

‘I Know Who You Are’: Antiblackness in the Speculative Rhetorics of Genetic Genealogy

by

Amber Elena Kelsie

Bachelor of Arts, Dartmouth College, 2007

Master of Arts, University of Pittsburgh, 2011

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This dissertation was presented

by

Amber Elena Kelsie

It was defended on

April 9, 2020

and approved by

Dr. Karma R. Chávez, Associate Professor, University of Texas at Austin

Dr. Shanara R. Reid-Brinkley, Assistant Professor, California State University-Fullerton

Dr. Caitlin F. Bruce, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication

Dr. Paul E. Johnson, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication

Dissertation Director: Dr. Brenton J. Malin, Associate Professor, Department of Communication

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Drawing on the theoretical frameworks provided by afropessimism, Black feminist new materialism, and rhetoric and media studies, this dissertation investigates the racial meaning-making at work in the speculative rhetorics of genetic genealogy. Genetic genealogy imaginaries are invested in a world-making project that mirrors the speculative maneuvers of biotechnology writ large. Blackness is understood as a “communicative medium” for the inscription of the Humanist drama of value in the production of technoscientific imaginaries. Genetic genealogy discourse figured in the popular HBO series *Watchmen* and AncestryDNA advertisements are examined as rhetorical mediations of nature and life that appropriate and (mis)recognize Blackness. This dissertation argues that genetic genealogy invests and arrests Blackness through motifs of loss and recovery, and through an incorporative logic of neoliberal multiculturalism. Rhetorical operations of structural adjustment found in this study neither simply forefront a color-conscious politic nor a post-racial one. Instead, these operations are indicative of a racialized command that one assent to deracialization in order to enter the drama of Human value.

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1.0 Introduction

In 2010, a man who had lived all his life as white, receives DNA test results that identify him as 90 percent Caucasian, 6 percent indigenous American, and 4 percent sub-Saharan African. He decides to sue the federal government after being denied a minority-business certification designed to offset economic disadvantages faced by racial minorities.¹ A white supremacist learns on daytime television that he “has a little black in [him]” when his results include 14 percent sub-Saharan African; he denounces the test as statistical noise.² In an event which recalled the “transracial blackness” of Rachel Dolezal, genetic ancestry testing was put in the national spotlight when Elizabeth Warren took a DNA test to prove her claim to Cherokee ancestry, prompting a response from Cherokee Nation stating that DNA testing could not determine tribal citizenship.³ An AncestryDNA advertisement features Kyle who grew up celebrating his German ancestry, and then learns that 52 percent of his DNA results designate his ancestry as Scottish and Irish. After receiving his results, he trades in his lederhosen for a kilt.⁴ Lyn, a Black woman from the south,

¹ Christine Willmsen, “Lynnwood man tried to use a home DNA test to qualify as a minority business owner. He was denied — now he’s suing,” *The Seattle Times*, September 13, 2018, last modified September 17, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/lynnwood-man-tried-to-use-a-home-dna-test-to-qualify-as-a-minority-business-owner-he-was-denied-now-hes-suing>.

² BlackandRight, “Racist Cobb Finds Out He Has Some Black in Him,” Youtube, Nov 12, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-XDKiO-i4Q>; Eric Boodman, “White nationalists are flocking to genetic ancestry tests. Some don’t like what they find,” *Stat News*, August 16, 2017, <https://www.statnews.com/2017/08/16/white-nationalists-genetic-ancestry-test>.

³ Cherokee Nation (@CherokeeNation), “Cherokee Nation responds to release of Senator Warren’s DNA test,” Twitter, October 15, 2018, <https://twitter.com/CherokeeNation/status/1051965527214776321>.

⁴ AncestryDNA, “Goodbye Lederhosen, Hello Kilt: How a DNA Test Changed One Man’s Identity Forever,” Ancestry (Blog), December 20, 2016, <https://blogs.ancestry.com/cm/goodbye-lederhosen-hello-kilt-how-a-dna-test-changed-one-mans-identity-forever>.

learns she's 26 percent Nigerian, and is inspired to learn about her culture. Her gele, she says, is the most important hat she's ever owned.⁵

In news, advertising, social media, and television, DNA ancestry testing has quickly become a mainstay of our cultural landscape. People reveal their results on social media, advertisements narrativize entertaining histories—which sometimes backfire and gain the ire of the Twitter, and both documentary and entertainment television feature genetic ancestry themes. Despite the disclaimers that genetic ancestry testing can only reveal so much, it seems that the promise to discover the secret of one's heritage cannot but evoke a sentiment that in one's DNA lies the truth of oneself—a truth that may run counter to common sense regarding the nature of racial identity. Common sense narratives of genomic science and Black ancestry are intrinsic to cultural mediations of nature, racial formation, and biotechnology in our supposedly post-racial, multicultural milieu. This dissertation thus considers the racial meaning-making at work in popular media discourses of genetic genealogy and Blackness. In this dissertation I contend that technoscientific imaginaries of genetic genealogy rhetorically facilitate (post-)humanist mediations of nature-as-Blackness and nature-as-genetic-life that figure genetic genealogy as a *promise or horizon of racial elsewhere* that organizes affects and immaterial labor, or *investments* in spatiality and temporality that is, nevertheless a self-same spacetime. Following the insights of scholars engaged in Black study thinking through the function and radical potentiality of Blackness as it is onto-epistemologically situated in modern thought, I consider Blackness as a “communicative medium” through which genetic genealogy's technoscientific promise emerges. While I more fully consider the theoretical developments in Black studies that think this Black

⁵ Ancestry, “Lyn Discovers Her Ethnicity Discoveries,” Television advertisement, Ispot.tv, accessed November 15, 2019, <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/wK8r/ancestrydna-lyn-discovers-her-ethnicity-discoveries>.

medium in chapter two, in this introduction I will first review the cultural and scholarly terrain of the ideological production of race and subjectivity in genetic and genomic science and will then close with an outline of upcoming chapters.

Direct-to-consumer (DTC) genetic testing of the sort illustrated in the above examples has become wildly popular. 23andMe and AncestryDNA, leaders in the genetic genealogy revolution, boast 10 million and 15 million users respectively.⁶ DNA companies partner with media and travel companies, promoting an “authentic” and personalized history or travel experience. The tests are often understood to be novelty items and can be given as gifts, but for many the test results represent much more. The tests have also been used by people to discover lost family members, to prove lineages long denied by dominant culture, to enable adopted people to learn more about their genetic heritages, or for people to learn about genetic health risks.

Ancestry testing often is a double-edged sword for Black and Indigenous people in the United States as it brings up still open wounds regarding medical experimentation and biopiracy, and also because DNA is increasingly used as a tactic of criminalization and surveillance by U.S. state and federal policing agencies. Nonetheless, for Black people whose links to heritage have been erased in the Middle Passage, DNA ancestry testing is an appealing method for learning about one’s genealogical roots. In *The Social Life of DNA: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation after the Genome*, Alondra Nelson details Black people’s use of genetic genealogy in reparations suits and “reconciliation projects,” or “efforts aimed at repairing the social ruptures produced by transatlantic slavery.”⁷ For example, Nelson describes the efforts of African Ancestry, co-founded

⁶ Melissa Wiley, “The golden age of at-home genetic testing may be over — but it’s still a critical part of one of the biggest trends in how people will be traveling in 2020,” *Business Insider*, November 28, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/ancestry-tourism-travel-trend-genetics-heritage-ancestrydna-23andme-2019-11>.

⁷ Alondra Nelson, *The Social Life of DNA: Race, Reparations and Reconciliation after the Genome* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2016), 9.

in 2003 by Rick Kittles, an African American geneticist, and Gina Paige, a black business woman, in their quest to provide genetic genealogy tools to members of the African Diaspora.⁸ Instrumental in popularizing genetic genealogy and overcoming Black cultural anxieties has been Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who popularized ancestry testing on *African American Lives* and *Finding Your Roots*, which partnered with 23andMe and African Ancestry. While African Ancestry markets specifically to members of the African Diaspora, many broadly-marketed DNA companies also especially target the Black market in DNA as indicated by 23andMe's Roots into the Future Project, which offered African-American participants DNA tests free of charge, and the African Genetics Project, which does the same for those who can prove four grandparents hail from one of a list of countries in Africa. Black/African DNA serves multiple functions: DNA companies are able to capitalize off of Black natal alienation, or Black historical and geographical rupture, by promising to recover a coherent tie to an ancestral home in Africa; and, following the confirmation of the Out of Africa hypothesis, Black/African DNA is also significant for genetic databasing and attempts to map genetic geographies and migrations. Furthermore, pharmaceutical companies share an interest in DNA ancestry testing as it provides genetic data for new race-based medicines and pharmacogenetic applications that promise greater profits than medicines marketed generally.⁹ Thus, Black DNA is an important source of surplus value for DNA testing companies and their partners.

⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁹ On the return of biological essentialism in genetic ancestry testing, pharmacogenetics, and race-based medicine see Dorothy Roberts, *Fatal Inventions: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-first Century*, (New York/London: The New Press, 2011).

Such applications suggest that rather than overcome racism, genomic science may reconstruct and intensify bio- and necro-political arrangements.¹⁰ Dorothy Roberts, for example, pointedly argues that genomic science and biotechnologies like pharmacogenetics and genetic ancestry testing herald the emergence of a new racial science that facilitates race-based medicines and circumscribes the socio-political effects of racism to genetics rather than color-blind or racist policy.¹¹ Duana Fullwiley, Ramya Rajagopalan and Joan H. Fujimura argue that the “admixture” technology used to link genetic “ancestry informative markers” (AIMs) to constructed geoethnic types is itself based on faulty, tautological assumptions.¹² And, while DNA can be used to exonerate the incarcerated, the increased use of DNA forensics by law enforcement—sometimes with the aid of direct-to-consumer DNA testing—calls for renewed attention to the rhetorical framing of genetic genealogy and its relationship to biopolitical apparatuses.

The seeming paradoxes of genetic ancestry testing are reflective of the humanist paradigm in which the Human Genome Project and subsequent mapping projects developed. On June 26, 2000, when President Bill Clinton announced the first draft of the genome sequence decoded by the project, he expressed a popular and enduring hope in a new era of science saying, “in genetic terms all human beings, regardless of race, are more than 99.9 percent the same. ... The most

¹⁰ On the biopolitical dangers of genetic and genomic science see Troy Duster, *Backdoor to Eugenics* (New York/London: Routledge, 1990); Jenny Reardon, *Race to the Finish: Identity and Governance in an Age of Genomics*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Kaushik Sunder Rajan, *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Melinda E. Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2011); Roberts, *Fatal Inventions*; Jenny Reardon, *The Postgenomic Condition: Ethics, Justice, and Knowledge After the Genome*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

¹¹ See Roberts, *Fatal Inventions*.

¹² See Duana Fullwiley, “The Biologistical Construction of Race: ‘Admixture’ Technology and the New Genetic Medicine,” *Social Studies of Science* 38, no. 5 (October 2008): 695-735; and Ramya Rajagopalan and Joan H. Fujimura, “Making History via DNA, Making DNA from History: Deconstructing Race-Disease Connection in Admixture Mapping,” in *Genetics and the Unsettled Past: The Collision of DNA, Race, and History* ed. by Keith Waloo, Alondra Nelson, and Catherine Lee, 143-163, (New Brunswick, NJ/London: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

important fact of life on this earth is our common humanity.”¹³ Flanked by Craig Venter, the Celera Genomics founder who “spearheaded the private arm” of genomic research, and National Human Genome Research Institute director Francis Collins, Clinton’s optimistic announcement of the post-Genomic dawn suggested that, “composed of an amalgam of individuals’ genes, the human genome represents us all.”¹⁴ In his remarks however, Clinton also likened the genome map to Galileo’s scientific observations of celestial bodies and the mapping of the “American” frontier in the Lewis and Clarke expedition; thus, he inadvertently situated genomic science within the Eurocentric celebration of scientific and geographic “discovery” and the settler landscape materialized through European conquest, Native American genocide, and Black enslavement. We can thus read this watershed moment in modern science as an allegory of the ongoing colonizing operations of Human Being and racial capitalism. The allegory contextualizes Dorothy Roberts’ concern that despite celebrations that science had once and for all demonstrated the invalidity of race as a biological descriptor, “the science that emerged from sequencing the human genome was shaped by a resurgence of interest in race-based genetic variation.”¹⁵

Indeed, the sampling process itself, as exemplified by the Human Genome Diversity Project (HGDP), which sought “Isolates of Historical Interest,” raises concerns of racism, as scientists seek out communities historically dispossessed by ongoing legacies of settler colonialism, colonization, and chattel slavery, targeting them for tissue and saliva extraction.¹⁶ For example, Jenny Reardon and Kim Tallbear note that while population geneticists and biological anthropologists regularly frame their activities as anti-racist, believing that they have

¹³ Bill Clinton, quoted in “READING THE BOOK OF LIFE; White House Remarks On Decoding of Genome: READING THE BOOK OF LIFE,” *New York Times (Online)*, June 27, 2000, ProQuest.

¹⁴ Nelson, *The Social Life of DNA*, 13.

¹⁵ Roberts, *Fatal Interventions*, xi.

¹⁶ Reardon *Race to the Finish*; Reardon, *The Postgenomic Condition*.

“abandoned race as an object of study and racism as a practice,” the demand “for access to ‘nature’ (in the form of human DNA) ... [transforms] it into something of value and use: knowledge about human evolution.”¹⁷ The settler temporality involved in the figuring of indigeneity-as-nature—an extractive resource for Man to unlock the mysteries of life—renders Native people as “mere repositories of DNA,” and rehearses “a very old order of things in which whiteness figures as a rational civilizing project that creates symbolic and material value of use to all humanity.”¹⁸ Thus, what initially appears as a tool in the quest to learn one’s own history, turns out to be a weapon in the settler colonial arsenal to transform dispossessed material life—as organic matter—and meaningful life—as history—into the property of whiteness. This dissertation thus attends to the spatiotemporal figurations of the cultural mediation of nature in media depictions of genetic genealogy.

Technoscientific imaginaries do not only rhetorically function to enlist potential DNA consumers but are here understood as worlding projects that influence societal meanings and attitudes towards biotechnologies; they rhetorically function to craft and invest subjectivity according to racialized and biocapitalist figurations of space and time. Though Black feminists and others had already been developing an analysis of the capitalist expropriations of life qualities, the development of recombinant DNA technology and the mapping of the human genome are commonly understood to be key events in the development of biocapitalism.¹⁹ Drawing on both Marx’s conceptions of labor and commoditization, and Foucault’s conception of biopolitics as a

¹⁷ Jenny Reardon and Kim Tallbear, “‘Your DNA Is Our History’ Genomics, Anthropology, and the Construction of Whiteness as Property,” *Current Anthropology* 53, no. 5 (April 2012), S234.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ On the Black feminist pre-figuration of the critique of biocapitalism and the role of the “slave episteme” in biocapitalism, see Alys Eve Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery: Biocapitalism and Black Feminism’s Philosophy of History*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); on the importance of recombinant DNA technology for the development of biocapitalism, see Cooper, *Life as Surplus*.

mode of governance, biocapitalism names the speculative forms of value creation that occur through the valorization of *life itself* at both the sub-body level and the supra-body level—biota, molecular life, and even the modalities of life that we think of as affect or desire are targeted by capitalism for the extraction of surplus value.

Biopolitical governance transforms under biocapitalism; increasingly biopolitics operates “at the level of the molecular and from that seat organizes new landscapes of risk and genres of ethical subjectification,” in which “corporeal being... is increasingly fungible and multiple.”²⁰ According to Nikolas Rose, as the subject is increasingly made responsible for her biosocial vitality, citizenship becomes less tied to the state and a form of “biological citizenship” emerges.²¹ Marxist feminists, as well as scholars working within feminist science and technology studies, have further examined the ways in which new reproductive technologies signal a troubling of the binaries of nature/culture and production/reproduction.²²

Under biocapitalism, “biology increasingly becomes an information science.”²³ As Reardon explains, information “structured the development of genomics from the start.”²⁴ Exemplary of the imbrication of information and biocapitalism is the moniker “Book of Life” popularly given to the decoded genome to designate the genome as the repository for the information of humanity. Also exemplary is the explosion of computational DNA sequencing that

²⁰ Stefan Helmreich, “Species of Biocapital,” *Science as Culture* 17, no. 4 (December 2008), 466.

²¹ See Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself*.

²² See for example, Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell, *Tissue Economies: Blood, Organs, and Cell Lines in Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Sarah Franklin, *Dolly Mixtures: The Remaining of Genealogy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Cooper, *Life as Surplus*; Melinda Cooper and Catherine Waldby, *Clinical Labor: Tissue Donors and Research Subjects in the Global Bioeconomy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Kalindi Vora, *Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

²³ Rajan, *Biocapital*, 41

²⁴ Reardon, *The Postgenomic Condition*, 22.

all but eliminated human-filtered readings of DNA in the aftermath of the HGP.²⁵ Thus, “[s]equencing technologies became a significant site of venture capital investment, sparking the innovation of next-generation sequencing technologies.”²⁶ From a political economy perspective, it is this mix of venture capital with the requirement for immense computational and databasing power that could only be supplied by private biotech firms and information technology giants like Google that facilitated the growth of direct-to-consumer ancestry testing.

