglas Green, E., “Shakespeare, Branagh, and the ‘Queer Traitor,’” in *The Reel Shakespeare: Alternative Cinema and Theory*, ed. Lisa S. Starks-Estes and Courtney Lehmann (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 203.

⁷ “Dick Clark Interviews Yvonne Elliman-American Bandstand 1978,” YouTube video, 2:24, posted by “AwardsShowNetwork,” January 28, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U3-ZTN0z_LY. In this interview with Dick Clark, Elliman racially defines herself as Euroasian, with maternal Japanese descent

(Jérôme Pradon), opposite a white Jesus (Glenn Carter) and black Mary (Renée Castle). The 2018 production cast both Judas (Brandon Victor Dixon) and Jesus (John Legend) as black, and Mary (Sara Bareilles) as white. Upon first comparing these productions, I detect a shift in the portrayal of intimacy, especially that of Judas in his interaction with the other lead characters. The evolution of Judas's relationship to the other lead characters, specifically Jesus, through these three productions seems to characterize him as subordinate (1973), dominant (2000), and then ambivalent (2018). This paper interrogates this shift and the implications that arise from such interpretations of intimacy that are inflected by race. In Gerald Sims's work on race and film he justifies the knowledge people of color bring in readings of film, stating, "Regardless of how a film crafts its mode of address, in the end it can only provide interpretive cues because meaning is ultimately generated by spectators in the act of reading. [...A]udiences of color inevitably bring to the film their experiences, knowledge and awareness of their own Otherness."⁸ Ultimately, what I provide in this thesis is my own reading, as a biracial woman of color, of three specific productions of *JCS*. With two white parents who did not acknowledge the difference between their unmarked race and my experience as ambiguous 'other,' I find the racially diverse casting in these productions too interesting to ignore.

Discourse on race has moved to the realm of gender, sexuality, and women's studies, most often in the form of intersectionality. Intersectionality entered the academic discourse on representation and identity politics in critical race studies with the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw.⁹ In Crenshaw's work she analyzes interlocking systems of power and oppression and explores the

and paternal European descent. She is from Honolulu, Hawaii. She jokingly labels herself "mongrel," indicating her multi-raciality.

⁸ Gerald Sim, "Film: Race and the Cinematic 'Machine,'" in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Race*, ed. Christopher P. Campbell (London: Routledge, 2016), 121.

⁹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241-1299.

limitations of US law in its erasure of protections for women of color. This critical discourse on race has moved beyond legal studies to the broad scope of scholars from any field that engages in the study of race, racism, and power, with the intention of transforming the relationship.¹⁰ Critical race film studies has adapted critical race theory into discourse analysis and studies of stereotyping and fragmented subjectivity, with the goal of uncovering how cinema all too often communicates racist values.¹¹ As I look at different characterizations of Judas, I utilize discourse analysis to analyze stereotyping and portrayals of fragmented subjectivity in relation to how the characters Jesus and Mary perceive Judas and constitute his character's represented selfhood, emphasizing its raced and gendered aspects. Taking intersectionality as the foundation of my analysis, I explore the relationship between race and gender in characterizations of Judas. It is in Judas's intimate relationships that interlocking systems of power and oppression are revealed. In his relationship with Jesus, and at times Mary, Judas is forced to confront the image of himself that those closest to him project.

The relationship between Jesus and Mary has been frequently discussed in terms of intimacy, with roots in biblical tradition. In the gnostic Gospel of Philip, for example, Mary is labeled as the most loved companion of Jesus, whom he frequently kisses on the mouth.¹² Modern film has explored this theme, including the film *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), whose plot is based on Jesus's temptation to eschew his messianic duties and instead start a family with Mary. In *Cinematic Savior: Hollywood's Making of the American Christ*, the Mary

¹⁰ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 4.

¹¹ Gerald Sim, *The Subject of Film and Race: Rethorizing Politics, Ideology, and Cinema* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2014), 2-3.

¹² Andrew Phillip Smith, *The Gospel of Philip: Annotated & Explained* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2005), 53.

of *JCS* is also interpreted as wanting Jesus as a lover.¹³ *JCS* itself contains an erotically charged solo, “I Don’t Know How to Love Him,” that Mary sings about Jesus.

I argue that Judas and Jesus must also be considered as a primary couple as the visual and musical structure of all three productions frames them as such.¹⁴ Throughout the entire work, it is clear that Judas and Jesus know each other’s fears and weaknesses, more so than any other couple in the story. For instance, in the first film, when Simon the Zealot suggests taking Rome by violence, Judas and Jesus share a knowing glance of disapproval. In the number “Everything’s Alright,” Judas and Jesus show physical familiarity with an erotically charged argument. In the second film, Judas and Jesus demonstrate intimacy in “Heaven on Their Mind” by clasping each other’s shoulders and enjoying a longing embrace. Most importantly, in all three productions the most intimate number is a duet reserved for Judas and Jesus in *The Last Supper*. The “duet” in *The Last Supper* is not a duet proper. Instead of singing simultaneously in harmony, they sing dialogically, first one sings and then the other responds. However, their removal from all other actors and their sentiments directed to one another places them in the Broadway musical and opera tradition of the love duet. Before moving to the close reading and analysis, I will briefly address the few scholars who have taken *JCS* as a topic of study.

¹³ Stephenson Humphries-Brooks, *Cinematic Savior: Hollywood’s Making of the American Christ* (Westport, Conn: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 60.

¹⁴ Stacey Wolf, “‘We’ll Always Be Bosom Buddies’: Female Duets and the Queering of Broadway Musical Theater,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 3 (2006): 351-376. Wolf analyzes the heterosexuality structures so prominent in midcentury musicals, and then draws attention to the prevalence of duets between women and the number’s homoerotic nature.

2.0 Literature Review

JCS has been largely analyzed in the context of studies that address the figure of Jesus in film.¹⁵¹⁶¹⁷ Jeffrey L. Staley and Richard Walsh give a broad overview of the 2004 special edition DVD of the 1973 adaptation in *Jesus, the Gospels, and Cinematic Imagination: A Handbook to Jesus on DVD* (2007). They generously assess the film stating that, “Jewison undoes some of the anti-Semitism of traditional passion plays with his concentration on the viewpoint of Judas and his depiction of both Jesus and Judas as ‘fated’ to their roles [...]”.¹⁸ The primary intervention of this opera is the fatedness of Judas.

Stephenson Humphries-Brooks analyzes the 1973 film adaptation and situates Jesus as the quintessential American hero.¹⁹ He makes an interesting claim that would benefit from further theorizing that *JCS* “shows the need to reintegrate the feminine into the Christian and American ethos.”²⁰ He flirts with a queer critique in his analysis of the characterizations of Pilate and Herod as foreign (British/Jewish) ‘other’ and as sadist homosexuals, a Hollywood stereotype of “imperialists who oppress and torture honest American manhood [Jesus].”²¹ He briefly addresses the accusation of casting Judas as black as a racist act (without directly stating that this was leveled against the film) by stating that the casting and staging choices “say little directly about betrayal or responsibility for Jesus’s death, unless the viewer brings such prejudices

¹⁵ Jeffrey L. Staley and Richard Walsh, *Jesus, the Gospels, and Cinematic Imagination: A Handbook to Jesus on DVD*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Humphries-Brooks, *Cinematic Savior*.

¹⁷ Pamela Grace, *The Religious Film: Christianity and the Hagiopic* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009).

¹⁸ Jeffrey L. Staley and Richard Walsh. “Jesus Christ Superstar” in *Jesus, the Gospels, and Cinematic Imagination: A Handbook to Jesus on DVD*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 66.

¹⁹ Humphries-Brooks, *Cinematic Savior*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

directly to the movie.”²² This statement completely sidesteps implicit bias as people may unknowingly bring bias and prejudice when creating a film and choosing its cast. Furthermore, viewers of color may perceive the casting of a black Judas continuing racist iconography in cultural texts that implicitly condone the history of African enslavement by whites.

The scholarship on *JCS* also includes studies of genre: the rock musical, the megamusical, and the Hollywood musical. Stanley Richard’s *Great Rock Musicals* (1980) provides a historical overview without analysis or critique. Jessica Sternfeld, in her book *Megamusical* (2006), gives an overview of the historical moment of the 1973 premiere. She also gives a detailed breakdown of musical techniques and style. Kelly Kessler, in her work on Hollywood musicals and masculinity, categorizes *JCS* in a group of musicals she labels *ambivalent*, with themes that steer away from gender norms, traditional sexuality, and tidy endings.²³ Elizabeth L. Wollman’s history of rock musicals, considers *JCS* as an example of what she calls the *fragmented musicals* of the 1970s.²⁴

In sum, most of the literature on *JCS* concerns genre and the figure of Jesus in the film. My thesis, in contrast, follows Celia R. Daileader and Diana Rebekkah Paulin in its focus on race and intimate relationships. Daileader identifies recurrent, unspoken rules of the casting of couples in theater and film within Euro-American frameworks, such as avoiding inter-racial coupling at all cost, never even considering it a possibility, and emphatically thwarted when one party is white. Where Daileader traces the anxiety of miscegenation in iconography, narrative and casting practices from Shakespeare plays to Spike Lee films, I use discourse analysis to

²² *Ibid.*, 62.

²³ Kelly Kessler, *Destabilizing the Hollywood Musical: Music, Masculinity and Mayhem* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

²⁴ Elizabeth Lara Wollman, *The Theater Will Rock: A History of the Rock Musical, from Hair to Hedwig* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

analyze split subjectivity and stereotyping.²⁵ My analysis attempts to augment Paulin's conclusion in *Imperfect Unions: Staging Miscegenation in U.S. Drama and Fiction* (2012) that cultural texts (fiction, theater, cinema) are vital in reconstituting covertly ingrained problematic racial constructions.²⁶

My critique thus draws on approaches from critical race film studies, primarily discourse analysis and split subjectivity, in order to make legible the complex and conflicted subjectivities that are still marginalized in the twenty-first century as represented in *JCS*. In *Casting Judas: Interracial Intimacy in "Jesus Christ Superstar,"* I seek to further the application of critical race and musicological methodologies to a musical text that consistently portrays intimacies that cross racial boundaries. I restrict my musical/visual comparative analysis of the 1973 and 2000 film adaptations and 2018 live television special to three musical numbers, "Heaven On Their Minds," "Everything's Alright," and "The Last Supper." I use the listing of numbers of this work from The Musical Company, which licenses performance of *JCS*. The DVD lists the numbers differently, at times combining two numbers into one. Because The Musical Company organizes *JCS* into smaller increments, I will use its numbering schema. However, my analysis is based

²⁵ Celia R. Daileader, *Racism, Misogyny, and the Othello Myth: Inter-racial Couples from Shakespeare to Spike Lee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 17.

²⁶ Diana Rebekka Paulin, *Imperfect Unions: Staging Miscegenation in U.S. Drama and Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012). Rachel F. Moran, *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race & Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Ronald R. Sundstrom, *The Browning of America and the Evasion of Social Justice* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008). Sheryll Cashin, *Loving: Interracial Intimacy in America and the Threat to White Supremacy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017). These scholars highlights the necessity of engaging with the all too often ignored phenomena of relationships that cross racial barriers, but this text and the previous two citations do not thoroughly engage in the context of cultural production, like film and theater.

strictly on the 1973 and 2000 film adaptations by Norman Jewison and Gale Edwards (respectively) and the 2018 live television special by NBC.²⁷

²⁷ As stated earlier, my analysis will rely on a combination of my own transcriptions and the 35-piece orchestral score in my critical listening and close description of scenes. The following music examples I will note in the caption whether they are based on the orchestral score, my own transcriptions. All measure numbers are based on the orchestral score.

3.0 Judas 1973

The composers Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice were at the early stages of their careers when they decided to create a rock opera, with Lloyd Webber as composer and Rice as librettist.²⁸ In their collaboration on *JCS*, it was difficult for them to find a producer willing to finance a project that both deconstructed the Jesus story and undermined musical theater conventions.²⁹ After many rejections, the *JCS* project was signed by MCA-Decca.³⁰ *JCS* was first launched as a single, which familiarized listeners with the titular number “Superstar.” This single became internationally popular, especially outside of the U.K.³¹ The success of the single abroad gave MCA the confidence to permit Webber and Rice to develop *JCS* into a full concept album. It then debuted as a staged musical in 1971 at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, directed by Tom O’Horgan.