Melinda Cooper argues that biocapitalism marks a kind of ironic return to eighteenth-century life sciences in which “the opposition between organic and inorganic began to be perceived as fundamental.”²⁷ Under biocapitalism, neoliberalism increasingly subjects daily life not to disciplinary power and generalized commodification, but financialization. Neoliberalism for Melinda Cooper is marked by a delirium in which capital pursues “life as surplus,” utilizing biotechnologies to “[reinvent] life beyond the limit.”²⁸ That is to say, biotechnologies (re)produce speculative economies for capitalism in a world where it appears as if there are no more frontiers, by locating and producing new extractive sites in the very forces of life itself. Thus, it is often the case that biotechnologies are *not valued* for what commodities they may produce right now. In fact, in the speculative economy it does not matter if new start-ups produce a single thing. What matters is the collective speculation of an always developing future horizon of value which can be financialized. This insight is significant as it suggests that though biotechnologies certainly change biotechnological capabilities, for any given technology what is at stake is less the technological

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 95.

²⁷ Cooper, *Life as Surplus*, 6.

²⁸ Ibid., 12.

product and more so the ways in which it can produce affective investments in technological speculation itself.

The financialization of life—both at the level of immaterial, affective labor, and at the level of biological processes—is also undergirded by violent processes of extraction and subjectivization. Financialization works through debt imperialism, the extension and intensification of the global debt economy that extracts from the present in order to credit the future of capitalism. Though debt imperialism especially targets the global south through techniques as dispersed as global governance, structural adjustment, and biopiracy, the debt economy always threatens the West with capitalism’s contradictions as well. Thus, in the name of keeping the money train running, institutional actors regularly unleash the very forces of disease, militarism and violence that they (claim to) seek to prevent.

Alys Weinbaum examines contemporary configurations of biocapitalism in surrogacy and argues that biocapitalism, as a form of racial capitalism, was inaugurated on the plantation and is subtended by the “slave episteme.” The slave episteme “[renders] slavery thinkable [and] enables continued—albeit continuously recalibrated—forms of gendered and racial exploitation of human reproductive labor as itself a commodity and as the source of human biological commodities and values.”²⁹ Weinbaum further argues that biocapitalism “sublates the history of slavery by rendering it a ‘rationally-necessary moment of the whole,’ even though this rationally necessary moment must be systematically disavowed for the system to function smoothly.”³⁰ Black feminist thought then serves as an essential mode of investigation for unearthing the disavowals which smooth biocapitalism’s operations.

²⁹ Weinbaum, *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery*, 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

Direct-to-consumer genetic testing (DTC GT) is deeply implicated in these machinations of biocapital and racism. Sibille Merz argues that DTC GT companies' quest for racialized DNA, especially where it concerns Black DNA, suggests that DTC GT must be examined for both its racial logics and biocapitalist logics. Merz extends to DTC GT Cooper and Walby's examination of "clinical labor," or the valorization of and surplus value created through tissue extraction, surrogacy, organ donation, and clinical trial participation, arguing that "the economic and cultural practices of 23andMe... are paradigmatic of the logics of post-Fordist valorisation and the conflation of production and consumption."³¹ Consumers provide free, immaterial labour, in the form of participant online information and activity, and clinical labor in the form of saliva samples, which both "constitute central revenue generators for the company."³² Thus, in DTC GT, the distinction between consumer and producer is collapsed; under biocapitalism, genetic testing customers are better termed "prosumers," as it is their prosumption—the simultaneous consumption and production—that generates surplus value. Merz also argues that because 23andMe "capitalizes on the revival of scientific ideas about shared genetic makeup amongst group members" the DTC GT company benefits from both the "unremunerated contributions" of prosumers and "the assumption that African Americans differ from their white counterparts *qua* biology."³³ That is to say, what DTC GT sells is not just genetic data analysis, but also the racial science that motivates users to buy their product.

Drawing on Denise Ferreira da Silva and noting that admixture tests are notoriously unreliable and ideological, Merz suggests that "23andMe's interpellation of racial subjects

³¹ Sibille Merz, "'Health and ancestry Start here': Race and presumption in direct-to-consumer genetic testing services." *Ephemeris* 16, no. 3 (2016): 125.

³² *Ibid.*, 125.

³³ *Ibid.*, 122.

reproduces the effects of racial violence at the level of signification, and hence allows for the continued extraction of value from their unremunerated labor.”³⁴ Providing the example of Henrietta Lacks as a “neoliberal *doppelgänger*,” Merz suggests that multiculturalism makes an incorporative move toward difference that also flattens racial hierarchy under neoliberal capitalism.³⁵ While Merz gestures towards the fungibilization of Blackness that occurs at the nexus of scientific signification and antiblackness, there is yet more work to be done. This dissertation seeks to extend Merz’s insights by explicating the ways in which racial logics produced in scientific signification are figured in popular discourses of genetic genealogy.

1.1 Chapter Preview

What is genetic science’s investment in Blackness? How does it re-elaborate the humanist frameworks that capture Black fleshly matter? How does it work to invest Black people in its project? What is the technoscientific imaginary produced by and on behalf of genetic genealogy? This dissertation takes up these questions, interrogating the cinematic and rhetorical mechanisms that figure genetic genealogy as a benign, yet exciting and meaningful technique of repair. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks provided by afropessimism and Black feminist new materialism with questions raised in rhetoric and media studies, this dissertation examines genetic genealogy discourse as it is figured in the popular HBO series *Watchmen* and AncestryDNA ancestry testing advertisements. These rhetorical texts present technoscientific imaginaries that

³⁴ Ibid., 123.

³⁵ Ibid., 135.

attempt to world a Black future made possible by genetic genealogy; they thus serve as privileged examples for investigating racial meaning-making in speculative biocapitalist rhetorics. Specifically, I contend that genetic genealogy imaginaries are speculative rhetorics that mediate nature-as-Blackness and nature-as-genetic life by situating Blackness in motifs of loss and recovery, and by affectively investing Blackness in a humanist economy of debt and credit that reattaches Black existence to policing operations and neoliberal multicultural capital.

Blackness in this examination is understood as the onto-epistemologically historically-structured and -structuring “zone of nonbeing” which is reduced to fungible materiality, matter, and medium—which is to say, that Blackness is reduced to and made to serve as a symbolic resource that is yet more-and-less-than symbolic—that coheres and facilitates humanist rhetorical and material meditations on socio-political conflict and ethical value.³⁶ As that zone which lacks a claim to historical or geographical relationality which secures the self-determined and individuated Human/Being *qua* Man and his racial others, Blackness is often simultaneously appropriated and disavowed in racializing rhetoric. Thus, this dissertation traces the mobilizations of Blackness as a fungible “communicative medium” to effect a humanist narrativization of Black genetic ancestry, and reads for moments in which fugitive Blackness nevertheless unsettles the spatio-temporal coherence of these technoscientific imaginaries.³⁷

Chapter two, titled “Theoretical Indebtedness,” outlines the theoretical framework for this project. While several scholars have considered the ideology of genetic and genomic science, I

³⁶ Frantz Fanon describes Blackness as a “zone of nonbeing.” This concept is extended and elaborated by Frank B. Wilderson III. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008); Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

³⁷ I discuss Armond R. Towns’ theoretical development of Blackness as “communicative medium” in chapter two of this dissertation. See Armond R. Towns, “Black ‘Matter’ Lives,” *Women’s Studies in Communication*, 41, no. 4 (2018).

here make the case that the ontological turn in Black studies provides an important theoretical intervention for thinking through the specific mode of humanism in which culture overtakes nature in the speculative rhetorics of genetic genealogy. First, I elaborate the stakes and key concepts developed in Afro-Pessimism and Black feminist new materialism, two related tendencies in Black studies that consider the fungibilization of Blackness in the modern onto-epistemological grammar, and the fugitive potential of Black matter to fracture humanist modes of thought. Following the insights of communication theorist Armond Towns, Blackness is shown to be a “communicative medium,” a technology or prosthetic that serves as surface of inscription for the coherence of humanist frameworks of subjectivity and relationality.³⁸ Blackness, in other words, is a matter/media that enables humanist rhetoric to do its work. This chapter provides an extended explication of Blackness, science, and capitalism as they are refigured by Hortense Spillers, Sylvia Wynter, Denise Ferreira da Silva, Stefano Harney, and Fred Moten. Each of these thinkers seek to return an analysis of racial violence to modern thought capable of thinking through the cultural and scientific overdetermination of human variation.

Chapter three, titled “Finding Your Mother, Losing Your Mother: Natal Alienation, Black Trauma, and Genetic Repair,” examines the genetic genealogy imaginary as rhetorically produced in the popular 2019 HBO superhero drama *Watchmen*. *Watchmen* is notable for its centering of Black superheroes and Black narratives of intergenerational trauma. Genetic genealogy and pharmacogenetics serve as key plot devices in the characters’ journey toward racial reconciliation and intergenerational healing. This chapter examines the way genetic technologies are made to work with other socio-political and juridical technologies like the filial, policing, and racial reparation to cohere the narrative of loss and recovery. I contend that these technologies serve as

³⁸ See Towns, “Black ‘Matter’ Lives.”

structuring and suturing devices that enable, figure, and constrain a genetic imaginary that may re-elaborate racial subjection in its move toward genetically-enhanced racial reconciliation.

In chapter four, titled, “Without You, the Story Stops Here: Incorporative Moves and Neoliberal Futures in Genetic Ancestry Advertisements,” I turn to ancestry advertisements themselves, examining how a sense of Human/World History is constructed and made to include Blackness in operations of neoliberal multiculturalism. Though genetic ancestry advertisements clearly seek to target new potential customers, the more important work lies in the speculative, rhetorical, and affective worlding that invests us in the imagined technoscientific future. I argue that this future is one that is produced through a series of structural adjustments and disavowals of the historical breach effected in the Middle Passage, enabling a sense of historical continuity between past and present that readies Blackness and Nativeness for incorporation into the neoliberal multicultural and multiracial future. In doing so, these advertisements evoke development discourse, erase legacies of racial and sexual violence, and re-elaborate Black and Native ontological incapacity.

2.0 Theoretical Indebtedness

“I leave methods to the botanists and the mathematicians. There is a point at which methods devour themselves.” – Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*³⁹

“If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. I, too, am the afterlife of slavery.” – Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*⁴⁰

“The asterisked archives are filled with bodies that can only come into being vis-a-vis racial-sexual violence; the documents and ledgers and logs that narrate the brutalities of this history give birth to new world blackness as they evacuate life from blackness. Breathless, archival numerical evidence puts pressure on our present system of knowledge by affirming the knowable (black objecthood) and disguising the untold (black human being). The slave's status as object-commodity, or purely economic cargo, reveals that a black archival presence not only enumerates the dead and dying, but also acts as an origin

³⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 5.

⁴⁰ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 6.

story. This is where we begin, this is where historic blackness comes from: the list, the breathless numbers, the absolutely economic, the mathematics of the unliving.” – Katherine McKittrick, “Mathematics Black Life”⁴¹

According to Alexander G. Weheliye, black studies “illuminates the essential role that racial assemblages play in the construction of modern selfhood, works toward the abolition of Man, and advocates the radical reconstruction and decolonization of what it means to be human.”⁴² This project takes up black studies loosely described under the headings afropessimism and/or black feminist new materialism to examine the ways in which the genre of the human called Man serves as the organizing framework in the production of genetic genealogy imaginaries. Drawing together afropessimism and Black feminist new materialism with questions raised in rhetoric and media studies, this dissertation argues that genetic genealogy imaginaries rhetorically work to situate motifs of Black loss and recovery into a humanist economy of debt and credit that reattaches Black existence to policing operations and the machinations of neoliberal multicultural capitalism.

What follows is a brief review of some major scholarly works and concepts in black studies as it takes up the question of the Human and its stakes for political and philosophical thought and practice that inform this dissertation. I then turn to the implications of Black studies for materialist rhetoric after the ontological turn and critical feminist science and technology studies. Finally, I examine black feminist new materialisms contributions to thinking through the implications of the enduring legacy of slavery for how we think science, humanism, debt, and immaterial labor.

⁴¹ Katherine McKittrick, “Mathematics Black Life,” *The Black Scholar* 44 no. 2 (Summer 2014), 16-17.

⁴² Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.

2.1 Afropessimism and Black Feminist New Materialism

Afropessimism and black feminist new materialisms designate a trajectory of black studies that follows an “ontological turn,” in its consideration of the “Black” as the non-Human/Slave par excellence, the antagonistic outside to the modern onto-epistemological grammar that organizes itself around the figure of the Human/Being.⁴³ In the *longue durée* of chattel slavery and its afterlife, the slave has a “bifurcated existence as both object of property and a person.”⁴⁴ This bifurcation of property and personhood reveals the matrix of domination and desire that constitutes both the captivity of the slave and coherence of Human mastery. Though many theorists working under or proximately to these umbrella terms are influenced by several different thinkers in black feminism and the black radical tradition, many are attuned to Hortense Spillers’ examinations of the racial-sexual slave-making violence experienced by Black people under captivity, Fanon’s examinations of the psychosocial violence undergone by the Black subject and the colonized, and to Orlando Patterson’s concept of “social death” as the condition of slavery.

Spillers theorizes the “pornotropic” violence that makes the slave.⁴⁵ “Pornotrope” combines “porno,” from the ancient Greek meaning “prostitute,” and “trope,” or “tropological,” the rhetorical figure meaning turn or manner. Pornotroping names “the becoming-flesh of the black female body,” the denuded life that following Agamben, we might call bare life, but here registers the entanglement of political domination and sexuality.⁴⁶ The “lacerations, woundings, fissures, tears, scars, openings, ruptures, lesions, rendings, punctures of the flesh” that exceed rationality in

⁴³ Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black*.

⁴⁴ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6.

⁴⁵ Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987), 64-81.

⁴⁶ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 91.

their gratuity provide a lexicon of otherworldly, fleshly modes of being.⁴⁷ This is not a claim about especially sadistic masters or sadomasochism as a limit to the political; rather, Spillers' analysis evokes a sensuous dimension to violence that masks itself through spectacle. The total access that mastery demands turns the contractualist fantasy of consent inside out; pornotroping is the modality of violence that produces blackness, and in that production, slave-making violence becomes the staging ground for an erotics or enjoyment experienced by the master that is post-facto attributed to the slave. The laceration marks the "theft of the body" and the reduction of body (as a coherent whole of meaning, including gender) to "flesh," and its "hieroglyphics" attune us to the racializing expropriative moves of biopolitical capitalism that materially, symbolically and psychically constitute the world. Within the "American grammar" black flesh is *materialized*, and its "formation," for example into the many pathologized names for black women, registers not the freedom of the captive, but only further captivity within the semiotic economy. Flesh nonetheless has a different kind of existence beyond the modern grammar to which Spillers gestures: "This materialized scene of unprotected female flesh—of female flesh "ungendered"—offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse mediation."⁴⁸

Famously, Fanon says,

"In the Weltanschauung of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation... Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some critics

⁴⁷ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 68.

will take it on themselves to remind us that this proposition has a converse. I say that this is false. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man... His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out.”⁴⁹

Theorists then are called to understand the middle passage and colonization as an imposition that is also a metaphysical or ontological clearing of the world that constantly unfolds for the continual production of the ontology of the Human *qua* Man. For Orlando Patterson, the social death of slavery entails “three basic elements: 1) total powerlessness, 2) natal alienation or ‘the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations,’ and 3) generalized dishonor, this last element being a direct effect of the previous two.”⁵⁰

Significantly, thinking through the Black nonhuman, or Black matter, suggests that we should upend the cherished notion that racialization figures hierarchically as derivations of whiteness. Instead, Frank Wilderson and Jared Sexton call attention to the need to think the colorline not between whiteness and non-whiteness, but between blackness and non-blackness.⁵¹ Afropessimists take seriously the claim that “black life represents an ontological shift in the human.”⁵² Thus, theorists like Hartman, Sexton, and Wilderson describe black studies in this vein as the study of the “unthought,” which may be the only thing worth thinking. Sexton explains,

“Black studies as a field is... iterations of an internally differentiated project are, involved in an ongoing attempt to think about things not only unthought, but also perhaps

⁴⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 82-3.

⁵⁰ Jared Sexton, “Ante-Anti-Blackness: Afterthoughts” *Lateral* 1 (2012), <http://csalateral.org/section/theory/ante-anti-blackness-afterthoughts-sexton>.

⁵¹ See Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) and Wilderson III, *Red White & Black*.

⁵² David Marriott, “Corpsing; or, The Matter of Black Life.” *Cultural Critique* 94 (Fall 2016), 40.

unthinkable. What is a world made and unmade by slavery?... that tear is not simply a figure for the enslaved... It is also a statement, an offering or gift, really, for thinking differently about space, time, being, existence and so on—a whole series of ontological matters—through an inextricable and inescapable nexus of sociopolitical problems giving rise to divergent ethical dilemmas.”⁵³

In the words of Tiffany Lethabo King, theorists working under or proximately to these theoretical designations share in a commitment to the politics of “decolonial Black abolitionist thought” that requires that one “refuse necropolitical epistemological systems, which structure white liberal humanist ways of thinking and imagining the world.”⁵⁴ Describing the hostilities faced by scholars committed to the task of Black and Native abolition and decolonization even from those posthumanist Deleuzians supposedly seeking to overcome humanism, King turns to black feminists like Sylvia Wynter, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, and Amber Jamilla Musser as models for thinking posthumanism differently, and with deep skepticism toward the arrogant and still humanist nonrepresentational accounts that dominate the academy. Thinking along with Jodi Byrd’s critique of settler spatial logics intrinsic to Delueze and Guattari’s rhizome, King asks with Byrd, “If this line of thought requires Indigenous death, why even venture down it? What could one possibly repair or salvage of it?”⁵⁵ King suggests that black feminist new materialism approach white celebratory posthumanisms with a hermeneutics of suspicion.