Norman Jewison, a Canadian director and producer who had just directed and produced *Fiddler on the Roof* two years before, directed the first film adaptation of *JCS* in 1973. In this film, the original story of Christianity is given striking treatments with “inclusive” casting and gender-bending characterizations. Perhaps these treatments were due to the demands made by

²⁸ Lloyd Webber also composed the music to *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat* (1972, Edinburg International Festival), *Evita* (1978, Prince Edward Theatre), *Cats* (1981, New London Theatre), and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986, Her Majesty’s Theatre). Rice was the book writer and lyricist for such works as *Evita* and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat*.

²⁹ Kessler, *Destabilizing the Hollywood Musical*, 9-10. In Kessler’s examination of musicals, she classes them into two categories: *arcadian* and *ambivalent*. Arcadian musicals refer to works prevalent in the 1930s to the 1950s and are characterized by narratives that strive towards ideological stasis and communal unification. Ambivalent musicals are works of the mid-1960s to the 1980s characterized by complicated narratives and contentious views of society.

³⁰ MCA-Decca previously signed The Who’s rock opera, *Tommy* (1969).

³¹ It was popular particularly in the US, where it was included in Billboard’s Top 100 Songs of 1971 as number 27.

the Civil Rights Movement for representation, or perhaps they were a reflection of the culture wars of the 1960s, or even an attempt to attract an audience of the burgeoning counterculture. Whatever the reason for these choices, the casting of Judas as a black man with an intimate relationship to a white Jesus broadly illustrates the precarious and distinct positionality of early 1970s black men in contending with the pressure to conform to Hollywood's color line and heteronormativity. This casting choice also alludes to negotiations of unequal and competing masculinities, pitting a black Judas against a white Jesus. In an interview on the Special Edition DVD of the 1973 film, Rice briefly comments on racial issues. Rice addresses the accusation of villainizing black men by casting a black male actor in the role of Judas: "There was no intention on our [Rice and Webber] part to have any racial definitions or rules about who played what. [...] Judas has been played over the years by hundreds of white guys, hundreds of black guys, hundreds of whatever guys. [...] And none were our choices, they were the directors'." Even though Rice states that there were no racial definitions for any of the roles, when addressing the casting of Ted Neeley, a young white man, as Jesus, Rice betrays his subconscious racial construction of the Jesus character by stating, "Teddy was wonderful. He just looked the part."³²

My first exposure to *JCS* was Ted Neeley as Jesus and Carl Anderson as Judas in the first film adaptation produced by Norman Jewison. Being a product of the 1970s Jesus Movement, my father would regularly watch his beloved VHS that narrated the ambiguities of the Christian origin story, complete with pop melodies, rock screams, and catchy guitar riffs. Since first watching this film as a child in the 1990s, I have been enamored with Carl Anderson's portrayal of Judas. From the desert soliloquy number of "Heaven on Their Minds" to the glitzy titular

³² *Jesus Christ Superstar*, DVD, directed by Norman Jewison, 1973 (Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2004). This interview was found in a bonus feature titled, "Special Features: Exclusive Interview with Master Lyricist Tim Rice."

number “Superstar,” the embodiment of his grief truly made me question whether Judas deserved the inheritance of betrayer. Classical depictions of Judas almost always adhere to the melodrama in which Judas is always clearly delineated as evil. Melodrama is a mode of narrative that presents the world in a clear binary of good versus evil.³³ Judas 1973 cannot be easily categorized as a backstabbing villain. There is also a long tradition that characterizes villains as seductive anti-heroes, such as Satan in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, rather than abhorrently evil. Judas 1973 does not fit neatly into this category either, most notably due to the rhythm of suffering he embodies.³⁴ Judas 1973 is neither villain nor seductive anti-hero, but rather a tragic hero, as he is characterized as the jilted lover of the Superstar.

3.1 Heaven on Their Minds 1973

Act 1, No. 2, “Heaven on Their Minds, opens with a desolate shot of the Israeli deserts and pans right to the empty ruins of Avdat. The ostinato guitar riff seems to have no precise beginning, as though it is mechanically inserted, and the volume slowly turned up (Example 1).³⁵

³³ Linda Williams, “Melodrama Revised,” in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 42

³⁴ Roland Barthes, Entry date July 18, 1978, in *Mourning Diary*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 162. Barthes describes his suffering as “disorienting capriciousness of the pain of absence.” From <https://lit.newcity.com/2010/11/04/review-mourning-diary-by-roland-barthes/>

³⁵ Based on the orchestral score.



Example 1: Ostinato guitar riff from “Heaven on Their Minds” Act I, No. 2, mm. 1-3

The ostinato repeats ad nauseam, sonically circling Judas’s dilemma to which we are about to be introduced. As the riff circles, a montage of four extreme long shots reveal a lonely figure of a man, sitting atop a mountain peak. The combination of the repeated guitar riff, montage, and the man’s posture that hearkens to Rodin’s *The Thinker* invites us to assume that he has been pondering for a great length of time. Even before Judas speaks, we feel his fraught anxiety. Judas 1973, a black man wearing scarlet, embroidered garb, sits in a state of isolation and physical vulnerability. The score notes Judas’s entrance at m. 4; however, in the film thirteen discernable measures pass before Judas’s soliloquy starts (Example 2).³⁶

³⁶ Based on the orchestral score.

Judas

Lead Guitar

Rhythm Guitar

Electric BASS

3

My mind is clear-er now.

Example 2: “Heaven on Their Minds” Act I, No. 2, mm. 1-5

The visual and musical structure of the 1973 interpretation of “Heaven on Their Minds” partakes in conflicting lineages that render Judas ambiguous in intent and precarious in his attempts to acquire agency. When Judas’s first starts to sing, it is unclear if Judas is actually singing. His despondent voice is so soft it seems most likely that he is singing to himself, rehearsing what he is about to say to Jesus, or perhaps what he wishes he could say. Running towards the camera and pointing to the valley below, Judas cries, “Jesus!” (Example 3).³⁷ With a rising, stepwise melody across five measures, Judas sings while looking to the valley where a crowd surrounds one who could only be Jesus. Perhaps he recalls being once a part of that happy throng. Now that Judas’s mind has cleared, now that he has worked out the events to their logical conclusion, he has become separated, distanced, and ostracized from the rest of the believers, and from Jesus.

³⁷ My own transcription of Judas’s solo with piano reduction.

15

Je-sus! You've start ed to be-lieve The

18

Things they say of you You real - ly do be-lieve This

20

talk of God is true

Example 3: "Heaven on Their Minds" Act I, No. 2, mm. 15-22

According to Daileader, the theater tradition reinforces implicit bias towards characters portrayed as black.³⁸ In our first introduction to Judas, the viewer is bombarded by conflicting theater tropes that may simultaneously disorient assumptions of racialized subjects and reinforce them: is Judas the protagonist or antagonist? According to the trope of monologue, Judas's opening number would seem to set him up as an antagonist; however, this number incorporates

³⁸ Daileader, *Racism, Misogyny, and the Othello Myth*. Her research covers works from Shakespeare to Spike Lee, and texts as diverse as drama, literature, gothic horror, twentieth and twenty-first century film. She explores how inter-racial sex in these texts feature a black male and a white female. Coined as "Othellophilia" her study deconstructs the repeated appearances of Shakespeare's Othello that figure in these cultural texts. She further argues that myths of gendered violence committed by black men are tools used to regulate white female sexuality.

elements that are usually reserved for the protagonist. For one, it is his point of view that we are first exposed to, which renders him sympathetic. On the other hand, the act of delivering a monologue could place Judas among the long line of dramatic villains. Much as villains enact the "evil gloating" trope, in which they reveal to the audience their plans or their intellectual superiority over the protagonist, Judas likewise reveals to the audience his superior logic. However, he does not reveal his "evil plan," but rather the holes in Jesus's plan. In this way, Judas is enacting a trope bender.³⁹ In this first sung number, Judas subverts traditional expectations and produces a queer aura. He is not being set up as strictly evil, but neither is he situated as obviously good.

Although Crenshaw speaks specifically of the experience of women of color, the need for intersectional approaches turns my gaze towards the marginalization of black men in musical theater.⁴⁰ According to Hoffman, since the inception of the genre, musical theater has engaged with diverse social topics, but with race taking precedent, for musicals propagate a "history of white identity in the United States."⁴¹ Throughout "Heaven on Their Minds" Judas 1973 must navigate a world that is not his own. In Judas's opening number, his body steps within the implicitly white male gaze of musical theater, to be evaluated and objectified, for "[...] black men's visibility evokes a simultaneous navigation of white male ideals, envy, surveillance, and

³⁹ Nadine Hubbs, "'Jolene,' Genre, and the Everyday Homoerotics of Country Music: Dolly Parton's Loving Address of the Other Woman," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 19, no. 1 (2015): 71-76. *Trope bender* is an adaptation from the term *gender bender* (the subversion of traditional gender expectations) and Hubbs's term *genre bender*.

⁴⁰ Crenshaw reveals how feminist and antiracist politics have often acted on the felt necessity of splitting one's political energies into two dimensions to work towards only one kind of empowerment. In viewing how feminist and anti-racist discourse may inadvertently leave people in the margins, Crenshaw's works seeks to pull those forgotten into the gaze of academia. She has done so by articulating the complexity of living at the intersections of oppression.

⁴¹ Warren Hoffman, *The Great White Way: Race and the Broadway Musical* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2014), 3.

law.”⁴² Judas 1973 is characterized by what W.E.B. Du Bois coins as *double consciousness*, that is, an internal conflict of subordinated groups as they are required to look at themselves through the eyes of those who oppress them.⁴³

Casting a sympathetic Judas as a black man may reveal the oft-ignored moments of intimacy of a body that is traditionally hyper-masculinized. In “Heaven on their Minds,” we are almost immediately brought into the subjectivity of Judas, with a focused camera angle and an aria that centers on him. The characterization of a black Judas with camera work that portrays intimacy “counteracts pervasive black male images that focus on his physical abilities.”⁴⁴ Instead, Judas is legible as an opera diva of *JCS*, complete with love triangle intrigue, dramatic aria, and ultimate death. He ends his aria on a dramatic melisma (Example 4).⁴⁵

91
It was beau-ti-ful but now it's sour - Yes it's all gone

95
sour - - - - - Lis-ten Je - sus to the
Please re - mem-ber that I

98
warn-ing I give It's all - - - gone sour -
want us to live

3rd and 4th free

4 TIMES

rall.

colla voce

Example 4: "Heaven on Their Minds" Act I, No. 2, mm. 91-102

⁴² Alisha Lola Jones, “Pole Dancing for Jesus: Negotiating Movement and Gender in Men’s Musical Praise,” in *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience: There is a Mystery...* (Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2014), 323.

⁴³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Avenel, NJ: Gramercy Books, 1994): 2. *Double consciousness* describes African Americans whose identities are psycho-socially divided due to racial discrimination and enslavement.

⁴⁴ Jones, “Pole Dancing for Jesus,” 323.

⁴⁵ Based on the orchestral score.

In Judas' adlib, *colla voce* ending, we get the first glimmers of the sonically sublime, with annotation indicating no precise limit of pitch. The pleasurable timbre of Judas' tenor voice bears the threat of breaking as he pushes past D5 in full chest voice. As Judas' voice climbs in register, he physically ascends another mountain peak. He cries, "He won't listen to me," which pushes almost beyond melody to a primal scream. His body and voice both convey fatigue, and this fatigue convinces the viewer of the sincerity of his distress. Art critic and scholar, Daniel Albright writes, "[F]or a scream is, arguably, the primal human response to the world, a response in no way prevaricated, or dissembled or embellished."⁴⁶ Judas's desperation hearkens to the madwoman trope of opera. As Judas reaches towards Jesus, his despair and impotence resembles the desperate Dido after being abandoned by Aeneas.⁴⁷ Judas's verbal logic pierces through his vocal hysteria as he rationalizes, "Listen, Jesus, to the warning I give. Please remember that I want us to live."⁴⁸ Judas seems to be a Cassandra figure, cursed to know the truth but never to be heeded. As the camera zooms out and distances Judas to a blurred image of a man, he is last seen lying receptively supine on the peak of a mountain, giving the viewer the impression that his safety is dangerously threatened by even the slightest imbalance. And there, Judas lies, wailing his distress into the empty valley below, verbally protesting the Superstar's advances but unable to physically resist the assault. The number finishes with a shot that points back to the beginning of the soliloquy: Judas juxtaposed against the mountain desert, its vastness highlighting his

⁴⁶Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature and Other Arts* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2000), 20.

⁴⁷Henry Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas* (1680).

⁴⁸ Mari Thompson and Ian D. Biddle, *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 151. "The association of the scream with an 'out of control' emotional state, or with a lack of affective regulation, has also garnered 'feminine' connotations, supplemented by notions of corporeal excess, irrationality and chaos."

rejection and his vulnerability. As the camera zooms out, the music enforces Judas's distance with a decrescendo. Judas is aurally and visually diminished, his voice slowly muted as his image is blurred into the unrecognizable.

3.2 Everything's Alright 1973

In Act I No. 5, "Everything's Alright" orchestrates a struggle over intimacies, a love triangle, the apex of which is Jesus, thus rendering Judas and Mary as competitors. After a few musical numbers in which the motivations of the secondary characters are fleshed out (the disciples desire to know the future and to come into their own; the Pharisees want to maintain the peaceful status quo) a heated power struggle and jealous display of intimacy is staged in the number "Everything's Alright." This number accompanies the first entrance of Mary Magdalene, who is played by an Asian American woman, Yvonne Elliman. She lights a lantern, blows out a match, and starts to sing in a honeyed mezzo-soprano (Example 5).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Based on the orchestral score.

Example 5: “Everything’s Alright” Act I, No. 5, mm. 5-10

Only a few seconds have past and already Mary is evoking a sensually charged atmosphere, complete with candlelight ambiance, cooing female backing, a lilting melody (the beginning of the score indicates a swing rhythm) and softly tickling percussion. It first appears that Mary is singing to an empty room, quiet, dark, and alone. She walks as she sings and soon there appear silhouettes of other women, each one leisurely throwing a gauzy shawl around their shoulders. Mary crosses the room to where Jesus is reclining on the floor. The 1973 Mary’s characterization falls into a stereotypical representation of Asian women in film, her demur vocals and timid facial expressions alluding to such stereotypes as lotus blossom baby, China doll, and Geisha Girl.⁵⁰ This characterization is particularly pronounced in this adaptation, which requires her to delicately pamper a white Jesus, massaging his head and washing his feet in “Everything’s

⁵⁰ Renée Tajima, “Lotus Blossoms Don’t Bleed: Images of Asian Women,” in *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women*, ed. Asian Women United of California (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 309.

Alright.” Perhaps this critique is ungenerous, as women in film are generally regulated in their portrayals of intimacy and eroticism. However, Karen Shimakaw argues, “Asian American performers never walk onto an empty stage; [...] that space is always already densely populated with phantasms of orientalism through and against which an Asian American performer must struggle to be seen.”⁵¹ Mary starts to caress Jesus’s face while continuing her melody, physically and audibly soothing him. Mary is quite obviously enacting care work that is inextricably intertwined with her racial construction.

Mary is the only woman who is featured in this entire rock opera. She is the only woman named and she is the only woman who is featured musically, with a solo (“Everything’s Alright” in Act I, No. 5), a ballad (“I Don’t Know How to Love Him” in Act I, No. 12), and a duet (“Could We Start Again, Please?” in Act II, No. 6). As Mary sings to Jesus, the camera rotates around the couple, creating a visual aura of intimacy. But the shot only rests on them for a moment before it pans left. In the shadows, and now in the middle of the shot, can be seen a disgruntled Judas. As Mary coaxes Jesus to relax and enjoy the myrrh she is applying to his head and feet, the camera zooms slightly in to focus on Judas. He chides Mary from the shadows, shaking his head. With arms akimbo and a scowl smeared across his face, he sings, “Woman your fine ointment, brand new and expensive should have been saved for the poor” (Act I, No. 5, mm. 33-36).⁵² Judas is responding to Mary, but it is clear he is addressing Jesus, as his gaze never leaves the man he is truly accusing. So far in this narrative, both Judas and Mary are attempting to control, or at the very least influence Jesus. They are both performing affective labor; however, they are on opposite sides of the comfort spectrum. In “Heaven on their Minds”

⁵¹ Karen Shimakaw, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 17.

⁵² Thomas A. King, “Performing ‘Akimbo:’ Queer Pride and Epistemological Prejudice,” in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (Routledge, 1994): 20-43.

Judas is trying to awaken Jesus to the danger that they are in, to unsettle him and move him to change his course of action that would not endanger his people. Mary, on the other hand, is trying to convince Jesus to forget about everyone else and just relax, because, “If we try, we’ll get by, so forget all about us tonight” (Act I, No. 5, mm. 60-64).

Judas is hell-bent on awakening Jesus from the stupor of superstardom, but he is continually thwarted in his efforts. On more than one occasion, the other disciples physically restrain Judas, even when he poses no physical threat to Jesus. One such incident happens after he reprimands the pampering Jesus is receiving. He accuses, “People who are hungry, people who are starving, they matter more than our feet and hair” (Act I, No. 5, mm. 41-50). Unless paying very close attention to the characters in the periphery of the beginning of this number, Judas and Jesus seem to be the only men in this subterranean chamber. When Judas’s accusation reaches its peak—“they matter more than our feet and *hair!*”—the other disciples hurriedly enter the shot, attempting to keep Judas from further insulting the benign Jesus. Judas is loud, heated, and upset. As the other disciples physically compel Judas to mind his place, Jesus responds, “Surely, you’re not saying you have the resources to save the poor from their lot,” and Judas is silenced (Act. I, No. 3, mm. 65-68). Jesus responds directly to Judas’s judgment, questioning how a bottle of myrrh could possibly compensate the entirety of the poor in the world. Jesus’s response betrays the place of privilege from which he speaks. A white Jesus brushes Judas’s accusations aside, as he cannot possibly conceive of how much good his sacrifice of comfort could bring another.

The stage is now set for the most intimate and erotically charged interchanges between Jesus and Judas. Jesus tenderly lifts Judas’s face, which is now lowered and shaking in anger and disbelief. Jesus is characterized as dominant and transcendent, Judas as subordinate and

distraught. Jesus cups Judas's chin in his hand, lifting his gaze to meet his own, and warns, "Think while you still have me. Move while you still see me." The camera zooms into an over-the-shoulder shot, into the face of Judas. This camera technique produces two distinct, and maybe even competing portrayals of Judas. The coercive over-the-shoulder angle forces the viewer to look down on Judas as though through the eyes of Jesus, securing Judas's subordination. It seems in this moment of intense vulnerability and intimacy, a truth about Judas is being revealed. This close-up implicitly claims the true circumstances of Judas, a character with a lineage set in the stone of Biblical history as betrayer. As put in the words of Béla Balazs:

Facial expression is the most subjective manifestation of man, more subjective even than speech, for vocabulary and grammar are subject to more or less universally valid rules and conventions, while the play of features, as has already been said, is a manifestation not governed by objective canons, even though it is largely a matter of imitation. This most subjective and individual of human manifestations is rendered objective in close-up (Balazs 190).

With just one gesture from Jesus, Judas abandons his own heated act, the lines on his face disappear and his eyes soften. Judas reveals what has been simmering below the surface of his frustration all along, his tender regard for Jesus. Acknowledging the intimacy of their relationship, Jesus continues, "You'll be lost and you'll be sorry when I'm gone!" (Act I, No. 5, mm. 75-82). The camera zooms out on the B5 "gone!" as if signaling the futility of man-to-man intimacy, while at the same time sonically enveloping Judas. Jesus sings it so forcefully it seems as though he is trying to convince himself to let go of Judas. Jesus's hand slips from Judas's face to his shoulder. Clinging to the moment of sincere connection, Judas reciprocates the initial intimate gesture by grabbing Jesus with both hands. Perhaps detecting the erotic tension between these two men, Mary reasserts her heteronormative role. She throws a shawl on Jesus's shoulders and starts anew her refrain of refreshment, "Sleep and I shall sooth you, calm you and anoint you." Mary's reminder cues Jesus's physical release of Judas's body. Stan Hawkins has explored

popular music's prevalence in framing strangeness, otherness, and queerness within normative structures. This extremely intimate, and erotically charged interchange between Jesus and Judas is taking place inside of what looks to the domain of women. This interchange between these two men is preceded and followed by Mary's anthem, "Everything's alright." As Mary presses her body against Jesus, he slowly pulls his hand from the disciple's, which this exchange has revealed as his most intimate of the twelve.⁵³ Jesus slides his hand down Judas's arm and clasps his hand. The rock instrumentation rescinds into the background as the orchestral strings foreground and confirm the intimacy of the moment by doubling Mary's melody. Judas grasps the hand of this man that he clearly loves but must forfeit to Mary.

Jesus's expression never changes; he never blinks as he disentangles his fingers from those of his beloved. As Judas backs away from him, Jesus stares unblinkingly at the distraught Judas. And yet his eyes appear queerly veiled. Jesus pays no heed to the crooning, "Close your eyes and relax, think of nothing tonight" of Mary, but remains focused on Judas's face, a face full of hopeless love and admiration, a face of longing and disappointment. This queer veiling of Jesus's emotions in the 1973 film may be read as simply poor acting. With the sensitive rendering of the main characters of this production of *JCS*, (Judas, Mary, etc.), I am not convinced that the acting ability of the titular character was overlooked in the process of producing this first film adaptation. Instead, I see Jesus's veiled subjectivity as a defense mechanism, prompted by the fear of the repercussion of interracial, homoerotic intimacy. Judas and Jesus are the primary couple of this production, as I argued in the introduction. Unlike most

⁵³ Stan Hawkins, "On Male Queering in Mainstream Pop," in *Queering the Popular Pitch*, eds. Sheila Whiteley and Jennifer Rycenga (New York: Routledge, 2006), 287. Rather than using the presence of a beautiful woman to create legitimacy or mediate the anxiety produced by queer performativity, Mary's assertion of a heteronormative role juxtaposed against the embodied homoeroticism of these two men disrupts the heteronormative male gaze and produces ambiguous posturing.

leading couples in musical theater, this couple has two significant factors that weigh against them and deny them a typical comic happy ending. For one, they are both men; but also, they are of opposing racial constructions in a society that relies on the racial white/black binary. Jesus is racially unmarked as a white man, whereas Judas is the epitome of the racialized other, a black man. This interchange alludes to what Daileader coins as *Othellophilia*, which she defines as a theater tradition that promotes the narrative of the “[t]ragedy of inter-racial marriage to the exclusion of broader definitions, and more positive visions, of inter-racial eroticism.”⁵⁴

3.3 The Last Supper 1973

In the previous number analyzed, the intimacy between Judas and Jesus was threatened by gender asymmetry in the form of Mary Magdalene. In “The Last Supper” when Judas’s intimacy with Jesus is threatened, he himself tips the power balance. Although he is ultimately driven away by Jesus, Judas creates a fissure in Jesus’s resolve. Days have passed since Jesus told Judas that “you’ll be sorry when I’m gone,” in fact, since that time, Simon and his zealots dance for Jesus, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, Mary re-evaluates her feelings towards Jesus, and Judas consults with the Pharisees to betray Jesus in order to save the nation. *The Last Supper* opens Act II. It starts with a medium shot of a shepherd and his flock of sheep. As the shepherd leads his sheep away, the disciples can be heard singing in unison, “Look at all my trials and tribulations sinking in a gentle pool of wine” (Act II, No. 14, mm. 7-14). The camera cuts to the stream the sheep are walking alongside, their gentle gait reflected in soft sepiia. The camera cuts

⁵⁴ Daileader, *Racism, Misogyny and the Othello Myth*, 6.

again to another part of the water, but this time reflecting the disciples walking alongside the stream.

We next see the disciples assemble for the historical Last Supper, mimicking the pose of the fifteenth-century mural painting, *The Last Supper*, by Leonardo da Vinci. With disciples frozen in place, Jesus mysteriously prophesies his demise at the hands of his friends. The disciples look one to another questioningly but remain silent as Jesus officiates the symbolic meal of bread and wine. Jesus's instruction carries a bitter tone, "For all you care, this wine could be my blood, for all you care this bread could be my body." Judas, the only man not dressed in drab neutrals, slowly eats the bread handed to him. While the other disciples seem merely perplexed, Judas's face is weighted with sadness as he hears, "This is my body you eat." Despite his sadness, Judas appears ready to meet his soon coming expulsion.