⁵³ Jared Sexton, Interviewed by Daniel Colucciello Barber, “On Black Negativity, Or The Affirmation Of Nothing: Jared Sexton, interviewed by Daniel Barber,” *Society and Space*, 2017, <https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/on-black-negativity-or-the-affirmation-of-nothing>.

⁵⁴ Tiffany Lethabo King, “Humans Involved: Lurking in the Lines of Posthumanist Flight,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2017), 162.

⁵⁵ King, “Humans Involved,” 172.

Wilderson examines the position of the slave paradigmatically, explaining the structural antagonisms on which the modern onto-epistemological world rests. Here we find grammars of suffering and modalities of the Slave, the ‘Savage,’ and the Settler/Master. The antagonisms speak to the founding events of modernity, the settler colonialism and genocide, and the middle passage and reduction of the African to the Black slave. While the Settler/Master is constituted in the grammars of alienation and exploitation, which is to say, constituted in the labor relation under capitalism, this is not so for ‘Savage’ and ‘Slave’ positions. Nativeness for Wilderson is constituted in the grammars of sovereignty (land dispossession) and genocide, while the Slave or Blackness is constituted in the grammars of fungibility and accumulation (being exchangeable cargo). The labor relation is not, in the first instance, the condition of chattel enslavement and Blackness. The Slave is in a position of non-ontology, a space, following Fanon, of “absolute dereliction.”⁵⁶ Nataly alienated, the Slave (or ex-slave) lacks “cartographic coherence,” as the Black non-human is outside of (Historical) time and (World) space for which it is the condition of possibility.⁵⁷ Lacking honor and being a thing for the master, the Slave is gratuitously vulnerable to violence, a condition that continues into the present for black folk as Blackness is the epitome of criminality, an object which can be disposed of without reason. The slave-making, race-making, and world-making violence of settler colonialism and the middle passage requires that we center the question of racial violence in our analyses of socio-political projects. To fail to do so reiterates the very humanist logics which leftist and radical thought seeks to overcome by imposing an

⁵⁶ Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black*, 77.

⁵⁷ Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black*, 313; also see, Frank Wilderson III, “The Prison Slave as Hegemony’s (Silent) Scandal,” *Social Justice* 30, no. 2 (2003): 18-27.

assumptive logic of humanist coherence upon the Slave. Wilderson refers to these humanist moves alternatively as “ruse of analogy,” “structural adjustment,” and “borrowed institutionality.”⁵⁸

Black in this schema grants coherence to the onto-socio-epistemo-political drama of human relations and conflicts insofar as they are organized through a disavowal of its unthought constitutive outside. In this theorizing, even progressive projects that seek to disrupt various forms of domination are often indebted to an unexamined centrality of a Human subject that anchors political dreams, proscriptions, and prescriptions. Historically, philosophically, and materially, such progressive programs for liberation or (in their more modest formulations) redress, resituate the disarticulating force of blackness as that which must be concealed or held at a distance. The question of race enters such political projects through a “structural adjustment” in which blackness (or more broadly, racialization) is brought into the conversation either as a derivative aspect of an ontology (for example, Marxist paradigms that figure race as a subsequent cultural or political division secondary to prior considerations like class or humanity) or as a particularity that can be subsumed into a universal (as we find in political appeals to formal equality, or social constructivist critiques of racism that understand race as a cultural phenomenon rather than a biological one).

For afropessimists, what the study of Blackness reveals is that the very grammars through which we make sense of the modern world (relationality, space, time) need rethinking. This is an impossibly difficult project, and thus many early afropessimists have taken as their starting point the absolute negation of the World and all its attendant coordinates (since the World itself is the correspondence of coordinates with itself); for such afropessimists there can be no affirmative project that does not first begin with the absolute refusal of every trace of the World in which we currently reside. At the risk of imposing faulty frames and language on a project resistant to it,

⁵⁸ See Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black*.

Afropessimism is thus an affective (as much as it is political and epistemological) project that seeks to joykill premature celebrations of “moving beyond” violence and domination through the insistent reminder that whatever looks like liberation somewhere will, by necessity, still look like slavery elsewhere. It is the very notions of freedom and unfreedom, possession and dispossession, subject and object, posed as they are in a modern dialectic, that need to be destroyed. Granting freedom to the unfree, or subjectivity to the object is but another enactment of the colonization of the unfree/dispossessed/object.

Black feminist new materialisms then seek to examine the Black materiality that is both constituted in absolute violence, but knows itself by other names. As McKittrick says, “The slave is possession, proved to be property. Yet a voice interrupts: says she.”⁵⁹ Weheliye thus argues that European discourses of biopolitics and bare life (meaning the Nietzschean tradition as developed by Foucault, Deleuze, and Agamben) cannot account for this fleshly, black material dimension of violence, and instead misrecognize racializing assemblages as a derivative and particularized violence. Simply put, they miss the manner in which Man and his space-time is a racializing assemblage. Weheliye further argues that the posthumanisms that follow from such discourses can only see exceptional populations negatively, as the bare life that has been stripped of humanity and can only serve as the limit case to prove the failures of modernity.

Following Spillers and Wynter however, Weheliye sees in the laceration a politics of the flesh called Habeas Viscus (“you shall have the flesh”) that leaves behind the world of Man for a different modality of existence in a elsewhere space-time that “remains even after the body’s demise; it refuses to pass on but is, nonetheless, passed down as the remainder of the hieroglyphics

⁵⁹ McKittrick, “Mathematics Black Life,” 17.

of the flesh.”⁶⁰ This is a different kind of posthumanism than the ones typically offered in rhetorical studies. This posthumanism begins with the traditions of the oppressed and “translates the hieroglyphics of the flesh into a potentiality in any and all things, an originating leap in the imagining of future anterior freedoms and new genres of humanity.”⁶¹ Keeping this fleshly potentiality in mind, this dissertation will examine how Black flesh and Black object is mobilized in technological assemblages and imaginaries to structurally adjust and devitalize some existences while animating others.

Afropessimism and Black feminist new materialism have also been explored in communication, media, and rhetorical studies.⁶² Communication theorist Armond Towns applies Black feminist new materialisms to communication studies specifically and calls for a similar rethinking of the humanist presumption that subtends communication studies. Placing Black feminist new materialisms in conversation with Marshal McLuhan and media and communication studies, Towns links matter and media in the context of racialization and argues that “the black body functions as a communicative medium, or an extension of Western self-conceptions, so often overdetermined by whiteness.”⁶³ For Towns, thinking the Black body as media also requires thinking violence, as he notes that Black speech is necessarily coerced. This project similarly seeks to think through the function of the Black body as a technology for the production of Man. Drawing on Towns concept of the Black body as communication medium, I examine the ways in which Blackness, as it accrues to Black bodies, but also as that which is not always at the surface

⁶⁰ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 132.

⁶¹ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 137.

⁶² See for example, Amber Kelsie, “Blackened Debate at the End of the World,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 52, no. 1 (2019): 63-70; and Shanara R. Reid-Brinkley, “Voice Dipped in Black: The Louisville Project and the Birth of Black Radical Argument in College Policy Debate,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Voice Studies*, ed. Nina Sun Eidsheim and Katherine Meizel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁶³ Armond R. Towns, “Black ‘Matter’ Lives,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 41, no. 4 (2018), 6.

of the text but nonetheless coheres the system of meaning that is utilized as a tool for liberal genetic imaginaries.

2.2 Materialist Rhetoric After the Ontological Turn

As Towns, Kelsie, and Reid-Brinkley's work suggests, afropessimism and Black feminist new materialism speaks to issues of importance to rhetoric and communication scholars. New materialist rhetoric follows the "ontological turn" (also sometimes called the "immanent turn" or "affective turn") of rhetorical studies inspired by Ronald Greene's call for "another materialist rhetoric" that understands rhetoric as a "technology of deliberation" and inquiry as the investigation of the material modalities of the discursive and non-discursive in an apparatus of power.⁶⁴ New materialist rhetoricians draw from new materialism, new media studies, science and technology studies, affect studies, and/or critical posthumanist studies in their explorations of the materiality of rhetoric and the rhetoricity of objects. Though there are variations and not everyone involved in this academic development might identify themselves as new materialists, generally this vein of rhetoric/media studies challenges the transcendent principles of humanism and anthropocentrism; rejects representationalism and signification as the locus of rhetorical change in favor of extra-linguistic dimensions of rhetoric often inflected through Foucauldian and Deleuzian diagrammatics of networks, circulation, assemblages, affects, and intensities; privileges ontology over epistemology; is concerned with the sweeping societal changes wrought by

⁶⁴ Ronald Walter Greene, "Another Materialist Rhetoric," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 15, no. 1 (1998): 21-40; Ronald Walter Greene, "More Materialist Rhetoric," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 12, no. 4 (2015): 414-417.

biopolitical capitalism and new technologies; rethinks subjectivity as embodiment rather than solely or primarily as symbolicity; and aligns with vitalist and posthumanist projects that situate the human among non-human others.⁶⁵

While this dissertation project is in part informed by the lenses of extra-discursivity, affect, assemblages, biopolitics, and embodiment in investigating the (un)gendering and antiblack politics of liberal genetic imaginaries, this project will also need to take seriously the limitations that new materialism's investments in distributed agency, vitalism, and non-human matter pose for thinking through (anti-)Blackness. In brief, it can be said that though new materialism's heart might be in the right place, its techniques and frames of analysis can often lead it to fold difference back into its distributive or relational frame, to resituate human *qua* Man in its ontological cartography of Being, and to dysselect as exceptional that which is not-vibrant, not-vital, and not-plenitude. In a sense, in charting Being so as to put forth a challenge to logistical and necro/biopolitical capitalist

⁶⁵ George Kennedy, "A Hoot in the Dark: The Evolution of General Rhetoric," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 25, no. 1 (1992): 1-21; John Muckelbauer and Debra Hawhee, "Posthuman Rhetorics: 'It's the Future, Pikul'," *JAC* 20, no. 4 (2000): 767-774; John Muckelbauer, "Rhetoric, Asignification, and the Other: A Response to Diane Davis," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 40, no. 2 (2007): 238-247; Jennifer Bay and Thomas Rickert, "New Media and the Fourfold," *JAC* 28 no. 1/2 (2008): 209-244; Jenny Edbauer Rice, "The New 'New': Making a Case for Critical Affect Studies," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94 no. 2 (2008): 200-212; Jane Bennett, *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Catherine Chaput, "Rhetorical circulation in late capitalism: Neoliberalism and the overdetermination of affective energy," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 43 no. 1 (2010): 1-25; Diane Davis, *Inessential Solidarity: Rhetoric and Foreigner Relations* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010); Kendall R. Phillips, "Affective Seams in the Discourses of the Present," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 29 no. 1 (2012): 1-6; Thomas Rickert, *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013); Michelle Ballif, "Regarding the Dead," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 47 no. 4 (2014): 455-471; Diane Davis and Michelle Ballif, "Guest Editors' Introduction: Pushing the Limits of the Anthropos," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 47, no. 4 (2014): 346-353; Laurie E. Gries, *Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach for Visual Rhetorics* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2015); Ehren Helmut Pflugfelder, "Rhetoric's New Materialism: From Micro-Rhetoric to Microbrew," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 45, no. 5 (2015): 441-461; Scot Barnett and Casey Andrew Boyle, *Rhetoric, through Everyday Things* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2016); Debra Hawhee, *Rhetoric in Tooth and Claw: Animals, Language, Sensation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Catherine Chaput, "Neoliberalism and the rhetorical invention of counterpublic attunement," *Communication and the Public* 3, no. 3 (2018): 176-189; Damien Smith Pfister, "Against the Droid's 'Instrument of Efficiency,' For Animalizing Technologies in a Posthumanist Spirit," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 50 no. 2 (2017): 201-227; Chris Ingraham, "Energy: Rhetoric's Vitality," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 48 no. 3 (2018): 260-268; Damien Smith Pfister, "Technoliberal rhetoric, civic attention, and common sensation in Sergey Brin's 'Why Google Glass?'" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 105 no. 2 (2019): 182-203.

violence, new materialism is at risk of missing something profound about the violent nature of Being itself.

This dissertation contributes to the growing field of new materialist rhetoric by examining genetic genealogy imaginaries through the lens of afropessimism and Black feminist new materialism. Black feminist new materialism is advanced by thinkers who are typically left out of the genealogy of posthumanist studies, who argue that Man “is not synonymous with ‘the human,’ but rather is a technology of slavery and colonialism that imposes its authority over ‘the universal’ through a racialized deployment of force.”⁶⁶ These thinkers in the Black radical tradition challenge the tradition of posthumanism by interrogating how the humanity to overcome has been assumed. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson argues more pointedly that any attempt to move “beyond” humanism ignores “praxes of humanity and critiques produced by black people,” and renders such praxes as illegible from within its own (post-)humanist scope.⁶⁷ The movement toward the nonhuman, whether machine, plant, animal, or object, is ultimately a move toward Blackness, whether one recognizes it or not.

2.3 Critical Feminist Science and Technology Studies

Critical studies of technoscience are united by an investment in studying science and technology as a culturally produced, material-semiotic process and focus “on the two-way links between technoscience, on the one hand, and literature, the visual arts, fiction, fantasy, and rhetoric, on the

⁶⁶ Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism,” *Feminist Studies* 39 no. 3 (2013): 670.

⁶⁷ Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Outer Worlds: The Persistence of Race in Movement “Beyond the Human,” *GLQ* 21, no. 2-3 (2015): 216.

other.”⁶⁸ Drawing originally from Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick, feminist critical posthumanists understand the body, especially in its gendering capacities, largely technologically. What appear to be immutable characteristics of an interior sexuality or gendering sensibility are better understood as a type of somatechnics, or technologies of corporeality that shape matter into form and profoundly “transform” bodily being.⁶⁹ The body therefore is not pre-given in its morphology, but rather is thought to be given according to the naturalizing function of humanist binarisms. Take gender assignation for example. It is only relatively recently that science has discovered X and Y chromosomes, but the production of modern colonialist gender is tied to an assemblage of scientific-medical forms of knowledge and expertise—for example, in the late nineteenth scientific production of homosexuality and onanism to the present rituals of gender assignation announced by nurses and doctors examining newborn children’s genitalia—and is also a technology of slavery, genocide, and conquest.⁷⁰ Sara Baartman, Marion J. Sims’ experiments on enslaved black women that give rise to modern gynecology, and native boarding schools that violently imposed gender propriety on children to “kill the savage, save the man,” exemplify the techniques of racial and sexual terror intrinsic to civilizing and scientific operations. Today it is practically impossible for most progressive assessments of trans or gender non-conforming practice to ignore the gatekeeping and overdetermining influence of the medical industry in directing how we understand and navigate gender variation. Though the ongoing legacy of scientific and medical practice has positioned the body as a given form of materiality, somatechnics also reveals that the body is

⁶⁸ Nina Lykke, “Feminist Cultural Studies of Technoscience: Portrait of an Implosion,” In *Bits of Life : Feminism at the Intersections of Media, Bioscience, and Technology*, ed. Anne Smelick and Nina Lykke, 3-15 (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2008), 11.

⁶⁹ Joseph Pugliese and Susan Stryker, “Introduction: The somatechnics of race and whiteness,” *Social Semiotics* 19 no. 1 (2009): 1-8; Nikki Sullivan, “Somatechnics,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 no. 1-2 (2014): 187-190.

⁷⁰ Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Che Gossett, “Žižek’s Trans/gender Trouble,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, September 13 2016, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/zizeks-transgender-trouble/>.

shaped through technology and often seek out ways in which gender (and racialized) others have repurposed technology for non-permissible ends.

Many have understood that gender is always also a racializing project, and that racial others are always already gendered and rendered sexually deviant. However, Spillers offers a unique account of the “ungendering” violence that constitutes blackness through pornotrope.⁷¹ Spillers argues that the violence of captivity signals the loss of gender coherence as well. Nonetheless, the black flesh bursts forth, perhaps offering us a disruptive potentiality for otherwise gender configurations. Importantly, Spillers challenges white feminist politicizations of the body as given, or even embodiment as given, pushing us to think beyond subjective individuated experience that can only be heard in the register of (white feminist) humanism toward that which lacks a body, or whose existence challenges the very terms of coherence, foundation, correspondence, or “standpoint.”

Critical/feminist posthumanism is generally understood to have developed in the 1990s and historically situates the early emergence of the “posthuman” subject in the early twentieth-century shortly before or during post-Fordist capitalism with the advent of the discovery of the genome/DNA, the development of computing and information/communication technologies, and cybernetics. The posthuman is often thought to rupture old Western, liberal, and humanist analytic categories and theorists of the posthuman tend to draw heavily from post-structuralist, Marxist, and feminist thought. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson and others warn us however of a different and typically silenced genealogy that comes from the traditions of the oppressed that do not allow the disentanglement of Man from the exercise of imperialism, slavery and genocide.⁷²

⁷¹ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Paper’s Maybe.”