Jesus throws his hands up, dissatisfied by the underwhelming response of the disciples. The rock instrumentation comes to the fore as Jesus sings his frustration, "I must be mad thinking I'll be remembered! I must be out of my head!" He slowly stands up as his anger erupts, "Look at your blank faces. My name will mean nothing ten minutes after I'm dead." After exposing Peter as the disciple that will deny him, Jesus turns towards Judas his voice climbing in crescendo, "One of my twelve chosen will leave to betray me." No sadness remains in Judas's face. He points accusatorily at Jesus, "You want me to do it!" After a battle of words, Jesus is successful in driving Judas from The Last Supper, "Hurry you fool, hurry and go. Save me your speeches, I don't want to know. Go!" Judas is now separated from the company of disciples by a grove of trees, and he is pitifully weeping. It would seem as though Judas, with his back to the disciples and his head cradled in his hands, is waiting for Jesus to come comfort him and bring him back "into the fold." Indeed, Jesus leaves the supper and goes to the jilted disciple. When

Judas looks up and turns towards Jesus he sees his friend holding out a cloak. Perhaps Judas expected to be reasoned with, to be reassured, to be comforted by the only man who could possibly understand the guilt he is carrying, the only man who understands the “master plan” that will render Judas “damned for all time.” Seeing Jesus’s blank expression and arm outstretched to hand him his cloak, Judas shakes his head in disbelief, anger, and hurt.

Jesus steadfastly maintains his dominance. He refuses to reveal weakness, and thus never apologizes to Judas; in fact, he does not appear the least bit remorseful for the position Judas is in. Jesus extends his arm out to Judas, giving his cloak back to him. This at first appears to be a gesture of goodwill, but is actually a gesture that facilitates Judas’s exit, like removing one’s ex-lover’s belonging from his home. Throughout the entirety of the opera, Judas was only permitted to voice his apprehensions in part. But finally, Judas fully airs his grievances,

You sad pathetic man,
See where you've brought us to.
Our ideals die around us
And all because of you.
But now the saddest cut of all,
Someone has to turn you in,
Like a common criminal,
Like a wounded animal.
(Act II, No. 1, mm. 111-118)

Judas's desperate effort to obtain agency is not well received. Jesus screams, as in a messy breakup, “Get out! They're waiting! Get out!” (Example 7).⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that the first time Jesus screams “Go!” during the last supper Judas obediently leaves (Example 6).

⁵⁵ Based on the orchestral score. Judas jumps an octave (circled in red, but not notated) the last time he banishes Judas from the supper.

94

Hur-ry you fool Hur-ry and go, Save me your speech-es I don't want to know Go!

Example 6: “The Last Supper” Act II, No. 14, mm 94-99

122

Get out! They're wait-ing! Get out!

Example 7: “The Last Supper” Act II, No. 14, mm. 122-123

But the second time that Jesus tells him “Get out!” after trying to give Judas his cloak, Judas does not leave. In these final moments with Jesus, Judas is finally negotiating his agency in this relationship. Jesus’s response to this negotiation harkens back to the number “Everything’s Alright” in his refusal to turn away from the person he is supposedly rejecting. Instead of trilling on “Get out,” he jumps an octave on a full chest voice rock scream (Example 6).⁵⁶ This time when Jesus tells Judas to leave he hits a pitch so high— F#5— it is palpable how near the voice is to breaking. All throughout the film, Judas’s subjectivity has been unfolding, and all throughout his character maintained a raw vulnerability embodied, vocal grain, and performed feminized, affective labor. But finally the camera cuts to a close-up of Jesus and highlights a critical revelation of Jesus’s subjectivity. Jesus’s head voice cry borders a shriek and is juxtaposed against Judas’s subsequent restrained rationale, “Every time I look at you I don’t understand why you let the things you did get so out of hand.” Judas detects the tenuous nature

⁵⁶ Based on the orchestral score.

of Jesus's dominance. As Jesus sings his voice is close to breaking, indicating his cognitive dissonance, which jeopardizes his resolve. Instead of fleeing, Judas moves in closer, with no other disciples around to hold him back. Their faces merely inches apart, Judas brokenly concludes, "You'd have managed better if you'd had it planned" (Act II, No. 14, mm. 131-132). Judas maintains his melody for the entirety of his rhetorical accusation until his anger is outweighed by his sadness. The instrumental accompaniment sympathetically withdraws as Judas struggles to maintain his composure. The guitar punctuates every downbeat of Judas's accusation- "*Every time* I look at you I *don't* understand...." Judas clasps Jesus's hand. He lifts his other hand to Jesus face, but furtively holds back the urge to caress Jesus's cheek. Judas looks down at the pale hand of Jesus in his own, pulls himself away, and flees as though a lover betrayed. Judas concludes his attempt at reclaiming intimacy with a look toward his lived reality. Jesus pale hand symbolizes that which is out of reach, the unmarkedness of whiteness.

Although Jesus does nothing to stop Judas from his grim task, in fact he encourages him down the path of betrayal ("Why don't you go do it.... Hurry, they are waiting"), he cannot look away from Judas (Act II, No. 14, mm. 82, 84). In this adaptation, Jesus maintains a dispassionate acting style, especially in this interaction with Judas. One may interpret this as Jesus being portrayed as otherworldly and transcendent. However, the vocals are so acute and raw that a strange disintegration of subjectivity is played out throughout this production. This split in subjectivity is capitalized in Jesus's expulsion of Judas from the last supper described above. The disembodied-ness of this white Jesus is in stark contrast to the ultra-corporeality of this black Judas. Throughout this production of *JCS*, when Jesus is interacting with Judas, Jesus portrays the behavior of white normative men in that "[W]ithin a heteronormative society, men's bodies

are constructed and disciplined to assume a ‘closed identity.’”⁵⁷ However, the exchange during “The Last Supper” reveals a fissure in the ethereal, white Jesus. The subjectivity of Jesus surfaces and finally Jesus’s true object of desire is revealed in the impassioned Judas. Only when Judas leaves Jesus’s presence do we see a moment of integration. Jesus’s face is suddenly etched with excruciating pain. In this moment it looks as though Jesus is the rejected and scorned. Jesus’s subjectivity is physically displayed and integrated with his vocality, and finally the truth of Jesus emerges. Music has been qualified with the ability to shield one’s subjectivity; however, in “The Last Supper,” Jesus’s vocality only confirms his distraught, ambivalent interiority. The Jesus of this production would seem to have every privilege available to him, especially in contrast to his counterpart, Judas, who is a racial minority. However, despite the privileges of his positionality, Jesus is not permitted to explore the erotic intimacy between himself and Judas because of sexist heteropatriarchy and the fear of interracial intimacy. Jesus’s act of rejection not only injures Judas, but also himself. Jesus’s gaze may work to objectify Judas or constitute the betrayer's selfhood. But, it may also betray his desire for Judas. This Jesus of the 1973 film adaptation, a Jesus vacillating between his desire for Judas and his political agenda, evokes a performance of straightness.

In the 1973 production of *JCS* Judas is portrayed as a tragic hero. The casting of Judas as black man adds an additional layer to his tragic characterization. He is a victim of his circumstances. He is damned in doing and in not doing. In short, this Judas is cast as weak, feminized and without agency. Despite the best of intentions, Judas is coerced into betrayal and is murdered by his circumstances at his own hand. In the introduction to Judas’s dilemma in “Heaven on Their Minds,” his reasoning is sound as he advises, “Listen, Jesus, do you care for

⁵⁷ Jones, “Pole Dancing for Jesus,” 327.

your race? Don't you see we must keep in our place? We are occupied; have you forgotten how put down we are.” (Act I, No. 2, mm. 55-62). At the end of the number, Judas’s cry never escapes monologue as his warnings fall on deaf ears. Judas is portrayed as a black, masculine Cassandra whose impotence of agency only highlights the historical maintenance of black inferiority. Judas is cast opposite Mary, as they both strive to control Jesus in “Everything’s Alright.” Like Mary, Judas is racialized, feminized and relegated to the gendered, affective labor of the subordinate. Rubin has theorized this prominent coupling of dominant and subordinate in regard to gendered labor, in the context of heterosexuality. She examines how the sex/gender system is a social mechanism that controls and shapes, as well as recreates, the domesticated woman. She claims that the sex/gender system necessarily discriminates against women. Rubin concludes that “[...], individuals are engendered in order that marriage be guaranteed.”⁵⁸ Rubin is referring to a specific marriage, the heterosexual marriage. In the dynamic between the two leading characters of the 1973 film adaptation of *JCS*, Judas can be read as playing the typical diva role, complete with fits of rage and ultimate death. Opposite the heated Judas is the strong and heroic Jesus. These two characters can be viewed through the lens of Rubin’s ‘heterosexual couple’ although both are men. Judas plays the role of the ‘Other,’ in his race, deportment, and role as tragic hero, furthermore he is saddled with not just the emotional labor in public (his public accusation of Jesus in “Strange Thing/Mystifying” Act I, No. 4) and in private (Judas’s declaration of guilt, “I have been saddled with innocent blood” in “Judas’s Death Act II, No. 20).

Jesus, on the other hand, maintains emotional indifference. In the 1973 film, Jesus’s indifference publicly ruptures only once. In Act I, No. 10, “The Temple,” Jesus overthrows tables and violently scatters merchandise onto the temple floor in a masculine display of

⁵⁸Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic of Women: Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2011), 180.

righteous anger. Unlike Judas, Jesus processes emotions privately. In this narrative revolving around two male characters, the deficiencies of the division of labor prove detrimental to both. In Humphries-Brooks analysis of Jesus as the quintessential American hero, he gives a compelling argument for reading race into *JCS* by framing Judas's death in critical race film theory. He points to the significance of how Judas 1973 commits suicide after betraying Jesus. Judas's act of hanging himself on a tree places this film into the American film tradition of the lynched man, a man who is always innocent: "Judas, the ultimate symbol of evil in Christendom becomes in *Jesus Christ Superstar* the lynched black man at the end of the white man's rope. His self-inflicted death becomes murder at the hands of the Establishment's God, "You murdered me." With him dies, figuratively, the projected view of the White God as just God."⁵⁹ Throughout this production it can be easy to label Judas as the weak protagonist and Jesus as the strong protagonist. Judas's embodiment of despair reveals a penetrable subject, whereas Jesus's un-integrated nature gestures towards transcendence. However, binary labeling is complicated in their last interaction with one another. Judas's rational accusation and refusal to leave without a fight in "The Last Supper" tips the power dynamic. As Judas stands up to Jesus, the Superstar's weakness is revealed, both in body and in vocality. Instead of an integrated heroic protagonist, Jesus's ambivalence is revealed. The contrast between the grain of Jesus's voice and his dispassionate posturing betrays his split in subjectivity as he struggles to break away from the disciple whom he clearly loves.

⁵⁹ Humphries-Brooks, *Cinematic Savior*, 64.

4.0 Judas 2000

Judas as a scorned black man opposite a white Jesus is the version of *JCS* I knew as a child. As an adult, I discovered a second film rendering. Gale Edwards directed this second film adaptation in 2000.⁶⁰ In November 2001, this adaptation won the International Emmy Award for Best Performing Arts Film Festival.⁶¹ The 2000 film adaptation is aesthetically very different from the one produced in 1973. Instead of the Israeli desert, the first shot of the 2000 version is staged indoors with a set composed primarily of concrete and steel. One of the most important differences between the first and second film adaptations is the casting for the lead roles. The 1973 film cast a black Judas against a white Jesus. In the 2000 film both Judas and Jesus are cast as white men. In the following analysis, I apply strategies of whiteness studies to expose how theatrical characterizations are “always performing race, even whites who may not see whiteness as a performance because whiteness exists in this country as a normative category.”⁶² Pamela Grace compares the 1973 and 2000 film adaptations, and makes some interesting observations regarding casting and race: “In 2000 Jesus is played by Glenn Carter, whose powerful build, confident stance, chiseled features, blond hair, and vivid blue eyes epitomize the Aryan ideal.”⁶³ Grace also identifies how costuming and gestures of the 2000 version portray anti-Semitic and orientalist sentiment, with a bloodthirsty mob of Jews grasping for Jesus and veiled women in long black robes, alluding to the conservative dress worn by some Middle Eastern Muslim

⁶⁰ Edwards directed a West End production of *JCS* in 1996, on which the 2000 film was based.

⁶¹ Elizabeth Guider, “Brits a big hit at Int’l Emmys.” *Variety*, (27 Nov. 2001).

⁶² Hoffman, 21.