⁷² Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism,” 669-685.

In *How We Became Posthuman*, Katherine Hayles traces the development of the concept of the posthuman through three waves of scientific development: the field of Cybernetics developed by Norbert Wiener in the 1930s, the second order of Cybernetics developed in the 1960s, and the autopoietic turn of the 1980s. Through this history Hayles sees the development of a concept of human first as an information processing entity that mirrors but is separate from the machine's information processing capacity, then as an entity entangled with and by the machinic information processes, and finally, as an integrated component of a broader cybernetic process able to evolve on its own.⁷³ Ultimately cybernetics developed into the quest for artificial intelligence (AI), for a machine that has the capacity to unpredictably create its own functionality so that it no longer needs to be fed specific commands. It is this moment when we can imagine that the machine is alive that the human becomes posthuman. As Hayles says: "I understand human and posthuman to be historically specific constructions that emerge from different configurations of embodiment, technology, and culture. My reference point for the human is the tradition of liberal humanism; the posthuman appears when computation rather than possessive individualism is taken as the ground of being, a move that allows the posthuman to be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines."⁷⁴ The posthuman is a performative, as in we are posthuman because we increasingly think we are. It is precisely this sense of the performativity of the posthuman that Weheliye critiques as saturated with whiteness.

In "'Feenin': Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Music," Weheliye critiques Hayles for her marginalization of race in her analysis. Weheliye charges media theory, and cybertheory specifically, with overemphasis on computer-mediated communication at the expense

⁷³ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁷⁴ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 34.

of other technologies that produce the (post-)human. This hyperfocus leads theorists of the posthuman to figure the cybernetic as disembodiment rather than centering the body as a fraught and already unthought category within modernity. Even as Hayles nods to the black condition and even goes so far as to describe her historical construction as a “rememory” in the vein of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, she has occluded “the specters of race and slavery” that haunt her argument.⁷⁵ Afro-diasporic thought has not simply rejected Man, but rather has challenged the “historicity and mutability of the ‘human’ itself, gesturing toward different, catachrestic, conceptualizations of this category.” In his later work, Weheliye will clarify this argument, explaining that this Black humanity is not the Human but rather is of a different order in time-space and thought altogether. In a sense, Weheliye in “Feenin” and elsewhere puts forth the idea that blackness is already posthuman.

In *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway argues for “a politics rooted in claims about fundamental changes in the nature of class, race, and gender in an emerging system of world order analogues in its novelty and scope to that created by industrial capitalism.”⁷⁶ The cyborg is the figure that offers a vision for a post-gender politics, beyond the oedipal, alienation, binarism and dialectical unification. Though of course the machinic and the cyborg are derivative of racist, patriarchal capitalism, Haraway sees in the cyborg an irreverence to the ideologies of its origin. Attentive to the alienating and exploitative relations of capitalism that produce racial and gendered domination, Haraway does not seek to produce an essentialist unity in the cyborg, but rather calls for an epistemological project that attempts to tease out what orders of difference can be liberatory

⁷⁵ Alexander G. Weheliye, “‘Feenin’: Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music,” *Social Text* 20, no. 2 (2002): 21-47.

⁷⁶ Donna J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” In *Manifestly Haraway*, ed. by Donna Haraway, 1-90, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 28.

and what orders of difference mirror the dominating systems which give rise to it. Central to her project will be thinking through communication technologies and biotechnologies that transform how we consider the body and other attendant binaries under which Western civilization has organized itself.

Such a project cannot simply be “empirical,” but rather is itself a myth-making process. Science fiction, storytelling, and political imagination is at the heart of how we come to organize self/other, nature/culture, man/woman, and so forth. In this way, Haraway’s work lends itself to thinking rhetorically about technoscience insofar as technologies materially, symbolically, and affectively are world-making and world-ordering technologies that cannot be separated from the visions and myths that give rise to them and which they promote. Haraway enables us to think of the subjectivizing function of technology and technological talk, as the cyborg is not only a category of types of technology, but more so is a mythic subject that haunts western modernity. Said differently, Haraway attunes us to the ways in which technology is systemic and subject forming, and is not simply the white papers, the programming, or the design that goes into technological advancement. While Haraway is certainly attentive to race as a function of dominance and hesitates to be too celebratory of the liberatory potential of the cyborg,

Haraway’s *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouseTM* is a tropological study of various figures in technoscience that reveal material-semiotic practices and enable better scientific literacy.⁷⁷ Here, Haraway is concerned with meaning, and organizes the book according to organization of meaning in semiotics; thus she begins with syntactics, or the grammar of feminism and technoscience, then moves to semantics, or the figures of

⁷⁷ Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouseTM*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

communication, then to pragmatics, or the acts of meaning-making, and finally to her own concept of diffraction as a way to rethink semiotics in a networked world. This dissertation, similarly thinks through the “the anatomy of meaning,” so as to examine the geometrical relations between rhetoric, media, technology, history, and metaphysics in genetic genealogy imaginaries.

Haraway also refuses to get caught up in old rhetoric versus empiricism schemes that beleaguer rhetoric of science studies by encouraging us to not be “literal minded,” and to instead “engage promiscuously in serious moral and political inquiry,” when studying science, technology, and society.⁷⁸ Haraway draws from pretty much anything and everything that will help her to bring into relief what is obscured in normative understandings of technology, including “narrative fiction, biological argument, historical analysis, political inquiry, mathematical jokes, religious reworkings, literary readings, and visual imagery,” and her work is in this sense profoundly both a rhetorical study and a media study.⁷⁹

Haraway’s tropology offers a way of thinking through the temporality of technoscience, which she characterizes as a kind of secularized Christian salvation narrative. Here, technoscience is shaped by a “figural realism” that enables “secular technoscientific salvation stories full of promise.”⁸⁰ Further, “In the United States, at least, technoscience is a millenarian discourse about beginnings and ends, first and last things, suffering and progress, figure and fulfillment.”⁸¹ Haraway’s method then involves positioning herself as a “modest witness” who “bears testimony to matters of fact constituted by means of material, literary, and social technologies crafted in the experimental way of life” so as to get an exegetical vantage point from which to explore

⁷⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁸¹ Ibid., 10.

technoscientific development beyond rationalistic frames.⁸² The modest witness is Haraway, but the witness can also be the figures of technoscience's progress narrative; for example, the witnesses of FemaleMan© and the OncoMouse™ produced outside/through/by technology. At stake for Haraway is an understanding "that social relationships include nonhumans as well as humans as socially (or, what is the same thing for this odd congeries, sociotechnically) active partners. All that is unhuman is not un-kind, outside kinship, outside the orders of signification, excluded from trading in signs and wonders."⁸³ For the purposes of this dissertation, the Black nonhuman medium is the lens or witness with which I analyze discourses of genetic genealogy.

Haraway's narrativization of the development of genomics is instructive in revealing her investments and the limitations in simultaneously attending to racism and sexism while acknowledging and even celebrating techno-scientific progress. In her account, genome mapping and databasing is a "vampire project" in which practices of blood sampling by the HGP, HGDP, and biotech companies are situated in a larger history of "the mutations of bioscientific categories from race to population to genome [that] code for what can count as human, and therefore progressive in the civic and personal bodies of twentieth-century U.S. Americans."⁸⁴ Though Haraway borrows the term "vampire project" from indigenous criticisms of HGDP practices of blood sampling and though she is critical of the HGDP for the "unself-conscious, modernist perspectives," which led it to a series of unethical engagements with indigenous and other racialized populations, Haraway also imagines the vampire as a fraught but ultimately disruptive figure.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid., 15.

⁸³ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 232.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 249.

The vampire figure emerges in eighteenth-century Europe as a metaphor for the Jew “accused of blood crimes ... bringing both bodily plague and national decay,” but also stands in for the diseased prostitute, the queer, and the immigrant.⁸⁶ Thus, for Haraway the vampire animates contemporary anxieties of racial and sexual impurity, but can also refer to “unnaturally breeding capital” as well as,

“the cosmopolitan, the one who speaks too many languages and cannot remember the native tongue, and the scientist who forces open the parochial dogmas of those who are sure they know what nature is. In short, once touched by the figure of this monster, one is forced to inhabit the swirling semantic field of vampire stories.”⁸⁷

The chains of equivalence between Jews, prostitutes, immigrants, queers, capitalists, cosmopolitans, and dogma-disrupting scientists by which Haraway reclaims the vampire as threat to humanist attachments to purity and nature is a specious account that leads to an uncomfortable dulling of the pointed critique made by indigenous peoples that it is Western science that is vampiric. The messiness of the semantic field of vampire metaphor slips into a celebration of racial and sexual messiness that further slips into a gross redirection of minoritarian challenges to Western science and its genocidal logics.

However, as her analysis of “SimEve” demonstrates, the joy of messy intermixing of categories poses limits to Haraway’s thought, especially when considering Blackness. “SimEve,” Haraway’s name for the 1993 *Time Magazine* simulated racially-mixed person of the future, was created using a new computer technology, “morphing,” in which one thing is made to appear to change into another thing. Morphing’s popular usage, in *Time*, by *National Geographic*, and most

⁸⁶ Ibid., 215.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 249.

famously, by Michael Jackson in the music video for “Black or White” where differently raced people shape shift into one another, speaks both to the 90’s milieu of liberal multiculturalism and, for Haraway, to the possibilities of another vision of humanity. Unlike these other morphing moments that shape shift actual persons into one another, SimEve is constructed through simulated cybergeneic race mixing rendered into the phenotypical visual schema of portraiture. Her mix is described in *Time* as “15% Anglo-Saxon, 17.5% Middle Eastern, 17.5% African, 7.5% Asian, 35% Southern European and 7.5% Hispanic.”⁸⁸ As a racially mixed simulation, SimEve then serves as a good representation for Haraway’s interest in the “the marriage of genomics and informatics in the artificial life worlds that reconstitute what it means to be human.”⁸⁹

SimEve also represents for Haraway, “the ideal racial synthesis, whose only possible existence is in the matrices of cyberspace,” and serves as a horizon of possibility for the United States’ multicultural immigrant future.⁹⁰ Haraway ends her analysis by remarking on the *Time* staff writers’ commentary that they fell in love with a figure who sadly does not exist. On this point, it is worth quoting Haraway’s analysis at length:

“Early-century racialized ethnic categories reappear as entries in an electronic database for a truly odd statistical population analysis. A virtual woman is the result, fathered like Galatea, Pygmalion’s creature, with which he fell in love. The curious erotics of single-parent, masculine, technophilic reproduction cannot be missed. SimEve is like Zeus’s Athena, child only of the seminal mind—of man and of a computer program. The law of the nation, like that laid down by Athena for Athens in the Orestian trilogy, will be the Law of the Father. The Furies in cyberspace will not be pleased. In the narrative of romantic

⁸⁸ Ibid., 264.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 259.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

love, SimEve forever excites a desire that cannot be fulfilled. This is precisely the myth infusing dreams of technological transcendence of the body. In these odd, but conventional, technoscientific erotics, the actual limits of technology only spur the desire to love that which cannot and does not exist. SimEve is the new universal human, mother of the new race, figure of the nation; and she is a computer-generated composite, like the human genome itself. She is the second- and third-order offspring of the ramifying code of codes. She ensures the difference of no difference in the human family.”⁹¹

Evelynn Hammonds takes issue with Haraway’s genome narrative and her assessment of SimEve for her misrecognition of the legacy of antiblackness, miscegenation, and the visual that subtends SimEve’s creation. In “New Technologies of Race,” Hammonds rereads the bioscientific narrative of the shift “from race to population to genome” to demonstrate that “the notion of race—both as a social and scientific concept—is still deeply embedded in morphology, but it is the meaning given to morphological differences that has been transformed.”⁹² Morphing in Hammond’s analysis is significant because of the many hidden assumptions in the production of post-racial figures such as SimEve. Morphing here is a form of “technical artistry” that “masks the imbrication of power, which is never articulated,” whereby transformations of whites into non-whites into animals operate as “late twentieth-century versions of the Great Chain of Being.”⁹³ SimEve and her attendant discourses and representations occlude the manner in which “genetic characteristics are presumed to be determinants of morphological differences between pure racial types.”⁹⁴ W.E.B. DuBois’ sociological study of African-American phenotype explicates a different

⁹¹ Donna J. Haraway, *Modest Witness*, 265.

⁹² Evelynn M. Hammonds, “New Technologies of Race,” In *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*, ed. by Fiona Hovenden, Linda Janes, Gill Kirkup, Kathryn Woodward, 305-18 (New York/London: Routledge, 2000), 306.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 306.

use of photographic/visual technology that reveals the centrality of racial rape and miscegenation taboo in the construction of a racial fantasy of a clearly demarcated phenotypical typology.

Simply put, even SimEve's technological design as a "racial mixture" of supposed primary races (no rationale for race selection in the mixture is offered) reiterates a continual presumption of the correspondence between racial morphology and racial/genetic type that can only be secured through a simultaneous imposition and disavowal of racial rape which in fact does produce "real" SimEves, and, as the figure of the tragic mulatto can attest to, always has. SimEve and her "siblings" laid out in the *Time* article as other possible multiracial composites require an unspoken morphological sensibility in order to render the morphological similarity of ethnically ambiguous figures representative of a future humanity bonded by culture rather than racial difference. On the note that the *Time* staff writers fell in love with a figure who sadly does not exist, Hammond's sees a variation on a very old theme:

"This is truly the drama of miscegenation in cyberspace. The history of white men crossing racial boundaries to have sexual relations with African, Asian, Mexican, and Native-American women—and then refusing to acknowledge their offspring in order to reserve the right to determine how whiteness would be defined as a characteristic of citizenship—is simultaneously implied and disavowed. [...] Donna Haraway argues that SimEve forever excites a desire that cannot be fulfilled and as such is an example of the realm of technological transcendence of the body. But I think SimEve carries a different meaning in light of the history of miscegenation—because she is a cyber—she is the representation of the desire to deny kinship and retain masculine power based on the maintenance of racial difference."⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Ibid., 316-7.

I would also add to Hammonds criticism, an application of Jared Sexton's critique of multiculturalism as the fantasy of a post-racial society in which there will be no black people. For even leftist fantasies of racial mixture situate themselves as a move away from that most ugly racial type of all: Blackness.⁹⁶

In the preface to the 2009 special edition of the journal *Camera Obscura* on race and/as technology, Lynne Joyrich reminds us that race is better considered as an assemblage rather than as representation.⁹⁷ Considering race as an assemblage requires more than thinking of race as socially constructed, or as false ideology. The term assemblage points to a conceptualization of race that parallels a Foucauldian arrangement of power, knowledge and force encapsulated by the term "technology of power/knowledge."⁹⁸ As a technology, raciality orders the world, producing subjectivations and enabling the exercise of sovereign power, biopolitics, and necropolitics.⁹⁹ Considering race as technology "shifts the focus from the what of race to the how of race" so as to better think changing technological relationships.¹⁰⁰ Thinking race as technology also enables us to move away from the well-worn dictum that technology is an extension of Man by calling attention to the ways in which Man and his capacity for extension is itself a technique of power. Beth Coleman traces the term "technology" through its emergence in the English language in 1615 back to its roots in ancient Greek was techné or technique.¹⁰¹ Here Coleman makes an unwitting

⁹⁶ I will also take up the question of multiculturalism and multiracialism in chapter four. For Sexton's critique of multiculturalism, see Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

⁹⁷ Lynne Joyrich, "Preface: Bringing Race and Media Technologies into Focus," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (2009): 2.

⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France*. Trans. David Macey. (New York: Picador, 1997); Achille Mbembé, Trans. Libby Meintjes, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11-40.

¹⁰⁰ Wendy Hui Kyong Chun. "Introduction: Race and/as Technology; or, How to do Things to Race," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (2009): 7-34.

¹⁰¹ Beth Coleman, "Race as Technology," *Camera Obscura* 24, no. 1 (2009): 177-207.

connection to the rhetoric of science that opens up the possibility for us to consider the stakes of rhetoric's representational techniques in the study of the operations of race. Coleman asks us to consider race "as a prosthesis of sorts" that "adds functionality to the subject, helps form location, and provides information."¹⁰² This dissertation similarly thinks Blackness as a technological prosthetic for the coherence of humanist meaning making.

2.4 The Darwinian Legacy: Scientific Signification, the Living Laboratory and the Overrepresentation of Man in Spillers, Wynter, and Ferreira da Silva

"Among the myriad uses to which the enslaved community was put, Goodell identifies its value for medical research: 'Assortments of diseased, *damaged*, and disabled Negroes, deemed incurable and otherwise worthless are *brought up*, it seems . . . by medical institutions, to be experimented and operated upon, for purposes of 'medical education' and the interest of medical science' (86-87). . . . This profitable 'atomizing' of the captive body provides another angle on the divided flesh: we lose any hint or suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features, between one human personality and another, between human personality and cultural institutions. To that extent, the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory." – Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe,"¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ibid., 194.

¹⁰³ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 68.