⁶³ Grace, 101.

women. In Grace's words, "The scene manages to insult both Islam along with Judaism."⁶⁴ In an interview with the director that is included in the bonus features on the 2000 DVD, she inadvertently comments on race by stating that the actor who plays Jesus, Glenn Carter, "looks like Jesus."⁶⁵

In the same interview, the director describes *JCS* as a "fascinating story of psychology." In her interpretation, she describes Judas as the one who "loves Jesus more than any of the other apostles," but at the same time acts as though he is "a very bright, hyperactive, attention-seeking child, who very easily falls into rebellious mode and becomes the provocateur of the story." This film, coming in on the new millennium, reworks the Superstar narrative into a harsher, angrier story that revolves around the notion of power.⁶⁶ Explaining her interpretation and approach to *JCS*, the director identifies that,

[A] very interesting theme in the whole piece, actually, [is] the notion of power. All the father figures, the patriarchs, failed to provide comfort or protection or even morality in the piece. They're all treacherous or weak, that's one of the main storylines that we've gone for in this particular production.⁶⁷

Whereas the 1973 film negotiates agency, the 2000 film is a commentary on notions and maintenance of power. In the following analysis of the 2000 version of the musical numbers "Heaven on Their Minds," "Everything's Alright," and "The Last Supper" I explore what kinds of power are being portrayed and how race and gender influence these characterizations.

⁶⁴ Grace, 101.

⁶⁵ Gale Edwards. "The Making of 'Jesus Christ Superstar'" in *Jesus Christ Superstar* DVD, special features. 2000.

⁶⁶ *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Special Edition with exclusive interview with Master Lyricist Tim Rice: "All I was trying to say in the words was, 'this is what I might have done in that situation.' [...] He's gonna say things that people will identify with."

⁶⁷ "Pilate's Story - 'The Making of Jesus Christ Superstar'." YouTube video, 3:09, posted by Jesus Christ Superstar," November 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmxGf8SldeQ>.

The following close reading and analysis differs in its focus from that conducted on the 1973 version. The analysis of the 1973 film focused on the interracial intimacy characterized between Judas and Jesus. In the 2000 production, interracial commentary does not come into play until Mary enters the scene, as she is a black woman. My focus will be, as it has been in the previous analysis, primarily on the characterization of Judas and his relation to Jesus, and his tangential relation to Mary. Because both Judas and Jesus are cast as white men, (and the overall interpretation is angry posturing), I shift my focus to whiteness and masculinity. Paul Elliott Johnson expresses the importance of marking whiteness, because “Silence about whiteness confuses its unmarked invisibility with transcendent universality.”⁶⁸ Like whiteness, masculinity too often goes unmarked and produces an aura of universality.⁶⁹ Framing Judas 2000’s characterization in whiteness and masculinity studies explores how his anxiety over power relates to race and gender. Judas’s anger and anxiety is particularly acute when confronted by Jesus’s shifting allegiance from himself, to the racialized Mary. In the case of this particular production, where a black Mary and white Judas are so obviously negotiating agency, the interracial intimacy is that of competing lovers. The following analysis situates and explores the overwhelmingly angry interpretation in the 2000 film adaptation.

⁶⁸ Paul Elliott Johnson, “Walter White(Ness) Lashes Out: Breaking Bad and Male Victimage.” *Critical Studies in Media Communications* 34, no. 1 (2017), 16.

⁶⁹ Todd W. Reeser, “Theorizing Masculinity” in *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction*. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 21. Todd Reeser lists the ways in which masculinity pervades society.

4.1 Heaven on Their Minds 2000

The beginning of Act I No. 2, “Heaven on Their Minds” depicts two figures. One is standing on a scaffold or balcony. The other is directly below, walking down some steps. The backlighting behind the man on the balcony is so bright that it is not discernable who the man is, and yet the stereotypes and tropes attached to both the figure of Jesus Christ and the Superstar informs the audience. It is the show’s titular figure: Jesus Christ, the Superstar. The man below walks down the steps, remaining within the shadow of the figure above. The man below, a white man of medium height and build walks towards the camera, unaffected by the presence of the strong jawed, golden haired Superstar above. This first shot, which focuses on who we will soon discover is Judas, dissolves into the next, in which the camera zooms in to a close up of his black heeled boots. As the camera tilts up Judas is framed as utterly powerful. Both hands are in the pockets of his black pants. He is wearing a chrome and leather belt, and a heavy leather jacket covering a crimson tee. The camera rests on his troubled face. He takes a deep sigh, with head tilted slightly upward, as if looking back into his own thoughts, scouring for a new angle with which to solve a pressing dilemma. All the while the scaffolding in the background slowly lowers Jesus. The camera pans right. Jesus is now blocked from view by a pillar, which Judas is now leaning on with one arm, the other still in his pocket. Judas looks straight at the camera and starts to sing with focused intensity and clipped, clear diction.

The singing style in this number whitewashes Judas and places him squarely within the musical theater tradition, a tradition that has been labeled as a history of the shaping, protecting, and upholding of white identity.⁷⁰ Judas 1973’s rough, throaty timbre, inflected with gospel and

⁷⁰ Hoffman, 3.

blues vocality, removes him from white identity and instead aligns him, not just visually, but aurally with an African American history, a black history. Judas 2000 whitewashes “Heaven on Their Minds” to the epitome of whiteness, with British pronunciation, entirely excising the flexibility of a blues vocal style so prominent in Judas 1973.

Instead of a black man sitting alone on a mountain singing softly to himself, this white Judas forcefully brings himself into an eye-to-eye monologue with the viewer, his eyes unblinkingly staring straight at the camera. The aura of this Judas assumes a position of power, which he never relinquishes throughout the entire work. He continues to sing in a tight camera shot. In the very presence of Jesus, he openly warns against the dangers of superstardom. “Heaven on Their Minds” confirms the security, and to a degree, the authority that this Judas has with Jesus. Jesus walks towards Judas, and they hold eye contact until Jesus walks passed him. Judas starts to sing. Jesus obediently stops and gives a half-hearted eye roll to Judas’s expressions of discontent. Judas places his hand on the bare shoulder of Jesus, which is met by a flirtatious side-glance and perhaps an indication of arousal. Judas scoffs as Jesus coyly pushes past him. Judas’s snarky tone and contemptuous characterization betrays a conniving, self-interested Judas. Judas rushes around the corner to where Jesus is leaning against a pillar with his arms crossed, lips pursed and brow furrowed. Judas’s expression doesn’t change, as he continues to enumerate the follies of the other disciples and complains about Jesus’s lack of attention. Stacey Wolf, a scholar of musical theater, theorizes duets between two women in such musicals as *West Side Story* and *Mame*.⁷¹ In her analysis she classifies two types of queer duets: the queer pedagogical duet and queer collaborative duets. Although Judas’s aria-like soliloquy is not a duet, in the 2000 rendition, he sings as though he is in dialogue with Jesus, and, indeed, Jesus’s

⁷¹ Stacey Wolf, “‘We’ll Always Be Bosom Buddies,’” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 3 (2006), 351-376.

body language is anything but ambiguous. I argue that this number establishes Judas as what Wolf coins as the pedagogical dominant. As the wiser, dominant counterpart of the relationship, the irritated Judas reveals that he is not primarily concerned for the welfare of his people, but rather, his position of power over Jesus. The pedagogical rant is a telltale sign of this white Judas's privilege.

Judas's tone increases in its antagonistic nature, from advising, to nagging, to boldly insulting. Judas's timbre is pinched, his manner demeaning, as he walks menacingly around Jesus. Jesus attempts to walk away, but Judas physically restrains him, firmly grabbing his upper arm, giving Jesus no time to retaliate. The only agency Jesus asserts is in walking a few steps away once Judas releases his grip, but, like a petulant child, Jesus does not remove himself far enough to be kept from further coaxing. Judas simply walks in front of him, grabs him by both shoulders, his face only inches from his own, and proceeds to physically and sonically overpower Jesus. Only when the rest of the disciples enter the scene do we see any sense of empowerment not generated by and for Judas; even so, Jesus still remains silent while Judas loudly wails his concerns. The Judas of the 2000 production, from the very first number, communicates frankly and intimately with Jesus. His frank and intimate style reveals his privileged status. This Judas is given as much if not more agency than Jesus, with the ability to forcefully make Jesus listen to him by physically restraining him. Judas 2000 is in stark contrast to Judas 1973, who does not look directly into the camera, who was placed hundreds of yards from Jesus, and though yelling his apprehensions, was never heard by Jesus nor the other disciples. Judas 2000's first appearance establishes his privilege and dominance.

In "Heaven on Their Minds" Judas of the 1973 production was not afforded an audience with Jesus, instead he was relegated to the isolation of the desert mountains. Judas of the 2000

production, on the other hand, behaves as though he is in a secure relationship with Jesus. Although Jesus's reaction to Judas's forceful supplication seems to reveal liminality to their relationship, the audience is not unclear as to the role the 2000 Judas is playing—he is self-serving, he is antagonist. The isolated 1973 Judas is not so easy to label. Not only does he enact a trope bender that complicates the traditional role of protagonist, he embodies distress—he is drenched in sweat and covered in desert sand—which does not seem to serve him politically. In comparing these two characterizations, the viewer is given more cues with which to understand Judas of the 2000 production. In his interaction with Jesus, there appears to be history between the two, which is now being threatened by Jesus's superstardom. Judas of the 1973 production sings alone, with no one around to provide context to his motives. The motives of the 1973 black Judas remain opaque and the viewer is left to grapple with the ambiguous nature of this isolated protagonist.

4.2 Everything's Alright 2000

In Act I, no. 5, "Everything's Alright," the synthesizer, set to positive organ, picks up a lazy 5/4 melody and is gently accompanied by lead, rhythm and electric bass. Jesus looks over his shoulder at Judas and all his disciples follow suit. The shot dissolves into the next to show Mary squarely facing Jesus. She conjures a very similar atmosphere to the one created by the 1973 Mary, as they both provide care work by cooling Jesus's head and washing his feet. However, what is striking in the 2000 version is Jesus's preoccupation with Judas from the very beginning of this number. When Mary starts to sing, "Try not to get worried; try not to turn on to problems that upset you," she has to coax Jesus to look away from Judas 2000, by cradling his

face in her hands, turning his face toward hers (Act I, No. 5. mm. 5-7). Jesus's priority is Judas, not Mary. He keeps mentally reverting back to his relationship with Judas, longing for his permission and support, but never actually obtaining it. Despite Jesus's obvious distraction, he stays by the side of Mary and allows her to convince him that "Everything's alright, yes. Everything's fine" (Act I, No. 5, mm. 9-10). This number does not start with an extended take of Mary singing, as does the 1973 version. Instead, as Mary sings to Jesus the camera cuts back and forth from Jesus to Judas 2000.

Jesus and all the disciples have their backs turned towards the disgruntled, Judas, and it is no wonder as he had just abused Mary in the previous number, "Strange Thing, Mystifying" (Act I, No. 4). In this previous number, Judas reprimands Jesus for his close relation to Mary, a young, attractive, black woman. He scoffs at Mary's origins and her ill fit within Jesus's company: "It seems to me a strange thing, mystifying, that a man like you can waste his time on women of her kind" (Act I, No. 4, mm. 1-8). While Judas sings, "But to let her kiss you, stroke your hair, it's hardly in your line," Mary's hands are about Jesus's shoulders, caressing him as he sits atop stone steps (Act I, No. 4, mm. 12-16). Judas 2000 suddenly grabs Mary's hand and pulls her away from Jesus and sings, "It's not that I object to her profession" (Act I, No. 4, mm. 16-18). He then throws her down the steps and finishes, "But she doesn't fit in well with what you teach and say. It doesn't help us if you're inconsistent. They only need a small excuse to put us all away" (Act I, No. 4, mm. 18-24). This violent act causes the rest of the disciples to further ostracize Judas by turning their backs to him.

Although the one who sustained the abuse, Mary is the first to bounce back. Mary subverts Judas's misogyny by physically mirroring Judas's opening number, "Heaven on Their Minds:" she stands directly in front of Jesus, and she steps within his personal space, clasps his

shoulders and sonically overwhelms him. Mary's parallel behavior to his own does not seem lost on Judas and thus a competition for Jesus's intimacy ensues. One of the disciples sympathetically grabs Judas by the shoulder, as though he understands why Judas is disgruntled: his position has been usurped. During Judas's first number, "Heaven on Their Minds" he is established as having an important position in Jesus's life. In his forceful critique of Jesus in "Heaven on Their Minds," Judas is portrayed as the pedagogical dominant and Jesus the subordinate. Judas is convinced he knows just what Jesus is doing wrong. His authority is exemplified in his lack of caution as he reprimands the silent Jesus. But since "Heaven on Their Minds," the relationship between Judas and Jesus has shifted. In the previous number, "Strange Thing, Mystifying," instead of allowing Judas to abuse without consequence, Jesus meets Judas's condescension with a reprimand:

Who are you to criticize her?
Who are you to despise her?
Leave her, leave her,
Let her be now.
Leave her, leave her,
She's with me now.
If your slate is clean,
Then you can throw stones.
If your slate is not
Then leave her alone.
(Act I, No. 4. Mm. 25-32)

Jesus's reprimand of Judas works Jesus into a fury, however, Mary is able to soothe him back into docility. Mary's ability to sooth Jesus in "Everything's Alright" confirms that Mary is now the one controlling the docile Jesus. Judas meets Mary's newfound position with what Michael Kimmel labels as *aggrieved entitlement*. In Kimmel's theorizing of twenty-first century white men and the types of anger they embody, he explains:

Because these guys felt that those jobs were 'theirs,' that they were entitled to them, and that when some 'other' person—black, female—got the job, that person was really taking 'their'

job. [...] Although it's true that everyone needs to be a victim to even stand a chance of being heard in today's political arena, the white-man-as-victim comes with a certain self-righteous anger that makes it distinct.⁷²

In other words, the black Mary of the 2000 adaptation is taking the job of Judas in "Everything's Alright." She is taking his job as pedagogical dominant, pushing him out and recreating the "primary couple" of *JCS*.

The Mary in *JCS* 1973 can be deceptive, in that she appears to have a major role in "Everything's Alright," but when juxtaposing the 1973 characterization with the 2000 version, it is clear that she is the backdrop, the framing context for the tension that erupts between the two leading characters, Jesus and Judas. The 2000 interpretation grants Mary agency, placing her in the foreground, rather than relegating her to the background like the Mary in the 1973 version. And yet, despite the new Mary's more active participation in the 2000 version, the Jesus of *JCS* 2000 remains fixed on Judas, unwilling to fully affirm Mary and oblivious to her newfound importance to the narrative.

To what degree are the discrepancies between these two different Marys—the 1973 Asian-American Mary and the 2000 black Mary—due to racially charged stereotypes or to the strides made by the feminist movement? When it comes to racialized women, pinpointing societal progress or regression can seem like being caught between a rock and a hard place. The "blind casting" of an Asian American as Mary—a role that does not explicitly program orientalism—seems to be an effort towards greater representation in film. However, the 1973 Mary closely aligns with the geisha girl stereotype, an eroticized woman physically pampering a

⁷²Michael S. Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2015), 17.

white male Jesus.⁷³ The casting of Mary as black and with more physical agency runs into a similar dilemma. The 2000 Mary meets the third wave feminist sensibilities of the early twentieth-first century as she defiantly reacts to Judas's abuse. At the same time, the choice of casting a black woman in this agential interpretation stokes the coals of the sapphire caricature, the stereotype of the uniquely and irrationally angry black woman.⁷⁴ Both film adaptations of *JCS* cast Mary as a minority woman. Mary in *JCS* is never explicitly labeled as the prostitute Mary; however, there are a few clues that suggest that this particular Mary was the prostitute. Judas implies that "her profession" is somehow shameful and that she is not fitting company for Jesus.⁷⁵ Also, the act of washing Jesus feet alludes to the Bible story in Luke 7:36-50, in which a repentant prostitute washes Jesus's feet. Furthermore, the Euro-American theater has a long tradition in which white women are portrayed as virginal, whereas racialized minority women are cast as promiscuous.⁷⁶

Judas is anything but oblivious to this edgier Mary and her influence on the Superstar. Making his move, Judas weaves his way from the periphery of the disciples to the center where Jesus is seated with Mary. Just as Jesus lowers his head into Mary's lap, waiting for the sensual anointing, Judas violently snatches the bottle of myrrh from Mary's hand. This aggressive act is markedly different from the spirit of Judas 1973. The black Judas of the 1973 production never once lays a hand on Mary, much less pushes her down some steps or whisks away the precious balm from her hand. Like what was seen in the beginning of the film, Judas, is able to assert

⁷³ Renée Tajima. "Lotus Blossoms Don't Bleed: Images of Asian Women" in *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 309.

⁷⁴ Melissa V. Harris-Perry. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 88.

⁷⁵ Act I, No. 4, Mm. 16-18.

⁷⁶ This can be seen in traditional opera (Bizet's *Carmen*) and in Shakespearean theater (*Antony and Cleopatra*; *Othello*).

active authority—even abusive force—that a black Judas did not have available to him. With Mary’s bottle of ointment in hand, Judas strikes a prophet-like pose holds in the midst of the disciple. He smugly ridicules Mary for her lack of economy and foresight in buying something so expensive and superfluous. His pretense is in striking contrast to Judas 1973. Judas 2000 chides Jesus and Mary with a feigned expression of piety, whereas Judas 1973 only tries to point to the lack of continuity of Jesus’s action. Judas squats down to where Jesus has been sitting, he holds up the bottle to Jesus’s golden locks and concludes that the starving people who could benefit from the money that the myrrh cost “matter more than your feet and hair!” (Act I, No. 5, mm. 43-50). The irritated Mary reclaims the bottle and rebuts Judas with her refrain, “Try not to get worried. Try not to turn on to problems that upset you” (Act I, No. 5, mm. 51-53). She faces Judas, and condescendingly caresses his cheek. Her actions belie her soothing words as she shakes her head coyly, tainting the sentiment with sarcasm. She then abruptly turns her back to him to continue ministering to Jesus. Judas’s response to her quasi-endearing gesture is visible discomfort, if not overt disgust at her advance.

The 2000 black Mary is given more physical force than the Asian American Mary of the 1973 version. After sweetly, and maybe even tauntingly assuring Judas that “everything’s alright,” Mary returns to where Jesus is sitting. Perhaps emboldened by Mary’s devotion, Jesus stands up to Judas and accuses, “There will be poor always, pathetically struggling. Look at the good things you’ve got” (Act I, No. 5, mm. 69-72). Jesus powerful stance is undercut by his lack of eye contact with Judas as he sings, “You’ll be lost and you’ll be so sorry when I’m gone” (Act I, No. 5, mm. 75-82). He hits B5 on “Gone!” and like a diva queen delicately swoons to the floor (Act I, No. 5, m. 82). The disciples and Mary rush to encircle Jesus, effectively cutting Judas off from this divine fit.

Perceiving the wedge between he and Jesus, Judas enacts suffering in order to elicit sympathy. Starring in the face of one who lives at the intersections of oppression, a black woman, Judas performs *abject hegemony*.⁷⁷ With increasing awareness of traditionally marginalized peoples (especially women of color) abject hegemony reorients the gaze back to the privileged, while at the same time excuses the privilege they experience. This reorienting “(re)secures a privileged position for white masculinity. [These] claims of white masculine victimhood encourage objectively well-off members of society to interpret the presence of difference and uncertainty as threatening the subject with unjust marginalization.”⁷⁸ His preferred expression of abjection resides in his pinched timbre and dejected scowl. One critic Paul Johnson identifies portrayals of problematic masculinity and notices that “Cultural texts—and their reception—often figure a certain kind of wounded masculinity as a central agent to offer a narrative of masculinity in crisis.”⁷⁹ Judas acts as though he is not getting his fair share of Jesus’s attention, and that the agency deployed by Mary really belongs to him. Judas, in an attempt to accrue sympathy and assuage his aggrieved entitlement, performs abject hegemony.⁸⁰

4.3 The Last Supper 2000

The Judas of the 2000 production has had to dig in his black booted heels to maintain the privilege of intimacy with Jesus. Mary threatens his position, which causes him to experience

⁷⁷ Paul Elliott Johnson, “The Art of Masculine Victimhood: Donald Trump’s Demagoguery,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 40 no. 3 (2017): 231.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁷⁹ Paul Elliott Johnson, “Walter White(Ness) Lashes Out: Breaking Bad and Male Victimage,” *Critical Studies in Media Communications* 34, no. 1 (2017): 23.

⁸⁰ Kimmel, *Angry White Men*. Kimmel theorizes masculinity-induced anxiety, which in the US is frequently expressed as anger.

aggrieved entitlement. He, in turn, performs abject hegemony, eliciting sympathy for he is merely a “frustrated genius [...] wracked by existential crises.”⁸¹ The next number shows Judas’s homoerotic force evolve into outright contempt for the one who he claims to admire, Jesus. In the 2000 adaptation, the “The Last Supper” starts with Judas sitting on the floor, back against a pillar, drinking from a wine bottle (Act II No. 14). In the background, the other disciples are walking with lighted candles towards the center of the room. Judas picks himself up to join the others. The disciples lay a white tablecloth on a long low table at the foot of the stairs that Mary was thrown down earlier. The disciples casually, happily surround the table and seat themselves. A chalice is placed in the middle of the table. Jesus approaches the table, picks up a bottle, and pours the wine into it. As Jesus sings in a descending melodic line about his demise, the celebratory air the disciples possessed suddenly dissipates. “The end” Jesus sings, “is just a little harder when brought about by friends” (Act II, No. 14, mm. 33-38). Jesus’s melody gives way to toneless vocal fry on “friends,” and the camera pans over the disciples and rests on Judas as he shifts uncomfortably among his fellow disciples. Judas stares off into the distance, and raises his hand to his mouth, as though hiding the guilt he feels from the betrayal to which he just committed himself. Jesus passes around the wine and bread, singing in ensemble with piano, horns, and bassoon.

Amidst his officiating of the supper, Jesus suddenly pounds the table in anger “I must be mad thinking I’ll be remembered! Yes, I must be out of my head!” (Act II, No. 14, mm. 51-54). This sudden outbursts portrays an angrier Jesus than the 1973 version. Before accusing his disciples, the 1973 Jesus patiently waits for the bassoon to repeat the phrase he has just sung, which allows the disciples a moment to dwell on the metaphor of the bread and wine. The 2000

⁸¹ Johnson, “Walter White(Ness) Lashes Out,” 23.

Jesus gives the disciples no such luxury as his tone quickly turns to contempt at their ignorance. It is as though Jesus of the 2000 production, a young, strong-jawed Aryan beauty, has less control of his deportment than the slight and disheveled Jesus of the 1973 version. Pushing the disciples out of his way, the 2000 Jesus makes his way angrily around the supper table, a spotlight following him, and the warm sepia filter gives way to a harsh cold hue. First, he accuses Peter, “Peter will deny me, in just a few hours” (Act II, No. 14, mm. 73-74). And then he turns towards Judas. All of the disciples are standing in astonishment at Jesus’s change of demeanor and his accusations. The only disciple left sitting on the floor at the supper table is none other than Judas, now completely clothed in black, from heeled boot, to black tank and leather jacket. Jesus, standing at the end of the long table prophesies, “And that’s not all I see. One of you here dining, one of my twelve chosen will leave to betray me” (Act II, No. 14, mm. 76-79). But before Jesus has the chance to expose him, Judas pounds his hand on the table, stands to his feet and cries, “Cut out the dramatics you know very well who” (Act II, No. 14, mm. 80-81). Judas and Jesus are staring daggers at each other across the long table. Chests are heaving, nostrils are flared, and the eye contact unfaltering. Judas screams, “You want me to do it” (Act II, No. 14, mm. 83). It is not clear whether Judas is asking or accusing Jesus. However, paying very close attention to Jesus’s face as Judas asks, “You want me to do it,” Jesus gives a slight nod and mouths, “Yes.”