“The biological sciences were therefore to come into existence only in the wake of the second act of redescription effected during the nineteenth century by Liberal humanist intellectuals- as a redescription by means of which the still hybridly religio-secular political subject conception of the human, Man (as embodied in Prospero) was redefined as optimally economic Man, at the same time as this Man was redefined by Darwin as a purely biological being whose origin, like that of all other species, was sited in Evolution, with the human therefore existing in a line of pure continuity with all other organic forms of life. A mutation had thereby occurred, in that Darwin, by means of his deconstruction of the Chain of Being that had been earlier mapped onto the rational human/irrational animals line, had begun the emancipation of the human knowledge of the purely biological level of reality from having to be known in genre-specific adaptive terms, thereby giving rise to the biological sciences and to its contemporary, dazzling triumphs- as, for example, the cracking of the DNA code, the Human Genome Project, together with the Utopian cum dystopian promises and possibilities of biotechnology.” – Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,”¹⁰⁴

“What is the path of the scientist if not the search for gifts of death, an unholy ambition elevated neither by a desire to find a cure for the diseases that threaten the bodies of the living (the work of the physician) nor by a dedication to relieve the troubled souls of the dying (the work of the clergyman)?” – Denise Ferreira da Silva, *A Global Idea of Race*¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003), .315.

¹⁰⁵ Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 93.

There are deep stakes for thinking technoscience once we consider that it is impossible to detach the logistics of dispossession inaugurated (and continued) by settler colonial conquest and the trans-Atlantic slave trade from scientific knowledge production. What for example, do we make of the “link between the colonial information order and the empiricist knowledge regime of the late seventeenth century, between forms of epistemology, providentialism and domination”?¹⁰⁶ That is, what do we make of the now documented relationships between “the Republic of letters” that saw the development of the natural sciences in the Enlightenment, the nascent capitalist techniques of credit and trade, and the violence and misery brought about by European conquest which enabled Newton (and to which, let’s be clear, he and other men of letters participated in, extended, and benefited from) to pay for “explorers” to make the very measurements and observations with which he would write the *Principia*? What do we make of *the reduction of World to laboratory*, or the indebtedness of the “life of the mind”—which science, philosophy, and rhetoric in their methods and epistemological forms replicate to this day—to the containerization and shipping of the “natural” world into Europe? Numerous studies show the extent of scientific development’s sordid history with racial and gendered violence.¹⁰⁷ Three that this dissertation takes seriously in a rhetorical and media approach to the technoscience of genetic genealogy and the Black nonhuman are Hortense Spiller’s, Sylvia Wynter’s and Denise Ferreira da Silva’s investigations.

¹⁰⁶ Simon Schaffer, “Newton on the Beach: The Information Order of Principia Mathematica,” *History of Science* 47 no. 3 (2009), 247.

¹⁰⁷ See for example, Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, and Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2006).

First, I will attempt a reading of Hortense Spiller's famous 1987 critique of the usefulness of white feminism's gender concept (the category of woman overdetermined as mother or wife) for Blackness, attempting to read her faithfully while also inflecting my description with an analytic language and spatial mapping that draws into relief her insight into relationships between racial violence, (un)gendering, and science. I am admittedly especially influenced by Denise Ferreira da Silva's and Frank B. Wilderson, III's interpretations of the text, but also provide my own. Then I will introduce Sylvia Wynter's and Ferreira da Silva's explications of what I am calling "the Darwinian Legacy" that still today deeply influences how we think of science and its role in delimiting the Human. Wynter and Ferreira da Silva share a concern that we center racial violence as *constitutive* of the modern project in their genealogies of the onto-epistemological production of Human Being. That is to say, they do not think the deployment of critique in the vein of "racial discrimination" is sufficient to undermine Humanism.

In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe", Hortense Spillers outlines the "fatal effects" of the production of racial Blackness: the reduction of the slave captive's body into flesh through the direct material and semiotic violence of racial terror on the plantation.¹⁰⁸ The "lacerations, woundings, fissures, tears, scars, openings, ruptures, lesions, rendings, and punctures of the flesh" mark the pornotropic ungendering of the Black female slave from the category of womanhood and her entry into the category of the Thing.¹⁰⁹ Race in this process becomes static, it "freezes in meaning," and "shows no movement in the field of signification," locked in an eternal, "mythical time."¹¹⁰ Here one cannot (or does not) "discourse away" racialization; for the living, embodied Subjects of language are entreated to *enjoy* it, as a resource, or as a stage upon which the drama of

¹⁰⁸ Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 66.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 67.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 66.

Human Life and Culture can unfold.¹¹¹ Spillers calls this stage of absolute powerlessness of the flesh that precedes the body “a cultural *vestibularity*,” as in a passageway; but anatomically speaking, she also means the vestibular system of the inner ear which regulates the body’s sense of balance and position, protecting the body and its capacities of perception from vertigo. The absolute objectification (thingification) of the slave—the loss of her body and the will, meaning, and value that subjectivity confers—then serves to *structurally* enable the positionality of the Subject, stabilizing his scopic regimes and representational project. Spiller’s use of an anatomic system of the body in describing this stabilizing relationship between the Master and the Slave refigures the Hegelian scene of lordship and bondage, reworking the relationship away from the struggle for recognition (which is no longer possible for the Slave) and instead turning our attention to the “instruments of captivity” that produce racial difference as biological substance in three dimensions, which are enacted in the same moment of racial violence: torture, sexual enjoyment, and science (observation, measurement, and comparison). The Slave-making violence of the pornotrope both sexually abuses but also masks its abuse through the transposition of sexual desire onto the Slave, making her both the object and stand-in-subject of her own brutalization. Pornotrope then secures the overdetermination of the Slave by locking her away from any semiotic respite; that is, by rewriting violence—and the Master’s libidinal enjoyment in inflicting it—as the necessary effect of the Slave’s very anatomical (biological) position.

Spillers points us toward a new way of reading that attends to “the hieroglyphics of the flesh,” or the material lacerations that dismember and ungender Black female flesh rather than the semiotics of history or culture that pornotropes racial violence. Laceration “offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse

¹¹¹ Ibid., 67.

meditations.”¹¹² Reading in this way, the first guiding quote of the section can then be seen to speak to this third dimension in the production of Blackness as “living laboratory” for the onto-epistemological project that Spillers calls “the American grammar.” This dismembered slave body that takes on “anatomical specifications” is also the target and effect of post-Enlightenment’s will-to-truth, where “the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality” supposedly found in flesh is revealed to be the provenance of the (supposedly rational, dispassionate, and ethical) Man of Science’s sickening *jouissance* in his powers of scientific discovery.¹¹³ Spillers analysis of the living laboratory presents the need for rethinking our approaches to the analysis of race and science. Thus, this dissertation considers the semiotic configuration of structurally adjusted Blackness from the vantage of nonhuman Blackness that serves as the surface of inscription for the science of Man.

Sylvia Wynter draws from numerous “hard sciences” including neurobiology, anthropology, cybernetics, and genetics as well as post-colonial thought, most notably Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire and Edouard Glissant, in her development of the history of the autopoietic “descriptive statement” of Man, the concept of the sociogenic principle, and the outline of “a new science” tasked with unsettling Man’s dominant status. Through numerous works, Wynter explains how the modern “idea of race” emerges not as an ideological conceit of bad or immature science that emerges post-Enlightenment but is what anchors a certain order of knowledge and modality of human being that is enacted in material relations of force found in colonial conquest. The architectures of colonial conquest, settlement, and enslavement that begin in the 16th century and continue to the present underwrite the production of the “ethnaclass Man” (in both its

¹¹² Ibid., 66-67.

¹¹³ Ibid., 67.

iterations, as what Wynter calls Man1 and Man2) as the biocentric and bourgeois genre of the human that overrepresents itself as humanity as such. Wynter's account of the emergence of Man1/Man2 is in some ways a retelling of Foucault's account of "the invention of Man" that seeks to unsettle "the descriptive statement" of Man and its overrepresentation by locating its emergence not in post-Enlightenment philosophy (of for example, Hegel), scientific taxonomy and *mathesis*, but earlier, in the post-Gregorian rise of the laity and the nascent modern state in Renaissance humanism.

In Wynter's account, Man1 marks the epistemological transformation in the Renaissance to the 18th century from the medieval "matrix Christian identity" governed by "the master code" of the Spirit/Flesh that spatialized Being through a heavenly divine realm of spiritual perfection as nonhomogenous with the sublunar realm of Earth which was marred with the "negative legacy of Adamic Original Sin" – an order of knowledge that was further mapped morally as the distinction between the True Christian and Untrue Christian/Enemies-of-Christ, and geographically as the distinction between the inhabitable spaces of the Earth ("centered on Jerusalem") and the uninhabitable spaces of the Earth beyond God's Grace. It is Europe's 15th century "first contact" with peoples of the "uninhabitable zones" of Africa and (what would come to be called) the Americas—who did in fact inhabit these nonhomogenous uninhabitable areas—that would, in parallel interrelation with European economic-juridical contestations regarding state power over and against the church, inaugurate the symbolic and political secularization of this thoroughly theological world ordering and enable the emergence of Man1 by making thinkable the explanatory model of natural causality (rather than supernatural causality), thus setting the ground for the later "emancipation of reason" and the physical sciences that would fully crystalize the modern idea of race in the 18th century. Wynter is clear that Man1, the not-yet-fully "degodded"

“hybridly religio-secular” descriptive statement of Man, was “made possibly only on the basis of the dynamics of colonizer/colonized relation that the West was to discursively constitute and empirically institutionalize on the islands of the Caribbean and, later, on the mainlands of the Americas.”¹¹⁴ In this epistemic shift the “space of Otherness” once occupied by Jews, Muslims and heretics as the Christian Other (Enemies-of-Christ) is instead occupied by indigenous peoples (raced as Indians) and Africans (raced as Negroes) as the Human Other, who were said to have a “by nature difference” in rational capacity and moral substance and who were analogized (in part through the re-discovery of Aristotle’s *Politics*) to children and monkeys, with the Negro serving as the “missing link” in a pre-Darwinian Great Chain of Being.

For Wynter this epistemic shift has ontological implications as what is rendered thinkable (symbolic) is simultaneously made possible by and engenders the institutionalization of empirico-political realities. The production of the descriptive statement of Man (in both its iterations) is itself the production of racial logic. In Man1 “race” had become the answer to the question of “who and what we are,” which is to say, colonial conquest had rendered race thinkable as it never had before even as race impelled colonial conquest and expropriation; “race” had become the answer to Renaissance Europe’s own ontological question:

“This means that the large-scale accumulation of unpaid land, unpaid labor, and overall wealth expropriated by Western Europe from non-European peoples, which was to lay the basis of its global expansion from the fifteenth century onwards, was carried out within the order of truth and the self-evident order of consciousness, of a creed-specific conception of what it was to be human—which, because a monotheistic conception, could not conceive of an Other to what it experienced as being human, and therefore an Other to its truth, its

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 264.

notion of freedom. Its subjects could therefore see the new peoples whom it encountered in Africa and the New World only as the ‘pagan-idolators,’ as ‘Enemies-of-Christ’ as the Lack of its own narrative ideal. This was consequential. It set in motion the secularizing reinvention of its own matrix Christian identity as Man.”¹¹⁵

Man2, the thoroughly secularized and biocentric figure of rational Man as the political subject of the state, emerged in the wake of Man1 out of the genocidal and subjugating clearing of colonial conquest and African enslavement that emancipated reason and gave rise to the physical sciences. In the second wave of imperial expansion Man is reinvented in “now purely biologized terms.”¹¹⁶ Following Darwin’s development of the evolutionary theory of natural selection, the space of otherness “was now to be mapped on phenotypical and religio-cultural differences between human variations and/or population groups, while the new idea of order was now to be defined in terms of degrees of rational perfection/imperfection, as . . . that of the ‘law of nature,’ ‘natural law’: as a ‘law’ that allegedly functioned to order human societies in the same way as the newly discovered laws of nature served to regulate the processes of functioning of physical and organic levels of reality.”¹¹⁷ Thus, with the introduction of the modern physical and life sciences we see a shift from Man1’s use of rationality to transform the spiritual, to rationality as organizing *materiality itself* in Man2.

Governed by Universal Reason, the rational/irrational pair today undergirds the biocentric master code of Man that organizes thought, space, time, matter and relationality through the compulsion to select and dysselect racialized groups according to the compulsion for determining and delimiting matter itself. Natural-scientific knowledge here cannot be understood here as the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 291-2.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 266.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 297.

production of truth according to neutral and ever perfecting techniques of inquiry; the natural-scientific is itself an order of knowledge that materializes its own descriptive statement of Man and its less-than-human Others, suturing together materiality and the metaphysics of Being in a complex and deeply normalized assemblage that produces not “Truth,” but what Wynter calls “adaptive truths-for” the constant re-elaboration of the descriptive statement of Man. It is under Man2 and the development of evolutionary theory and the biological sciences that public/private, particular/universal, and nature/culture become salient and sensible dichotomies as we understand them today.

The “lawlikely” re-production of Man in Wynter’s account is “a naturalized autopoietic social system”¹¹⁸ that is both objective and subjective, produced through “the dynamic interaction between our genetic and non-genetic codes.”¹¹⁹ What we subjectively experience as a “we” under the auto-instituting genre of Man is coded according to “behavior-regulatory imperatives.”¹²⁰ Natural science in Wynter’s account is therefore insufficient to account for the ways in which human being is hybridly natural-cultural, that is, it can only hierarchize one side of this binary rather than traverse the binary itself. Instead, Wynter calls for a “new science” that will produce a “new humanism” informed by Frantz Fanon’s concept of sociogeny and Aime Cesaire’s call for a “science of the word.”¹²¹ The new science, or the science of sociogeny, provides an account for

¹¹⁸ Katherine McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 5.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹²⁰ Sylvia Wynter, “Unparalleled Catastrophe For Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations,” in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick, 9-89, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 26.

¹²¹ See Sylvia Wynter, “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be ‘Black,’” in *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America*, edited by Antonio Gomez-Moriana, Mercedes Duran-Cogan (New York: Routledge, 2001) 30-66; and Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom.”

the human as *homo narans*: “a hybrid-auto-instituting-languaging-storytelling species: *bios/mythoi*.”¹²² She elaborates that this human is

“defined by the singularity of the *co-evolution* of the human brain *with*—and, unlike those of all the other primates, *with it alone*—the emergent faculties of language, storytelling. This co-evolution must be understood concomitantly with the uniquely *mythmaking* region of the human brain, as the brain scientists Andrew Newberg, Eugene D’Aquili, and Vince Rause document.”¹²³

As the quote above demonstrates, Wynter remains attached to scientific notions of the human in a few ways: a) Wynter’s account of a human being that can be categorically distinguished from nonhuman animals is b) validated through the very modern scientific developments that institute the genre of Man. And, c) in her raising of Fanon’s concept of sociogeny to a science and d) her refiguring of human being as evolutionarily and hybridly bios-mythoi through e) continual accounts of the transcultural status of sociogeny as a governing code of human being verified through anthropological accounts of pygmy and Bantu-speaking peoples.¹²⁴ Though I take Wynter’s account of the autopoietic development of Man to be prescient to this study of the modern world and its knowledge-orders, I must depart with Wynter’s attachment to the givenness of categorical human being and her quest for a new science. Though Wynter’s project of radical humanism cannot be fairly categorized as a liberal humanism, Ferreira da Silva provides an

¹²² Wynter, “Unparalleled Catastrophe For Our Species?” 25.

¹²³ Wynter, “Unparalleled Catastrophe For Our Species?” 25.

¹²⁴ For a criticism of Wynter’s anthropocentrism see Max Hantel, “What is it Like to be a Human?: Sylvia Wynter on Autopoiesis,” *PhiloSOPHIA* 8, no. 1 (2018): 61-79. For a critique of an attachment to science and misuse of sociogeny, see David Marriott, “Inventions of Existence: Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, Sociogeny, and “the Damned,”” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 11, no. 3 (2011): 45-89.

important addition for consideration of the endurance of racialization in the scientific text even as it is taken up today.

Denise Ferreira da Silva's corpus of work is dedicated to thinking beyond the frameworks of understanding in the modern grammar that produce racial knowledge and subjection. Ferreira da Silva is interested in what makes it possible to speak of racial knowledge, of the conditions of possibility of racial knowledge such race can become an object of knowledge with the acquired attributes of phenomena. Thus, in effort to demonstrate the need to return raciality to the center of any analysis of the modern grammar, Ferreira da Silva examines the philosophical and scientific contexts of raciality. She especially attends to European Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophy, the life sciences of the nineteenth century, and the anthropological and sociological developments of the twentieth century.

Toward a Global Idea of Race is a rich and complex account of the intrinsic relationship between science and race that demonstrates, contrary to prevailing opinion, that we have not remotely moved beyond anything that could be called "scientific racism." Indeed, Ferreira da Silva argues that the modern "scientific text" necessarily produces racial subjugation because its ways of apprehending difference ontologizes transparency and self-determination as the effects of racial difference. In her examination, Ferreira da Silva creates an entirely new vocabulary to describe the ontologizing operations of the modern text. Here I detail some of her core concepts which are important for this dissertation's analysis.