From the beginning of the reprise of the chorus (“Look at all the trials and tribulations...”) to when the disciples hit the final cadence, Judas and Jesus remain standing on opposite ends of the table, in an epic showdown (Act II, No. 14, mm. 102-109). Jesus’s face of anger succumbs to pitiful whimpers as he continues to look to Judas. Wine glasses and linens are strewn about as though a domestic fight had just occurred. Judas does not reflect Jesus’s

softening of demeanor. In fact, Judas's face turns to smug superiority, as though he gained the upper hand. Judas steps onto the table:

You sad, pathetic man
See where you brought us to?
Our ideals die around us
And all because of you!
(Act II, No. 1, mm. 111-118)

Judas walks the length of the table. The other disciples erupt in protest as Judas struts atop the table towards Jesus. Surrounded by the rest of the disciples, Judas stops in front of Jesus. Throughout the *JCS* 2000 production, Judas is often positioned to be physically above Jesus and the rest of the disciples. The consistent maintenance of this posture further validates the idea that this particular Judas is more concerned with power and position than the safety of his people. This is a key divergence between the two Judases. In the 1973 production, this number reveals Judas as a tragic hero, deeply in love with but ultimately rejected by Jesus. When Jesus tells him to "Go!" he leaves the supper and is later approached by Jesus. The white Judas of the 2000 production, however, reveals him as a sarcastic and violent betrayer, who refuses to obey Jesus demands until the number has finished. The 1973 Judas reserves his final accusation to a private space removed from the other disciples. The white Judas seems to act with his political viability in the forefront of his mind, whereas the black Judas appears to be scolding a lover for his poor choices that negatively impact others. The 2000 Judas all but calls Jesus a criminal; he even throws Jesus to the ground during "The Last Supper."

After the 2000 Judas throws Jesus to the ground, the rest of the disciples rush in to protect the Superstar. Judas all too quickly throws off his leather jacket, ready to fight any willing opponent. After being picked up off the ground by the other disciples, Jesus stands atop the table to face Judas 2000. Jesus screams at him to "Get out!" Judas's face erupts into disgust as he

sings, “Every time I look at you I don’t understand” (Act II, No. 1, mm. 127-128). Judas appears to be holding back the urge to physically harm Jesus. When the 1973 Judas sings “Every time I look at you I don’t understand” his expression does not harden in disgust, but softens in despair. In an interview with the actor of the 2000 Judas, Pradon describes Judas as, “a man having a nervous breakdown... and Jesus puts him into this space.”⁸² I believe that this “nervous breakdown” is Judas’s projection of abject masculinity due to his aggrieved entitlement that is now coming to a head. This is very different in character from the 1973 Judas, a man whose life is not characterized by entitlement but rather embodies tragedy.

The 2000 production, from Judas’s very first number, “Heaven on Their Minds,” is very different from the 1973 film. The first film was in the desert of Israel. The second film is staged inside of an institutional structure, with concrete, steel pillars and balconies. These two Judases have very different experiences. The first film adaptation portrays a precarious Judas, a racialized minority who must grapple with a harsh, lonely and exposed environment. The second Judas is removed from the harsh, outdoor elements; his unmarked racial status and a shelter of stone and steel protect him. In “Everything’s Alright,” the 2000 Judas is able to walk right up to Mary and grab the bottle of myrrh from her hands. This power dynamic and struggle, key to the *JCS* 2000, is not present between the 1973 Judas and Jesus. The 1973 Judas maintains a subordinate position all throughout the narrative, if not physically placed out of earshot of Jesus, he starts his complaints at a whisper, or is relegated to the shadows. In “The Last Supper,” the privileged 2000 Judas is permitted to show active homoerotic force in “Heaven on Their Minds,” and then was given the liberty for this force to dissolve into outright contempt for Jesus in “The

⁸² "Judas' Story - 'The Making of Jesus Christ Superstar,'" YouTube video, 4:37, posted by Jesus Christ Superstar, November 10, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dV5AfhY2cbs>.

Last Supper.” The 1973 Judas is not given such liberty and instead portrays a longing for Jesus that is fraught and forbidden. Even with the white 2000 Judas’s masculine posturing and privileged position, he exhibits deep-seated dissatisfaction. The 2000 Judas seems to exhibit what Michael Kimmel calls the “potent fusion of two sentiments—entitlement and a sense of victimization.”⁸³

What is most unsettling about the 2000 adaptation is the lack of driving motivation for the two lead characters. Their incoherence of motive is only highlighted by the exuberance of their rage. The 2000 Judas bears particular inscrutability as his expression and manner quickly shift from amusement, to irritation, to rage, to despair, with little logic as to the evolution. This Judas’s opacity of motive can be defined as *abject masculinity*. Johnson refers to such masculinity in his work on demagoguery, in which he describes those who demonstrate abject masculinity as a “style whose incoherence is opaque to his critics but meaningful to his adherents, for it helps them imagine themselves as victims of a political tragedy centered around the displacement of ‘real America’ from the political center by a feminized political establishment.”⁸⁴ This version of *JCS* characterizes Judas as self-serving; however, at “The Last Supper” he claims abjection by accusing Jesus, “You wanted me to do it. Why don’t I just stay here and ruin your ambition” (Act II, No. 14, mm. 90-92). At this point the other disciples, in defensive rapt attention, take up their chorus from the beginning of the number, “Look at all my trials and tribulation,” which either seems to be an attempt to soothe or perhaps cultivate Judas’s act of strategic abjection (Act II, No. 14, mm. 102-103). The disciples’ sentiment, reframed by Judas and Jesus’s argument, seems to appeal to this reactionary masculine display. In the words

⁸³ Kimmel, *Angry White Men*, 10.

⁸⁴ Johnson, “The Art of Masculine Victimhood,” 230. Johnson is referring to the US 2016 election of Donald Trump as a response to the 2008 election of Obama, a self-identified black man, and a reaction to Hilary Clinton, the first woman to run for the presidency.

of Johnson, “These appraisals treat white masculinity as sympathetically contingent rather than strategically abject [...]” The 2000 production is not about love and tragedy, but about control and power. When comparing the 2000 production to its tragedy-laden predecessor, it is painfully absent of sympathetic protagonists.

5.0 Judas 2018

As I was drafting my first analysis of the 1973 and 2000 film adaptations of *JCS*, NBC broadcasted a new version of *JCS* on Easter Sunday 2018. It was directed by David Leveaux, a five-time Tony nominated director, and Emmy winner, Alex Rudzinski. This adaptation was staged and filmed in front of a live audience of about 1,500 people at the Marcy Avenue Armory in Brooklyn.⁸⁵ Aside from the live audience, this production was watched by 9.6 million viewers.⁸⁶ Pop and rock stars John Legend, Sara Berailles, and Alice Cooper were cast in leading roles. Broadway star Brandon Victor Dixon, best known for his role as Aaron Burr in the Tony-award winning *Hamilton*, was cast in the role of Judas.

5.1 Heaven on Their Minds 2018

The first film adaption in 1973 is set in the Israeli desert. The 2000 film starts in a pillared, stone building. The 2018 version is set in a deteriorating, Roman Catholic-looking structure, held up by scaffolding, giving the set a post-apocalyptic, Mad Maxian aesthetic. After the frenzied dance number of the “Overture,” the disciples gather center stage and surround someone who must be Jesus. A cautious man steps onto the stage from the aisle. He appears to have emerged from among the audience as he observes the circle of disciples. Now onstage, this

⁸⁵ Randee Dawn, “NBC's 'Jesus Christ Superstar Live' Blends the Crafts,” *Variety* (March 28, 2018), <https://variety.com/2018/artisans/news/jesus-christ-superstar-live-nbc-crafts-1202736626/>.

⁸⁶ Mitch Metcalf, “Updated: ShowBuzzDaily's Top 150 Sunday Cable Originals & Network Finals: 4.1.2018,” *Showbuzzdaily* (April 3, 2018), <http://www.showbuzzdaily.com/articles/showbuzzdailys-top-150-sunday-cable-originals-network-finals-4-1-2018.html>.

man remains just outside of the circle of light enclosing the rest of the disciples and he starts to sing his misgivings: “If you strip away the myth from the man you will see where we all soon will be”—this must be Judas (Act I, No. 5-12). His singing is controlled, his expression apprehensive, “You’ve started to believe the things they say of you. You really do believe this talk of God is true” (Act I, No. 2, mm. 15-21). As he sings, he not only looks to the jovial disciples, but to the energetic crowd watching the show. “And all the good you’ve done will soon get swept away,” Judas gestures to the live audience, “You’ve begun to matter more than the things you say” (Act I, No. 2, mm. 21-27). Judas increases in dynamic as the other disciples again start to dance. Jesus, although amongst the frenzy, does not join in the dancing, but stands up and looks toward the disciple who refuses to come into the light on center stage.

Jesus moves around the stage hugging his happy disciples while Judas sings, “You’ve set them all on fire. They think they’ve found their new Messiah” (Act I, No. 2, mm. 37-40). Facing the audience, Judas looks over his shoulder to where Jesus is brought into a group embrace, “And they’ll hurt you when they find their wrong” (Act I, No. 2, mm. 41-43). Jesus moves across the stage to the audience and clasps the hands of those enjoying the show. Judas sings about his unrequited admiration for Jesus, “And believe me, my admiration for you hasn’t died,” but his voice is unheard as the audience’s adulation increases in volume at the touch of the Superstar (Act I, No. 2, mm. 34-36). The use of a live audience emphasizes the superstardom of the Jesus character and creates a post-fourth wall-ness not present in the film adaptations (although not unusual for productions of it as a staged musical). Judas sings:

Listen Jesus do you care for your race?
Don’t you see we must keep in our place?
We are occupied,
Have you forgotten how put down we are!
(Act I, No. 2, mm. 55-62)

In her work on the Hollywood musical, Kelly Kessler contends that musicals of the late twentieth century, “bear the battle scars of the social and artistic struggles alongside which they emerged. They provide an excellent lens through which to examine the ultimate instability of the genre and study how social change both drives and finds itself represented in the shifting product.” The chemistry between Judas and Jesus, in light of the current political environment in which the adaptation was produced, portrays a competition of ideologies regarding race and identity politics. In an interview, Dixon, the actor cast as Judas, comments on how this interpretation of *JCS* reflects current culturally sensibilities:

They [Lloyd-Webber and Rice] tried to move kind of past the mythology and past the blanket titles we give to these figures [Jesus and Judas] and to the story and time and to really examine the human relationships that they had and how they really pushed and pulled with one another [...] so that we can, maybe, look at them as less a black-and-white thing and more of a spectrum and hopefully that will reflect on us in our communities as well; we are a spectrum.⁸⁷

Dixon’s statement that *JCS* somehow destabilizes stereotypes is a bit ironic, not in sentiment, but in its direct contrast to the belief system of the character he plays. Judas is operating within a world that is not kind to him, as he cautions Jesus, “Do you care for your race? Don’t you see we must keep in our place?” (Act I, No. 2, mm. 55-56). This is not the sentiment of a radical. This Judas is one who has felt his marginalization, who realizes that despite the preaching of neoliberal doctrines of meritocracy, upward mobility, and communities as an indiscriminate spectrum, in order for him to survive, he must “keep in [his] place” (Act I, No. 2, mm. 57-58). Michael Kimmel, author of *Angry White Men* (2013), theorizes the current racial politics that Judas’s sentiment anachronistically embodies. He refers to the simmering racial tensions as the reverse “Bradley effect,” specifically speaking of the US following 2008 election of Obama, a

⁸⁷ Brandon Victor Dixon, “Jesus Christ Superstar || Brandon Victor Dixon Interview || SocialNews.XYZ,” YouTube Video, 6:22, posted by “Social News XYZ,” March 14, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NC7eilpuclY>.

self-identifying black man, as president: “[H]aving now declared ourselves postracial, suddenly white people have given themselves *more* permission to express deep-seated racism.”⁸⁸ Judas claps to get the disciples’ attention—“Nazareth, your famous son should have stayed a great unknown”—and the disciples “clap back,” in turn, interrupting Judas’s warning with their jovial praise (Act I, No. 2, mm. 47-48). The disciples surround Judas and push him to back away from Jesus.

In the 1973 film adaptation, Judas is never permitted an immediate audience with Jesus in this first number. During the entire number, Judas is relegated to the isolated craggy mountain vista. He remains alone, wailing his distress into the empty valley below; its vastness highlights Judas’s rejection, his solitude, and his vulnerability. *JCS 2000* allows Judas from the very first number to communicate frankly and intimately with Jesus. Instead of a black man sitting alone on a mountain singing softly to himself, this white Judas forcefully brings himself into eye-to-eye monologue with the viewer. The aura of this Judas assumes a position of power that he never relinquishes throughout the entire number. He sings directly into the camera and in the very presence of Jesus. He openly warns against the dangers of superstardom. “Heaven on Their Minds” confirms the security, and to a degree, the authority that Judas 2000 has with the Superstar. Judas 2000 is given as much if not more agency than Jesus, with the ability to forcefully make Jesus listen to him by physically restraining him. Judas 2018 is not isolated from Jesus and the rest of the disciples, like the black Judas of the 1973 adaptation. He moves about the stage and is heard by those around him. Although he is afforded more apparent agency than Judas 1973 in that he is speaking directly in the presence of the one to whom he is addressing, he is not afforded the authority like what Judas 2000 exhibits. The 2018 Judas is seen and he is even

⁸⁸ Michael S. Kimmel, “Preface” in *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (New York: Nation Books, 2015), 7.

heard, but he is always kept at a distance. When he first enters the stage, he remains outside of the spotlight, the disciples' circle of light. He is present but not included. As Jesus moves around the stage, Judas follows close behind, but never within arm's length. The other disciples dismissively pat Judas on the back and nudge him away. As Jesus's body language evolves into empathy for Judas, the other disciples attempt to distract the Superstar. Finding Jesus's focus on Judas to be unyielding, the disciples rush towards Judas and effectively push him away, to which Judas throws up his hands and concedes, "Okay." At one point, Judas does push past the disciples and has the ability to be face to face with Jesus, however, Judas keeps his distance while pleading for Jesus to "Listen to this warning I give." When comparing these different interpretations of "Heaven on their Minds, the Judas 2018, a black Judas, is afforded agency that Judas 1973, also a black Judas, was not; however, the 2018 was not afforded the authority that was iconic of the 2000 white Judas.

5.2 Everything's Alright 2018

Both the 1973 and 2000 film adaptations incorporate interracial intimacy. The 1973 film portrayed competing interracial intimacies, with a white Jesus caught between a black Judas and an Asian American Mary. In the 2000 film, interracial intimacy was relegated solely to Jesus and Mary, with Mary as the racial minority. In the 2018 production, the American singer-songwriter, Sara Bareilles, was cast as Mary. This version of *JCS* demonstrates interracial intimacy with a white Mary and a black Jesus. In "Strange Thing, Mystifying," the number that precedes "Everything's Alright," Judas implies that Mary is a woman of questionable morals. With a Jesus that is black and a Mary that is white, this production shares a history of theater tropes as old as

Shakespeare's *Othello*. In her work on representations of interracial couples in theater and film, Daileader describes how these representations systematically perpetuate racist, sexist narratives in its characterization of white women's intimacy with black men. Just as Judith Butler describes gender as a repeated performance of specific signifiers, the theater canon implicitly enforces the idea that interracial intimacies between white women and black men necessarily end in disgrace and death. *JCS* re-articulates this narrative with a white Mary characterized (implicitly) as a prostitute and with a black Jesus that does not explicitly resurrect. The Jesus and Mary of this narrative do not strictly adhere to the problematic narrative identified by Daileader, for Mary never suffers from her intimacy with a black man. In fact, in this version, she is never controlled, and at times she even goes out of her way to control the two black men she is in most contact with, Jesus and Judas.

In the 1973 film, Judas barely acknowledges Mary's presence by never breaking eye contact with Jesus. In the 2000 version, Judas is in direct conflict with Mary, even to the point of grabbing her arm and throwing her down some stone steps. In NBC's 2018 version, Judas interacts with Mary with condescending, but cautious apprehension. In "Everything's Alright" Mary promptly takes charge. She tempers the agitated disciples by caressing cheeks and clasping hands. Satisfied that the disciples are under control she stands in front of Jesus, readjusts his garb and starts to sing. As she sings, she leads Jesus to the stone steps just in front of a graffitied wall, inscribed with "Jesus." There is a palpable lack of chemistry between Jesus and Mary in the 2018 production. This lack construes Mary's coaxing to be not exclusively for Jesus, nor for Judas, but for all those who are listening to her. This Mary is looking as much to the chorus and Judas as she is to Jesus. And while she lays Jesus head in her lap and she runs her hands over his body, there is an odd absence of erotic tension, and instead a motherly, matronly air. Where

Mary 1973 and 2000 indulge Jesus with intimate pampering, Mary 2018 pragmatically soothes everyone's agitation with a mother's tidying hand. With a gentle lullaby, she commands everyone to sit tight and everything will come together in the end.

As they sit, Judas passes in front of them, in and then out of the shot, reminding us of Judas's discomfort with Jesus's superstar position. We soon see a shot of the entire stage, with two spotlights, one on Mary and Jesus, the other on Judas. Judas stands up from where he was seated, he gestures towards Jesus and then to the rest of the disciples, asking why such money has been wasted on luxury rather than "saved for the poor." Judas's demeanor and vocality do not embody the rage of the 1973 Judas, nor do they portray the vitriolic disdain of the 2000 Judas. It is as though this Judas, the 2018 black Judas speaking to a white Mary, knows that he is speaking to one in a more privileged position. And yet, he is compelled to act. He calmly reprimands Mary. His criticism is outlined by a racially charged dynamic as he perceives Mary as acting on her naive white privilege. Mary stands up and approaches Judas and her coaxing takes on a condescending air. She moves about the stage and good-naturedly asserts how "everything is alright" if everyone would just relax. While Mary sings her white privilege, Judas looks back to Jesus, as if to ask, "You don't really believe this, do you? It'll take more than just relaxation to make everything alright for the marginalized and less fortunate." Judas seems all too aware of the danger that lurks just beyond Mary's politically correct veil. In "Heaven on Their Minds, he reminded Jesus of Jesus's fragile popularity and ignoring Judas, Jesus seems to disregard the potentiality of their tenuous safety and the Superstar's own tokenized existence within his "post-race" posse. Jesus may be the vital part to what Robin James coins as *MRWaSP*

or *multi-racial white sexist patriarchy*.⁸⁹ MRWaSP is an update to traditional patriarchy in that it includes racialized ‘others’ into the realm of privilege as long as they adhere to specific neoliberal narratives. This inclusion legitimizes the current hegemony, which James contends necessarily excludes the masculine, non-bourgeois black man. Judas, who physically and vocally bears masculine signifiers, detects the deceptive nature of MRWaSP, but Jesus is unwilling to give up his privilege, as he ignores its conditional nature. “Everything’s Alright” ends with Jesus’s head laying benignly in Mary’s lap while she and the disciples repeat the mantra, “Everything’s alright, yes,” and Judas slowly backs away into the shadows.

5.3 The Last Supper 2018

NBC’s “The Last Supper” number starts with a shot of a fire pit, with disciples singing “Look at all my trials and tribulation sinking in a gentle pool of wine” as the camera zooms out to where Judas and Jesus are sitting on the top of the stone steps, backs toward each other (Act II, No. 14, mm. 13-20). Mary walks from the shadows to where these two men are sitting. She places the shawl that was about her neck around that of Judas. She then sits in between them, grabs Jesus’s hand, and then Judas’s. The supper soon commences and quickly evolves into a battle of accusations, with Jesus crying, “One of you denies me. One of you betrays me,” and ending on, “Get out!” Unlike the 1973 version, the 2018 Judas does not leave when Jesus commands him to get out. Instead, he holds his hands out in disbelief and submission. Paying no heed to Judas’s visceral cognitive dissonance, Jesus turns, waving for him to leave. Judas stands

⁸⁹ Robin James, *Resilience and Melancholy: Pop Music, Feminism, Neoliberalism* (Lanham: John Hunt Publishing, 2015).

there while the chorus finishes their refrain. In a last attempt to bring Jesus to reason, like an older brother or even a father, Judas grabs Jesus's face, arms fully extended and tells him, "Every time I look at you I don't understand" (Act II, No. 1, mm. 127-128). Judas's desperation pushed him to do something that seemed particularly uncharacteristic in this production: he held the face of Jesus in his two hands. This is the only moment in which Judas 2018 uses physical force to obtain Jesus's attention, but it is only for a moment. Just before Judas leaves the supper, he reaches towards Jesus as if to clasp his face again or hug him, but instead throws his hands up in defeat and leaves the stage. This is almost a direct quote from Judas 1973. Both Judas 1973 and 2018, when faced with Jesus's rejection and at their most vulnerable, physically reach towards the face of Jesus. Even with their mirroring interpretations, the complete lack of close-up shots in the 2018 television special, in contrast to the nuanced use of close-up shots in the 1973 film, disarms the erotic tensions between the two key characters. Furthermore, casting the two protagonists as the same race circumnavigates the interracial nature of the Judas/Jesus relationship.

In the 1973 production, this number reveals Judas as a tragic hero, deeply in love with but ultimately rejected by Jesus. When Jesus tells him to "Go!," he leaves the supper and is later approached by Jesus. The Judas of the 2000 production, however, is characterized as a sarcastic, demeaning, and violent betrayer, who refuses to obey Jesus's demands until the number has finished and he has finished accusing Jesus. The 1973 black Judas reserves his final accusation to a private space removed from the other disciples. The white 2000 Judas seems to act with his political viability in the forefront of his mind, whereas the black Judas appears to be scolding a lover for his poor choices that negatively impact others. The 2000 Judas all but calls Jesus a criminal in front of all the other disciples. He even throws Jesus to the ground during "The Last

Supper.” In the 2018 production, when both Judas and Jesus are cast as black men, the characterization of their relationship produces a negotiation of blackness. These two men enact the Judas/Jesus narrative, portraying different ways a black man can navigate the current hegemony, a hegemony that claims to include racialized ‘others’ into the realm of privilege, but relegates them to positions of service rather than power. The 2018 Judas moves about the stage, is seen and heard by Jesus. Notwithstanding the preaching of neoliberal doctrines of meritocracy, upward mobility, and communities as an indiscriminate spectrum, the white 2018 Mary is the only character with explicit agency, while Jesus is infantilized and Judas is relegated to the shadows.

6.0 Conclusion

The Overture, the opening number before Judas's monologue, can provide a clarifying lens through which to address the divergences between these three adaptations. The first film starts with a panoramic view of the Israeli desert and then a montage of the ruins of Advat, littered with scaffolding as though in the process of restoring the falling structures. A bus arrives at the ruins with supplies atop. When the bus stops people pile out of it and immediately get to work unloading the materials, as though about to perform work of restoration. When *JCS* first premiered in the 1970s its treatment of Biblical figures challenged many norms. The original production's interpretation of the psychology of Jesus, its tragic treatment of Judas, the intentional use of anachronisms and the choice to incorporate "inclusive" casting all contributed to the controversial nature of this work, but at the heart of the anachronism was the attempt to revitalize and restore an age-old story. The second film adaptation released in 2000 backed away from such challenges. The original anachronism of multi-racial hippies dancing in the Israeli deserts of the 1970s version were sanded down into an industrial gay bar aesthetic in the 2000 adaptation. The "Overture" of this version opens with images of graffiti promoting diverse politics, such as "democracy," "freedom," "war." Black-cloaked soldiers are seen chasing and arresting terrified punk miscreants. Those who remain free are seen handling machine guns and practicing martial arts. The overarching theme contextualizes the entire film as a "we versus them," "rebels versus empire" plot. These disciples, rather than restoring that which has gone into disrepair, are wanting to reclaim that which they believe is rightfully theirs. This change in narrative focus accommodates a Judas characterized as dominant and self-serving, rather than tragic. The 2018 NBC production starts with images and choreography that indicate

deconstruction. On center stage is a twenty-foot or so long table draped in white cloth. The camera sweeps to the end of the stage to a chipped and faded facade with painted images of Judeo/Christian figures. The disciples run onto the stage from all sides, including from the audience. They strip “The Last Supper” table of its white cloth, remove its benches and completely disassemble it. This nostalgia-loaded enactment of *JCS* casts both Judas and Jesus as racial minorities and presented what appeared to be a post-race interpretation, which effectively erased the intimate, erotic nature prominent in this work’s previous iterations. This lack of homoeroticism between Judas and Jesus, a quality that has been central since its premiere, troubled the main intervention of this work, namely, the rendering of Judas as sympathetic. The difference in characterization of Judas essentially boils down to the black Judas of the 1973 adaptation as a jilted lover, the white Judas of the 2000 UK adaptation as an aggrieved and entitled opportunist, and the black Judas of the NBC live television special as a scapegoat. I have chosen to analyze and compare these productions in light of US identity politics because “the national imaginary of the United States often secures and facilitates—rather than undermines—structures of oppression.”⁹⁰ Indeed, this paper has observed how portrayals of intimacy in *JCS* produce implicit racial constructions that betray repressive subjectivity formation narratives of the Euro-American imaginary. By identifying how dynamically interracial intimacy can operate in a single musical that does not explicitly program race, I hope to make legible musical theater characterizations that are bound by racial construction.

⁹⁰ Johnson, “The Art of Masculine Victimhood,” 229.

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