Central to Ferreira da Silva's conceptual map are her reworkings of science/globality/exteriority and history/nation/interiority/ as twin staging grounds in the ontologization of "raciality." Raciality refers to the set of onto-epistemological technologies of displacement and negation which enable Europe to postpone its confrontation with its Other by

writing Europe in scientific universality and self-determination in such a way that the Other becomes onto-epistemologically irrelevant.¹²⁵ Ferreira da Silva explains,

“The challenge facing early modern philosophers... was how to sustain the writing of man as a self-determined (interior) thing in a mode of thought grounded on the assertion of the possibility of knowledge with certainty, that is, scientific universality, to establish that the mind has access to, and is affected by things other than itself, that is, exterior things, and yet the latter play no role in the determination of its essence or existence; that is, they consistently managed not to write the I as an affectable thing.”¹²⁶

Ferreira da Silva examines several Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophers and sciences to make her case. In Kant and Herder she locates the nascent development of the two ontological stages: Kant’s transcendentalism figures *universal nomos* or universal reason as a regulative—or constraining—space in the *stage of exteriority* governed by the formal principles of understanding while Herder’s concept of the historical figures the *stage of interiority* as the space of *universal poesis*, or reason as a productive—or representing—sovereign ruler through which consciousness apprehends itself through universal reason in time.¹²⁷ The exterior stage exists in the world of apprehended phenomena and is governed by universal reason; the other is interior and is the scene of history, or the representation of change that constitutes a people.

Hegel consolidates these two stages into a third symbolic gesture, which Ferreira da Silva calls *engulfment*. *Engulfment* transforms the non-apprehended exteriority into a moment of universal reason by folding it into interiority; this is Hegel’s Spirit. Ferreira da Silva designates this sublimating third gesture which engulfs apprehended exteriority into interiority *transcendental*

¹²⁵ Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, 31.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

poesis. *Transcendental poesis* in turn consolidates what Ferreira da Silva calls *the transparency thesis* as the ruling onto-epistemological assumption. Said differently, Hegel makes it possible for Europe to resolve exteriority into interiority without losing its sense of self. It is at this moment when Europe passes into the post-Enlightenment that Ferreira da Silva says the modern concept of the racial, as a *strategy of engulfment*, can fully emerge in the life sciences. What *transcendental poesis* provides for a Europe thoroughly engaged in conquest, enslavement, colonization, and settlement is “the political-symbolic strategy that apprehends the human body and global regions as signifiers of how universal reason institutes different kinds of self-consciousness, that is, an effect of productive tools that institute irreducible and unsublatable differences.”¹²⁸ *Transcendental poesis* makes it possible to think the differentiated space inhabited by others as governed by a universal law outside of the self-determined subject, and to think subjection to that law as part of a movement toward a higher plane of perfection that leaves the inhabited differentiated space outside. Thus, *transcendental poesis* provides a way for Europe to be in proximity to its others without losing its own transparent sense of itself by “consistently [rewriting] the defining premise of Western thought, namely, the ontoepistemological primacy of interiority.”¹²⁹ Ferreira da Silva calls this early modern figure that rewrites interiority’s primacy over exteriority *homo historicus*.

With the life sciences a new figure, *homo scientificus* emerges. The life sciences introduced a new version of the play of reason, *productive nomos*, which refashioned Hegel’s “transparent I” or Spirit as a specimen of the scientific European mind through the deployment of the *analytics of raciality*, a political-symbolic weapon which achieves what *transcendental poesis*

¹²⁸ Ibid., 32.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 40.

could “prescribe, but [could] not ensure”: the rewriting of “bodily and social configurations as signifiers of transcendental.”¹³⁰ Raciality “delimits the borders of the transparent I by rendering it both a temporal and spatial thing,” enabling Europe to embrace its finitude while still housing universality as though by natural law.¹³¹

Ferreira da Silva defines *productive nomos*, or productive reason, as “the regulative-productive force that authorizes any ontoepistemological statement.”¹³² *Productive nomos* builds off Hegel’s *transcendental poesis* by rewriting the scene of engulfment, not as the sublation of extended, exterior spatiality into Spirit, but

“as always already exteriorizations of the transcendental force in the “essence” of which they always already participate. That is, the science of life delimits a region of nature as the stage of actualization of a productive and regulative force, productive nomos, with the “law of conditions of existence” that turns representation into an effect of regulation, and the “principle of natural selection,” which transforms regulation into an instrument of representation.”¹³³

“Life” becomes a method, technique, and procedure for the apprehension of “other modes of human existence as variations of post-Enlightenment conditions.”¹³⁴ Echoing Wynter’s criticism of the overdetermination of biocentric Man, Ferreira da Silva defines “Life” as a strategy of engulfment which deploys the idea of “progress” in nature “when it maps a portion of it by classifying its inhabitants according to the degree of differentiation, specialization, and

¹³⁰ Ibid., 94.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 98.

¹³³ Ibid., 99.

¹³⁴ Ibid., xvi.

complexity... that is, their degree of perfection.”¹³⁵ The life sciences solidify concepts of universality and self-determination, concepts that Ferreira da Silva will deploy in her analyses of the present racial formation.

Darwin once again marks a decisive development in the life sciences. Darwin’s theory of natural selection operates as a ‘strategy of intervention’ that introduces temporality as a defining feature of living nature, thus imparting to nature its own form of Hegelian Spirit. Natural selection also reworks the Hobbesian struggle for existence as the hidden connection between all living things. It is here that a more fully developed account of human variation emerges in the scientific text. Searching the globe for specimens, Darwin’s very method “demanded the reading of the materializations of time onto the global space.”¹³⁶ While lesser peoples are subject to *productive nomos* or the law of nature, European civilization has, in Darwin’s estimation, ascended above subjection. Europe’s others are thus subjected to a telos of nature; they are destined to die, either because they lack the appropriate evolutionary capacities to transcend nature, or because a more fit civilization (Europe) will inevitably destroy them. Ferreira da Silva says that Darwin thus writes the others of Europe as doubly affectable. Subjected to the laws of nature and subjected to the civilizing and genocidal prowess of Europe, racial others are those who “are always already losers in the ‘struggle for existence.’”¹³⁷

From Darwin, Ferreira da Silva turns to early twentieth-century anthropology, which developed the enduring concept of the cultural. Though the cultural seems to be an attempt to provide a sense of interiority and transparency to those denied subjectivity, Ferreira da Silva argues that cultural politics can never write the racial other in transparency or universality, because the

¹³⁵ Ibid., 103.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 109.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 110.

very concept of culture in the scientific text is produced through *productive nomos* which already apprehends cultural difference as racial difference, and thus, as unevolved and destined for obliteration.

Sociology, which emerges from anthropology retains in even its progressive valences the racializing logics of science. Ferreira da Silva examines the Chicago School of Sociology and its development of the “race relations cycle,” and the theory of “race and cultural contacts,” and finds that they both follow social Darwinism in their assumption that racial conflict is the result of a failure to assimilate, amalgamate, or miscegenate. Ferreira da Silva terms this continually re-emerging concept “the logic of obliteration.” The logic of obliteration which, “postulates the necessity of the disappearance of the racial and cultural differences of the others of Europe” works through *eschatological time*.¹³⁸ The logic of obliteration is a genocidal mode of engulfment which, Ferreira da Silva says, is always the endpoint of onto-epistemological concepts of transparency and self-determination.

Ferreira da Silva is concerned that most analyses of racial formation, especially those taken up by critical race scholars and postmodern theorists, examine racial subjugation through the sociologic of exclusion which reduces racial violence to discrimination and access. She notes that despite the many attempts by postcolonial movements to rethink a pluralist universality, or to celebrate cultural difference fail to provoke an ethical crisis in the West. The sociologic of exclusion misses the full scope of racial violence at work by reducing racism to epistemology, when in fact the very techniques of apprehension configure life, space, time, and relation according

¹³⁸ Ibid., 157

to raciality. In this account, raciality is productive of ethico-political accounts of subjectivity that facilitate biopolitics and neoliberal capitalism, and not the other way around.¹³⁹

Ferreira da Silva finds in quantum physics a fertile ground with which to think relationality anew. To think beyond the modern epistemological text, Ferreira da Silva suggests that we avoid naturalizing cultural and racial difference, renounce a conception of universal justice, and abandon freedom as self-determination.¹⁴⁰ For Ferreira da Silva, Black feminist “poethics” gestures toward the end of the world by thinking and doing beyond the confines of reason, interiority, and historicity that have fixed Blackness as a material and symbolic site of extraction.¹⁴¹ Thinking with Ferreira da Silva, I contend genetic genealogy rhetorics variously rehearse the logics of exclusion and obliteration, visually worlding the redemptive possibilities of inclusion into universality, signified by the nexus of history and science. *Watchmen* promises to restore recognition and wholeness to a severed generational line, but transparency requires the representation of individuated suffering. Ancestry advertisements, which are made to market biotechnology, strategically collapse the viewers sense of time and space into a universalizing history, but in doing so, they disavow legacies of violence and sometimes inadvertently reveal the extent to which biotechnology is conditioned by the logic of obliteration.

¹³⁹ See Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Notes for a Critique of the ‘Metaphysics of Race,’” *Theory, Culture & Society* vol. 28, no. 1 (2011): 138-148.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ See Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World,” *The Black Scholar* vol. 44, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 81-97.

2.5 Affective Debt Economies: Racial Capitalism, Immaterial Labor, and the Bad Debt

“The transience of the slave’s existence still leaves its traces in how black people imagine home as well as how we speak of it. We may have forgotten our country, but we haven’t forgotten our dispossession. It’s why we never tire of dreaming of a place that we can call home, a place better than here, wherever here might be. It’s why one hundred square blocks of Los Angeles can be destroyed in an evening. We stay there, but we don’t live there. Ghettos aren’t designed for living. The debris awash in the streets, the broken windows, and the stench of urine in the project elevators and stairwells are the signs of bare life.” – Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*¹⁴²

“The history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist.” – Fred Moten, *In the Break*¹⁴³

In their exploration of the racial and colonial logic of global capitalism, Ferreira da Silva and Paula Chakravartty liken the U.S. subprime borrower of the 2008 financial crisis to Dana in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*. Both Dana, who fails in the “incomprehensible task” to keep her white ancestor (and slave master) Rufus alive, and the Black and Latino subprime borrowers who failed to pay the unpayable predatory mortgage, are punished for defaulting on “a *debt* that exceeds the legitimacy of both the law (contract) and morality (obligation).”¹⁴⁴ The comparison between the subprime debtor and the historically indebted ex-slave links the inherited generational wealth and

¹⁴² Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 87.

¹⁴³ Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁴⁴ Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva. "Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism—An Introduction." *American Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2012), 362.

“creditworthiness” that enabled whites and others to endure the financial hardship brought about by declining home values with the disavowed historical legacy of the “colonial and racial matrix of capitalist accumulation of land (conquest and settlement), exploitation of labor (slavery, indentured labor, forced migration), appropriation of resources, and ultimately the very meaning of debt in what Walter Mignolo calls the ‘modern/colonial world system’”¹⁴⁵ The U.S. state’s program of debt forgiveness in the bailout of Wall Street which bet against subprime debtors after providing them unpayable loans belies notions of neoliberalism that see the state as exogenous to the operations of capital and suggests that the racially saturated figure of the subprime debtor is but a contemporary casualty of capitalist “accumulation by dispossession.”¹⁴⁶

Seeking to challenge the valuation of Black existence that figures Blackness as credit risk—that is, as financially and socially unfit—and the juridical and economic domination of and divestment from Black social, political and economic life, the call for Black reparations seemingly flips the script through the demand for socio-political acknowledgement and monetary redress of the historical and inherited injury of slavery. As Randall Robinson’s pro-reparations treatise, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, plainly states, the nation and its racial benefactors owe a debt to Black folk.¹⁴⁷ Reparations then calls for an accounting of racial injury and seeks credit for this debt. How do we figure these debts—those of the subprime borrower and the nation’s debt to Black folk—and what processes of accounting can account for the ways in which the subprime borrower is indebted, like Dana, to the violence of genealogy?

In the Italian post-workerist Marxist tradition, the solidification of the creditor-debtor relationship is generally understood to have emerged with the rise of neoliberalism in post-Fordist

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 364.

¹⁴⁶ David Harvey, quoted in Chakravartty and Silva, ““Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt,” 364.

¹⁴⁷ Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (New York: Penguin, 2001).

capitalism.¹⁴⁸ The deterritorialization of money and its privatization as debt announced by post-Fordist financialization converges the real economy and the virtual economy, submitting life to regulation according to the imperatives of the market. The debt economy “institutes economic and existential precariousness, which is but the new name for the old reality: proletarianization,” and requires new modes of self-management whereby worker-debtors are called upon to become ‘entrepreneurs of the self’ “according to the terms of business and competition, its employability, its debts, the drop in wages and income, and the reduction [in] public services.”¹⁴⁹ Bioinformatics and financialization (and their crises) then indicate a transformation in the nature of labor,

“in which one’s entire life is put to work, when knowledges and cognitive competences of the workforce (the general intellect that Marx spoke about in his *Grundrisse*) assume the role played by machines in the Fordist period, incarnated in living productive bodies of cooperation, in which language, affects, emotions and relational and communication capacities all contributed to the creation of value.

[...]

In this gap, the extraction of surplus value, of unpaid labor, is done by capturing devices outside of the direct productive processes by using an organizational business model that draws from the productive, creative and innovative qualities of the workforce developed in extra-professional environments.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Lazzaratto and ‘Bifo’ locate the contemporary deterritorialization of money into debt in the Nixon “shock” which cancelled the gold standard for money in 1971. See Maurizio Lazzaratto, Trans. Joshua David Jordan, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on Neoliberal Condition* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012) and Franco Bifo Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2012.

¹⁴⁹ Lazzaratto, *The Making of the Indebted Man: An Essay on Neoliberal Condition*, 93; 94.

¹⁵⁰ Christian Marazzi. *The Violence of Financial Capitalism* (London: Semiotext(e), 2009), 113-4.

This is human capital: the valorization of immaterial/affective labor of self-*management* of the social that is the process of subjectivization as the debtor-creditor (which as we shall see are really one in the same) through modes of discipline and social control we might call biopolitical capitalism or logistics. This process of valorization targets life itself seeking to absorb in its calculations the very stuff of existence—capacities, modalities, informational content and algorithmic virtualities—at both supra-body (for example affects or the ‘general intellect’) and sub-body (for example genetic data or molecular information) levels, and this process is often called biocapitalism. *Self-management then can be seen to be one side of the same coin as business management: the calculation of loss or intransigence (that which has not been disciplined, where value has not been expropriated) as intrinsic to capitalism and biopolitical governance.*¹⁵¹ Financialization produces “financial rent” through the investment of profits and workers’ savings into the stock market (which is to say credit) rather than wages, and produces debtors for whom “the stagnation of real wages [are] in turn ‘compensated for’ with private debt.”¹⁵² Thus, as profits undergo a process of ‘becoming-rent’ through credit tools of speculative finance, workers become debtors, lives on rent.

Credit and debt are not only economic technologies; they are moral—and therefore juridical and historical—technologies. Reading early Marx, Lazzarato says that the creditor-debtor relation is “at once different from and complimentary to the labor-capital relation” in that credit does not seek to exploit labor, but *ethos*, the character of (individual or collective) action and self-making through the expropriation of immaterial labor.¹⁵³ Credit then is a mode of capturing of

¹⁵¹ See Stephen Matthias Harney, Mattia Fraportti and Niccolo Cupini, “Logistics Genealogies: A dialogue with Stefano Harney,” *Social Text* 136, no. 3 (September 2018), 95-110.

¹⁵² Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, 114.

¹⁵³ Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, 30.

the social, as the ethos of “trust” or the solidarity that produces the social is reduced into “solvency,” the confidence in the debtor’s long-term ability to meet their contractual obligation to pay the debt. In this reduction, credit “makes solvency the content and measure of the ethical relationship.”¹⁵⁴ Thus, the debtor is guilty—guilty for being in debt and for having sought credit, especially if the debt cannot be paid except by way of seeking more credit; the debtor is made to live in a dead time of the past that overdetermines the future, its radical possibilities eclipsed by the irreversible obligation.¹⁵⁵ All of this explains the relationship between *debt as a technique of governance* that complements the “real subsumption of life under capital,” even at the level of DNA, and the temporality of guilt that debt lives and credit produces.¹⁵⁶

However, the subprime housing crisis, like genetic genealogy, does not merely reflect the proletarianization or the increasing precarity that subtends the hyperaccumulation of global capitalism. At stake are the logics of genocide, fungibility, and accumulation found in conquest and slavery that underwrite the violences of the present. As Anna M. Agathangelou says, too much of anti-capitalist scholarship has misrecognized that

“[p]recarity, for this system though, is not just a project of a ‘bad economy of power’. It is a pivotal moment of inscribing colonial expropriations in a hierarchized grid of global

¹⁵⁴ Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, 58.

¹⁵⁵ “On an empirical level, time is immediately perceived by the indebted as that which multiplies the amount of debt. There is no ‘time to come’, of which they have full ownership. But more importantly, the promise they make to pay back affects their experience of time on a more profound level, something that we may equate with subconscious or transcendental conditions. In making promises, the indebted bind themselves to the past, not only in the moment but from that moment onwards; one is supposed to create a memory of the fact of indebtedness and must hold to it. It was Nietzsche who showed how the moral principle of ‘guilt’ (*Schuld*) derived its origin from the idea of ‘debt’ (*Schulden*) in the history of morality in the Western tradition. He noted that the issue here is that ‘a memory had to be made for those who promised’ (Nietzsche 1967: 64). As Deleuze states in his book on Nietzsche, it is a ‘memory of the future itself’ that makes a man capable of promising and of making use of the future, thus becoming a free, powerful man (Deleuze 2002: 134). In lending money, the creditor expects to have control over the debtor’s future.” Boram Jeong, “The Production of Indebted Subjects: Capitalism and Melancholia,” *Deleuze Studies* 10, no. 3 (2016), 343.

¹⁵⁶ See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

power (i.e. the total value yielded by native land and slave labor ‘that bet on an ethical indifference to the annihilation of the native and the enslaved’) (da Silva 2016, p. 189) in the national itself, and this process of inscription is constitutive of the contemporary moment of capitalism.”¹⁵⁷

This dissertation takes seriously the consideration that the fungible Black object precedes and prefigures bioinformatic capitalism and immaterial labor, something missed in too many accounts of contemporary configurations of violence much like how Foucault missed something profound about the nature of the prison when he disavowed the genealogical connection between the slave patrol and the prison-industrial-complex. It is important then that we turn with Stefano Harney and Fred Moten to the Black radical tradition to understand the ways in which Blackness prefigures the neoliberal debt economy to elaborate the symbolic, political, and onto-epistemological stakes of credit and debt. Following their investigations we see that bioinformatic capitalism is aided by logistics—that is, what we now think of as the capitalist science that manages and secures the production process, distribution, and the supply chain—and the apparatus of governance called credit which does not so much reduce workers to “precariats,” but first and foremost targets and calculates Black fugitive sociality; which is to say, it does not target the common as Hardt and Negri might say, but rather the *undercommon* fugitive Blackness that is the inhabitation of a sociality of mutual dispossession.

In thinking through racial capitalism and its algorithmic and pre-emptive administrative strategies as logistics, Harney and Moten find that logistics does not emerge in early modern military strategy nor is it most clearly expressed in nineteenth-century industrialization or the

¹⁵⁷ Agathangelou, Anna M. "What suicide and Greece tell us about precarity and capitalism," *Globalizations* 16, no. 4 (2019) 541-2.

Fordist assembly line as is commonly thought, but rather it begins and finds its expression in the trans-Atlantic slave trade:

“The Atlantic slave trade was the birth of modern logistics, as it was also the birth of a new kind of war on our species being, and the birth of racial capitalism, which amounts to saying the same thing. This trade entailed the first global movement of mass commodities, voluminous and grotesque. Moreover, these humans were also perishable and volatile commodities that could “go missing” and were hard “to extract,” requiring complex, even diabolical, logistical technologies, supported by finance, insurance, law, and of course state and extrastate violence.”¹⁵⁸

Ian Baucom details the origin of modern insurance and finance in the trans-Atlantic slave trade through his examination of the *Zong* massacre, in which 132 slaves captured on the British slave ship *Zong* were handcuffed and thrown overboard over the course of three days, enabling the ship owners to file an insurance claim on the “lost” dead cargo. Baucom takes the insurance contract developed through the trans-Atlantic slave trade and exemplified in the *Zong* massacre to be the “utterly paradigmatic, utterly typical, utterly foundational event” of modernity.¹⁵⁹ In the creation of “insurance value” and the attendant “speculative epistemology” that developed in the slave trade, “the money forms of the trans-Atlantic slave trade could attach themselves not only to the slaves who reached the markets of the Caribbean alive but also to those drowned along the way.”¹⁶⁰ The *Zong* massacre thus exemplifies the *necessity* of racialized thingliness and death as the *guarantee* of the creation of value in racial capitalism, as literal Black death made thinkable

¹⁵⁸ Harney, “Logistics Genealogies,” 95-6.

¹⁵⁹ Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: finance capital, slavery, and the philosophy of history* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 59.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

the financial annulment of value in the object for the creation of the “life” of value beyond the object. On this it is worth quoting Baucom at length:

“The genius of insurance, the secret of its contribution to finance capitalism, is its insistence that the real test of something’s value comes not at the moment it is made or exchanged but at the moment it is lost or destroyed. In a pure commodity culture (if there ever was such a thing), that value would cease to exist the moment the commodity ceased to exist... However, in... an insurance culture value survives its objects, and in doing so does not just reward the individual self-interest of the insured object’s owner, *but retrospectively confirms the system-wide conviction that that value was always autonomous from its object*, always only a matter of agreement. Insurance value, a more durable precisely because a less material, contingent, or mutable form of value than either use value or exchange value, does not await the moment of loss to become real. It exists the moment an object is insured and effectively abridges Marx’s full formula for capital at that moment, conferring upon that object a value that neither depends on its being put to use or entered into exchange as a commodity but results purely from the ability of two contracting parties to imagine what it would have been worth at that imaginary future moment in which it will have ceased to exist. Indeed, with regard to its value, *the object has ceased to exist the very moment that future becomes imaginable*. The insurance that covers an object has not ensured that it will survive destruction. *Anticipating that future moment of destruction, insurance proleptically visits its consequences upon the object. It annuls the object, abolishes it as a bearer of value, and so frees value from the degradation of thingly existence.*”¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 95. my italics.

This “war on thingliness” finds its “ultimate expression in the practice of insurance,” and “characterizes the speculative culture of finance,” without which modern finance could not materially nor epistemically exist.¹⁶² This war on thingliness is also why the courts could not see the *Zong* massacre as murder because at stake for the European world was a representational system and form of value that disallowed Black death and suffering to register as an ethical crisis. The story of financialization in the slave trade gives texture to what Wilderson means when he says that the Slave “underwrites” (as in insures) the Human drama of value—that underwriting is onto-epistemological, material, symbolic, and autopoietic within the Human grammar.

The demand of modern logistics, which Harney says also begins in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, is “the sociopathic demand for *access*: topographical, jurisdictional, but importantly *bodily* and *social* access.”¹⁶³ The “interface of movement between commodities” is for logistics a site of speculation. That is, Black insurgent sociality—which resides in *the means and not the ends* of the production/supply chain, where resides the worker/consumer—is what calls logistics into being. What logistics is a reaction to is that which it also always seeks to control, to manage in its war on thingliness, which is why logistics always stores within its contradictions the possibility of its critique and its abolition. Logistics assumes loss in its calculation in two senses; first, in the sense Baucom describes, of the annulled object that provides value even in her death, and second, in the sense of its “anticipation not of resistance but of a kind of impenetrability” of the general intellect now figured here not so much as the social of the self-determined alienated subject, but the indeterminacy that logistics seeks to render determined, *a sociality of means without end* which is the haptic practice of the shipped and containerized that emerges in the hold:

¹⁶² Ibid., 99.

¹⁶³ Harney, “Logistics Genealogies,” 95.

“In other words, our entangled, indeterminate, undercommon rub-up of curvy lines, kinks, loops, and crooked lines summons logistics. It reacts to our sumptuous tangle. Our entanglement requires them to draw up contingency plans, which are plans to make our indeterminacy mere contingency, to account for what goes missing. Logistics is the science of loss, the science of their lost means, which is to say it will always be the white science and the science of being white. Logistics is the science of their loss, not ours, though we, and those closest to blackness in particular, suffer horrific losses from their loss”¹⁶⁴

Black fugitivity, or the fugitivity of Black social life lived in social death, is what the dream of logistics has always sought to capture. In this sense, we could return to the dream of automation, to which Marx indicated capitalism seems to aspire and which is increasingly becoming realized today, in order to understand that “the death of the subject,” here expressed as racial capitalism’s desire to eliminate at all parts of the production process human error through algorithmic control as well racial capitalism’s extractive and expropriative quest for its constitutive outsides in the form of immaterial/affective labor and extremophilic life, is actually logistics’ desire “to live in the concrete itself in space at once, time at once, form at once... [to] dwell in... the concrete, the material world in its formality.... to dwell in nothing,” which is announced by, but is opaque to queer, inhabited and enmeshed “space-ways of the flesh.”¹⁶⁵ Thus,

“From the motley crew who followed in the red wakes of these slave ships, to the prisoners shipped to the settler colonies, to the mass migrations of industrialisation in the Americas, to the indentured slaves from India, China, and Java, to the trucks and boats leading north across the Mediterranean or the Rio Grande, to oneway tickets from the Philippines to the

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 97.

¹⁶⁵ Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 87; Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 126.

Gulf States or Bangladesh to Singapore, logistics was always the transport of slavery, not ‘free’ labor. Logistics remains, as ever, the transport of objects that is held in the movement of things. And the transport of things remains, as ever, logistics’ unrealizable ambition.”¹⁶⁶

In the contemporary, credit serves as an operation of racial capitalism in its production and governance of human capital, which is but an approximation of the fugitive/automated subject it can never fully realize. Credit names the mode of governance in racial capitalism that seeks to privatize fugitive social reproduction. Credit seeks out this fugitive sociality, seeks out what Harney and Moten call “bad debt,” or the indebtedness of those in mutual dispossession who gesture toward a horizon beyond the world of Man; credit targets this bad debt, attempting to give it credit, to transform it through a multiculturalist accounting project of privatization, incorporation and correction. Credit in this sense is certainly the calculation of debt, but it is a calculation that we can now understand cannot account for what it seeks, because the bad debt it seeks out is beyond calculation. The bad debt that credit seeks to account for by transforming “bad debt” into “good debt” (which is also to say by terraforming the planet, our bodies, and our poetics of relation), to make our wayward indeterminacies and touches into representable aggregates. But bad debt is not representable within the modern onto-epistemological text, except as pathology or what Ferreira da Silva calls “affectability.” If logistics seeks the death of the subject and if the seeming globalizing fungibilization of the world (which again, is made possible by the anoriginary Black fungiblity and hapticality within the hold of the slave ship and in its wake) is any indication, “the death of the subject” countenanced by poststructuralism is preceded (in a spatial sense, not simply a temporal sense) by the deathly object that threatens this world with ontological death—

¹⁶⁶ Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 92.

that, as Wilderson says, “threatens it with incoherence.”¹⁶⁷ Bad debt/Black debt, devitalized within “humanist modernity’s scopic episteme,” is in fact a kind of fleshly “brilliance.”¹⁶⁸ We can’t tune into it without centering raciality—and antiblackness specifically—in any analysis; we cannot see the beyond of necropolitical capitalism which offers credit and correction in many guises from Man’s vantage point.

Genetic genealogy, like logistics, is a science of loss insofar as it promises to use science’s apprehension of the natural to retrieve what has been lost to the archive. It promises to serve as a faithful witness to the history to which Man has been an unfaithful witness, to bring to life the dead who have been rendered all the more dead because of a stubbornness—that for Black people has been a stubbornness by design—to account for the existences of the dominated. No wonder then that genome scientists and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. both refer to the genetic code and its genealogical revelations with the theological moniker “the Book of Life.”¹⁶⁹ In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the ‘Book of Life’ refers to those who are righteous before God. It’s use in genetic genealogy recalls the “disenchantment of the world” brought about by scientific reason’s usurpation of divine mystery diagnosed by Weber as science promises to unlock the secrets of nature which can now be understood according to the natural laws of a universal molecular code. But, as Wynter suggests, genetic genealogy also promises to unlock the secrets of Human Being, biological existences as overdetermined by the genre of Man, determining the contours of Human/Being itself. As we find with Gates’ tracing through celebrity genealogy or the use of

¹⁶⁷ Wilderson III, “The Prison Slave,” 25.

¹⁶⁸ Robin James, “Notes on Weheliye’s Habeas Viscus: Or Why Some Posthumanisms are Better than Others,” *Its Her Factory*, November 26, 2014, <https://www.its-her-factory.com/2014/11/notes-on-weheliyes-habeas-viscus-or-why-some-posthumanisms-are-better-than-others>.

¹⁶⁹ Lily E. Kay, *Who Wrote the Book of Life? A History of the Genetic Code* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

genetics in reparations claims, The Book of Life in genetic genealogy promises to restore to Blackness (and to confirm to non-Blacks) its place in the divine Human drama by making it representable as history. Representation in the Book of Life then promises to be a confirmation of Black Humanity, as the Book of Life that is the Human Genome itself is, as genomic scientists suggested, Humanity's inheritance; it is a public good delivered to us in the present as though by a Hegelian unfolding of Spirit that confirms the temporality and ethicality of Man. We are here with this confirmation of our "shared humanity" because all that has happened, good or bad, has brought us to this point. The value of the genome is presupposed by a naturalistic fallacy that the ontologizing will-to-truth of science and historicity provides. All that has passed is as it should be, or at least it is good that what has happened is now transparent to us, however unfortunate. How could it be otherwise?

Credit wants to make good on your bad debt, it wants to promise a way out for the Black Matriarch and the Welfare Queen who cannot maintain domestic order, who spend too much and lack financial literacy. The translation of bad debt into good debt, into debt that can be managed and brought back into the system of accounting, is subjectivization. What credit promises is restoration, otherwise called "restorative justice," but Moten and Harney caution us that what goes by the name restorative justice is no justice at all. As with the *Moynihan Report*¹⁷⁰ which fixed the figure of the Black matriarch in order to save her from herself, the bourgeois notions of racial uplift which compel respectability politics as the index of worth, and the citizenship granted the ex-slave that also mandated hygienic attachments to domesticity, so credit operates as a speculate mode of social control that exceeds any institution such as the state, the bank, the university, but

¹⁷⁰ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, United States Department of Labor (Washington, DC: Office of Policy Planning and Research, 1965).

is at work in all of these sites. Credit is like a slave patrol, tracking down the bad debtor, the one who will not thank the more benign plantation master for the scraps but instead runs away, is drapetomaniacal, is mad and useless (for them). “We were offered credit for our debt. We were granted citizenship. We were given the credit of the state, the right to render private any public gone bad. Good citizens can match credit and debt. They get credit for knowing the difference, for knowing their place. Bad debt leads to bad publics, publics unmatched, unconsolidated, unprofitable. We were made honorary citizens. We honored our debt to the nation. We rated the service, assessed the cleanliness, paid our fees.”¹⁷¹ Governance. and the credit that it promises, is not “ideology,” or “ignorance,” or “the state,” but, as Harney and Moten suggest in borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari, is better understood as a form of “state-thought” that seeks to correct the criminal impulse to seek nothing in them because they have nothing for us that is not ultimately a tightening of the noose. Credit intervenes in the shared criminality of insurgent sociality that is conserved in its refusal to invest in recognition. What is necropolitical liberal democracy if not the distribution of debt? What is “the public sphere” if not the privatization of interests of those who have surrendered themselves to policy and to the police? What is credit but the compulsion to seek the truth of ourselves?

“In the United States, whoever says ‘subprime debtor’ says black as well.”¹⁷² If Black is the disowned (naturally alienated), disinherited (from history), dispossessed (from self-possession), stateless (in captivity) and homeless (subprime) life, then, as the world would seemingly have it, Blackness is in need of credit. The lenders say we need credit. The fight for reparations says we need credit. Genetic genealogy says we need credit. “State-thought says, “they burnt down their

¹⁷¹ Harney and Moten, “Debt and Study,” 65.

¹⁷² Moten, “The Subprime and the Beautiful,” 240.

own neighbourhood.”¹⁷³ But as Hartman reminds us, these are not our neighborhoods: “we stay there, but we don’t live there” because the ghetto wasn’t designed for living. And Harney and Moten say, the neighborhood is not ours, but before ours. What was burned was what was holding hostage and settling the undercommon existence that surrounds it. Thus, Wilderson, Moten and Harney implore us to stay in the hold, while Sharpe turns our attention to wake work, the modes of care amongst the dead and the drowned wake of the slave ship and the inventive modes of care found in the wake of slavery.¹⁷⁴ The undercommon and fugitive sociality that surrounds the police occupation (which is burning and needs to burn, which is why they are mad) is found in the hold and in our mutual dispossession because home cannot be found in these architectures of control; these architectures of control are what are refused in the refuge of bad debt, in the marronage of the fugitive public that comes when we follow “debt as its own principle” of elaboration, where the debt is left irreparable and unrepayable. Debt as its own principle of elaboration returns us to the subprime debtor who, having had their house foreclosed upon, inhabits the house and continues to live there. Improper inhabitation is what emerges in and as the refusal of credit; settled by credit and settled as deprivation and dispossession, this improper inhabitation is also never derived from that deprivation or made possible by it. We are not better for having suffered, especially when there can be no grammar of suffering to account for the depths and intensities of that suffering. We are however potentially something else; not positivity or vitality, but a different mode of generation that Moten and Harney call study or planning. Improper inhabitation does not seek credit—since the mortgage cannot be paid—but instead invites criminal fugitivity. And what we want then, as Harney says, is not the abolition of debt but the abolition of credit.

¹⁷³ Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 53.

¹⁷⁴ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016).

3.0 Finding Your Mother, Losing Your Mother: Natal Alienation, Black Trauma, and Genetic Repair

“Again, accompanying those discourses, which assume a universal grammar of suffering (White film, metacommentaries on ontology, film theory, and film reviews) is a prescriptive political common sense vested in shared convictions regarding the socially transformative power of symbolic action, a notion that the effects of symbolic action can have the impact of a structural intervention powerful enough to liberate the subject positionally. At the end of this socially transformative trajectory, the subject is recomposed and redeemed—in a word, liberated.” – Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black* ¹⁷⁵

“I don’t believe that what has happened in general is reparable, but if the United States finally decided to write me a check, I would cash the check and put it in the bank or go buy something stupid with it, a Rolls Royce or a Bentley, something that will really make George Stephanopoulos mad. I would accept the check, and be pissed off that it ain’t as much as it should be. But I also know that what it is that is supposed to be repaired is irreparable. It can’t be repaired. The only thing we can do is tear this shit down completely and build something new.” – Fred Moten, *The Undercommons* ¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*, 277.

¹⁷⁶ Fred Moten in Moten and Harney, *The Undercommons*, 152.

“On behalf of the entire United States government, President Redford offers his sincerest condolences for the trauma you or your family may have suffered. May I have your consent to test a sample of your DNA?” – Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Watchmen*

HBO’s *Watchmen* is an alternative-universe superhero drama that began airing in the United States on October 20, 2019. The television series, directed by Damon Lindelof, who also served as an executive producer and writer, takes its name and source material from the 1987 DC Comics series *Watchmen*, created by Alan Moore and David Gibbons. Neither a sequel nor a reboot of the original, Lindelof likens the 2019 creation to a “remix” that pulls from the source material while retaining the creative license to exist as an original story that “must ask new questions and explore the world through a fresh lens.”¹⁷⁷ While still referencing the original comic series, which focused on the conflicts of white vigilantes in the twentieth century, the *Watchmen* television series provides a counter-narrative and counter-history that focuses on Black superheroes and places racial conflict front and center in its imagined world. It thus presents a critique of the white-washing of history and popular imagination in both the source material and in the real twenty-first century. The series has received “universal acclaim” from critics for its masterful storytelling, its raw depiction of the history of American race relations, its centering of a Black narrative of trauma and healing, and its searing critique of the whiteness of the superhero genre.¹⁷⁸ The series was also

¹⁷⁷ Lindelof, quoted in Megan Farokhmanesh, “Damon Lindelof’s *Watchmen* will be a ‘remix’ with original characters, not a remake,” *The Verge*, May 23, 2018, <https://www.theverge.com/2018/5/23/17383826/damon-lindelof-watchmen-remix-original-characters-remake>.

¹⁷⁸ According to Metacritic, *Watchmen*’s “metascore” from critics is 85/100, qualifying it as “universal acclaim” and “must-watch,” while it has received a 5.8 user score from average review. See Metacritic, “*Watchmen* (2019): Season 1,” Metacritic, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://www.metacritic.com/tv/watchmen-2019/season-1>. See also, Nick Schager, “‘*Watchmen*’ is a spectacular assault on white supremacy,” *Daily Beast*, Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/hbos-watchmen-is-a-spectacular-assault-on-white-supremacy>; Emily Todd VanDerWerff, “I think HBO’s *Watchmen* is tremendous television. Lots of people will strongly disagree,” *Vox*, Oct 20, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/10/17/20918439/watchmen-hbo-review-damon-lindelof-regina-king>.

“review bombed” by more overt racists who, among other things, called the show “woke left,” “divisive propaganda,” of “social justice warrior[s].”¹⁷⁹ The ire from *Watchmen* fans on the Right serves as a reminder of rising white fascistic populism under increasing neoliberal precarity. W.E.B. Du Bois called the white cross-class alliance that exploited darker nations and peoples “democratic despotism,” while David Roediger has called it the “wages of whiteness.”¹⁸⁰ As the compact between the ruling classes and middle-and lower white classes becomes more tenuous, *Watchmen* suggests an important and continued need to consider the role of racial terror in the construction of civil society.

Lindelof, who is white, explains in the supplemental *Watchmen* podcast that much of his inspiration for centering Black people, beginning the narrative with the Tulsa Massacre and featuring genetic genealogy in the series came from Ta-Nehisi Coates’ “The Case for Reparations,” and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s *Finding Your Roots*.¹⁸¹ Alondra Nelson, in the *Social Life of DNA*, notes the growing connection between genetic genealogical analysis and repair. For Black Americans, who have experienced “a profound loss of social ties” due to the Middle Passage, genetic genealogy can be a tool for reconciliation and to make the case for reparations, serving as a tool kit in attempt to restore “lineages, families, and knowledge of the past, and to

comic; Monique Jones, “How ‘Watchmen’ Explores Generational Black Trauma and Provides a Path Beyond the Pain,” *Shadow and Act*, Dec 16, 2019, <https://shadowandact.com/how-watchmen-explores-generational-black-trauma-and-provides-a-path-beyond-the-pain>.

¹⁷⁹ Kevin Fallon, “Comic Fanboys Are Pissed About HBO’s ‘Watchmen’: It’s ‘Woke’ Propaganda!” *Daily Beast*, Oct. 25, 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/hbos-watchmen-pisses-off-comics-fanboys-its-woke-propaganda>; See also, Alex Abad-Santos, “Some Watchmen fans are mad that HBO’s version is political. But Watchmen has always been political.” *Vox*, Oct. 24, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/10/24/20926872/watchmen-hbo-backlash-politics-sjw-race>.

¹⁸⁰ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (New York, NY: Verso, 1999).

¹⁸¹ Damon Lindelof and Craig Maizin, “Masks,” The Official Watchmen Podcast at HBO.com, accessed March 2020, <https://www.hbo.com/watchmen/watchmen-listen-to-official-podcast>; For Coates’ article, see Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*, June 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631>.

make political claims in the present.”¹⁸² Thus, in these two inspirations we can begin to get a sense of the way in which genetic genealogy becomes an important connector in the motifs of loss and recovery and injury and repair that are forefronted in the narrative.

The intertextuality of the series is significant for its message. The world of *Watchmen* is meticulously constructed, due in large part to the efforts of Lindelof’s diverse writers team, which includes Cord Jefferson, Christal Henry, Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, Janine Nabers and executive producer/director Stephen Williams.¹⁸³ The series references several real-world events, situations and contexts, most notably the 1921 Tulsa Oklahoma Massacre, which opens the first eight to ten minutes of the first episode, and which was itself the source of so much praise and conversation when the series launched. The series also refers to the history of antiblack lynching, the Black deputy U.S. marshal Bass Reeves, Black film director Oscar Micheaux, the current national conversation on reparations for Black people, the Alt-Right, and recent popularity of genetic ancestry testing and the promise of pharmacogenetics. *Watchmen* is very much a social problems film that works its way through the genre-blended superhero story; there may be a time-traveling blue man, an evil genius trapped on the Jupiter’s moon Europa, and the Millennium Clock, but the story is also weaved through the more real-world technoscience of genetic ancestry testing and pharmacogenetics, and through seemingly impossible but conceivable legal technologies like monetary reparations, and socio-political technologies like the family structure. *Watchmen* makes it clear that for all its differences, this world is not so very different from our own. This chapter examines *Watchmen*’s depiction of the relationships between these real-world technologies in the fantastic superhero universe to better describe how they are made to cohere the narrative of loss

¹⁸² Nelson, *The Social Life of DNA*, 5-6.

¹⁸³ Monique Jones, “How ‘Watchmen’ Explores Generational Black Trauma and Provides a Path Beyond the Pain.”

and recovery. I contend that the use of genetic ancestry testing and pharmacogenetics, and the filial serve as structuring and suturing devices that enable, figure and constrain *Watchmen*'s portrayal of racial injury and healing.

The communicative medium of the natively alienated Black nonhuman and the world made for it by genetic genealogy serves as a vantage point of this investigation. This chapter explores the ways in which *Watchmen* is an ambivalent text, as it does important work in confronting the legacy of antiblack violence, but also returns racial injury to restrictive modalities of the Human. Following Wilderson's method of analyzing the grammar of film rather than its representational index, Black feminist new materialism's insights regarding the Black social reproduction, and attending to Ferreira da Silva's analysis of the spatial operations of the "the racial" and "the cultural," as processes of signification that engulf the otherwise possibilities of the racial subaltern and redirect them to Humanist frameworks, I contend that *Watchmen* depicts a genetic imaginary that may re-elaborate racial subjugation in its move towards genetically-enhanced racial reconciliation.

First, I draw on black feminist new materialists to articulate the stakes of natal alienation for Black genealogical historicity, the filial, and social reproduction. The (im)possibility of Black social reproduction lies in the ongoing and structuring legacy of slavery that produces Black filial forms as pathological. In this context, attempts at racial uplift that seek to restore wholeness to the Black filial often reproduce the pathologies they seek to overcome. For black feminist new materialists, the abolition of the family form can open new ways of considering Black social reproduction that delinks Black life from humanist epistemologies and subjectivity. Next, I describe how repair is figured in humanist frames within a debt economy. This debate economy is tied to biocapitalist neoliberalism insofar as the very processes that demand affective or

immaterial labor in the name of debt are preceded by the production of the Black object. Black sociality is figured as that which precedes and resists attempts to restore debt through social and economic methods of accounting. I then move to *Watchmen* more specifically, examining the ways in which *Watchmen* sets up the scene of violence and figures the loss produced by racial injury. I contend that the text produces a desire for genealogical wholeness that sutures blackness back to the filial and serves as a policing operation, even as the text troubles the ethical status of the law and policing institution. Finally, I examine the crowning episode of the season, “This Extraordinary Being,” to explore how the pharmacogenetic technology “nostalgia” serves as a lure into an affective economy of debt and credit that resituates black suffering as an object of enjoyment through a technique Hartman has termed “empathic identification.” I conclude this chapter with some thoughts on Black feminist modes of fugitive kinship.

3.1 Natal Alienation, Black Social Reproduction, and the Filial

Natal alienation troubles any genealogical account of antiblackness that narrows racial injury to lines of familial or genetic descent. Antiblack violence ruptures in both directions: horizontally as the stripping of relational capacity in the present, and vertically, through generations. This section will examine the ways in which natal alienation can be thought as a condition which figures the impossibility of Black social (re)production for its own sake, and its enlistment for the social reproduction for antiblack society.

There was an unbridgeable gulf, as wide and deep as the Atlantic, between the mother country and Saidiya Hartman when she traveled to Ghana to “reclaim the dead.”¹⁸⁴ So many of us dream of a “return to a native land,” as Aimé Césaire once put it, but Hartman did not return to Africa as a child returns to a family. Her return was not a return; it was not the coming back into the fold as a part reunited with the whole. She traveled to Ghana “in search of strangers,” and when she was there she tells us she was greeted as one.¹⁸⁵ *Obruni*, or stranger, introduces us to Hartman’s account of the West African slave trade, and as we follow Hartman’s tracing of the misery and deprivation of the millions stolen, perished, and reduced to human cargo in the Middle Passage we are also following her account of herself, which is to say her account of her dispossession from Africa which is also an account of Hartman’s shared and inherited dispossession that forms the basis of a lineage and solidarity that cannot be recognized as such.

How does one tell a story of those without the capacity for narrativization? The loss of the mother (country) for we who are the descendants of slaves is confirmed in the silences of the archive that presence the enslaved only through the master’s language: the ledger, the bill of sale, captains’ logs, planters’ diaries.¹⁸⁶ As Hartman says, “to enter the archive is to enter a mortuary,” and the challenge of the historian then cannot be to resurrect or give socio-historical life to the dead, but to grapple with the impossibility of doing so.¹⁸⁷ This story that cannot be narrativized is our story, the story of Blackness and of the descendants of slaves who share in common the fact of being dispossessed of the common; which is to say, we who are made a “we” by virtue of social death and natal alienation; we who belong nowhere.

¹⁸⁴ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 6.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

Hartman explains that to lose your mother is to have lost your past.¹⁸⁸ To lose one's mother is a metaphysical and irreparable loss that invokes both the loss of territorial claim, heritage, and history as well as the loss of relational capacity or kin. Branding was not simply a way to track cargo; it is the mark of property that "provide[s] the emblem of kinship in the wake of defacement. It acquires the character of a personal trait, as though it were a birthmark."¹⁸⁹ The separation of the enslaved from similar origins, housing together the enslaved speaking different languages in order to foreclose potential acts of rebellion or sabotage, the brutal and forced renaming of the enslaved that famously turned Kunta Kinte into Toby, the prohibition on slave literacy, the separation of children from parents, and the general bar from personhood crystalized in the U.S. slave estate—these techniques and conditions of material dismemberment and historical erasure produced an irreparable wound that is inherited generationally, as though according to the rule *Partus sequitur ventrem*, "the child follows in the condition of the mother."¹⁹⁰ To say that the Slave's existence can only be apprehended within the grammar of accumulation and fungibility and not through the analytics of culture or subjectivity is to take seriously the ways in which "[t]he stamp of commodity haunts the maternal line and is transferred from one generation to the next."¹⁹¹

The "afterlife of slavery" thus entails the (im)possibility of Black social (re)production, even as Black social (re)production is enlisted for the social reproduction of the antiblack world. As Spillers explains, the persistent accusation of intrinsic pathological Black filial relation, of which the 1965 *Moynihan Report* is exemplary, disavows and is itself symptomatic of the condition of captivity which produces racial Blackness.¹⁹² For the Slave there is no correlate to

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 80.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 80.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 80.

¹⁹² Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe."

the Oedipal structure that characterizes the (European/white) Human filial drama. What is castigated on all sides as the failed matriarchal Black family is the inheritance of a patrilineal absence continually materialized and enforced through ever intensifying techniques of domination and separation. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” because the papa in this case is the master. By virtue of ownership, the Master (and his metaphysics as Spillers will explain) signifies both the Law of the Father and the biological father. The enslaved father is displaced, in fact, cannot be allowed to exist.

Natal alienation is “genealogical isolation.”¹⁹³ As Spillers says, “kinship loses meaning, since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by property relations.”¹⁹⁴ As a white, Western, and humanist institution, the family coheres colonial gender formation (as white, cis, heterosexual and property accumulating) and secures “white ascendancy through antiblack racism and Native genocide.”¹⁹⁵ Remarking on the social Darwinism that informed the *Moynihan Report* Tiffany Lethabo King notes that such studies that seek to explain Black familial pathology (especially when undertaken in efforts to correct such pathology) render the Black family and its presumed matriarchal formation as an object of knowledge for “sociological surveillance.”¹⁹⁶ Reflecting widespread social anxiety regarding Black urban rebellion and Black failures to culturally, economically, and politically assimilate, such studies understand the Black Matriarch “as threatening to the coherence of the family as a property-generating institution and cornerstone of the nation.”¹⁹⁷ While white/Human families are “constructed as private and impenetrable spaces

¹⁹³ Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 51.

¹⁹⁴ Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 74.

¹⁹⁵ Tiffany Lethabo King, “Black ‘Feminisms’ and Pessimism: Abolishing Moynihan’s Negro Family.” *Theory & Event* 21, no. 1 (January 2018), 74.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

that protect white people—specifically, white patriarchal domination—from the excesses of state power,” Black domestic space is gratuitously vulnerable to state and extra-legal intrusion and therefore provides no respite from violence through the presumption of privacy.¹⁹⁸ Following Spillers’ and King’s insights into the *Moynihan Report*’s reiterations of Black filial pathology as the disavowed semiotic re-elaboration of Black captivity, we can say that rather than recuperating the Black family, even Black responses to Black filial pathology—whether in the form of “respectable Black bourgeois outrage, Black nationalist (re)commits to Black patriarchal models, Black feminist valorizations of matriarchal models, and more recent embraces of Black queer models of family life”—assume a liberal humanist paradigm of relationality that mystifies natal alienation and racial violence.¹⁹⁹

Figures of Black filial pathology such as the Black Welfare Queen, Black Matriarch, and Absentee Black Father serve conservative political agendas and provide cover for the exploitative operations of racial capitalism. The bemoaned loss of the Black family feeds into discourses of racial uplift and Black capitalism that prescribe a bootstrap ethic and aspiration for the cisgender, heterosexual familial form. As Hartman explains, the very modes of subjectivity granted the ex-Slave served as technique of social control. Marriage, for example, which was denied to the slave but demanded in the aftermath of emancipation as demonstration of Black deservingness of and capacity for legal and social personhood, enforced a morality that served to make Black men responsible for the economic support of the children of white masters, and disciplined fungible and accumulable slave bodies into (still fungible and accumulable) laboring docile bodies. As the juridico-economic category of the slave was shifted into the category of the worker, the very forms

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 74.

of subjectivity (subjectivity itself in fact) and rationalities demanding adoption foreclosed what otherwise relationalities might have been sought by these newly nominally emancipated people.

The Black family then has remained a site of control and exploitation, even as it has symbolically served to promise (and justify denial of) recognition to Black people. Meanwhile, as Black men have been positioned as the economic support for Black households, Black women's energies have been expropriated to serve as the caretakers of the white family and nation. The Mammy figure, who emerges in the plantation as the wet nurse to and caretaker of white children, today becomes the Black woman made to work in white households as caretakers. That Black women have been made to perform reproductive labor in white domestic spaces in Fordist capitalism would become a central feature of the stark differences between the politics of white feminism and Black feminism, as white feminism figured women's liberation as the emergence out of the private sphere into the public while Black feminism recognized that there had never been a presupposition of private domestic space for the Black family. Today, Black women are still called upon to be "the belly of the world," as indicated in the 2016 political takes that simultaneously blamed the election of Donald Trump on below-2012 Black voter turnout, and celebrated Black women's overwhelming voter support for Hillary Clinton.²⁰⁰

3.2 Suturing the Filial through Racial Trauma in *Watchmen*

In a present-day, alternate-universe where police mask themselves for protection against white supremacist terrorists, Tulsa, Oklahoma detective and masked superhero Angela Abar (played by

²⁰⁰ Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," *Souls* 18, no. 1 (2016), 166-73.

the incredible Regina King) investigates the bizarre murder of her friend and Chief of Police, Judd Crawford.²⁰¹ Following directions from an unknown caller who claims, “I know who you are,” Abar finds Judd hanging from a tree, while next to him sits an old Black man (Louis Gossett Jr.) in a wheelchair. We in the audience know from the paper sitting in the man’s lap imploring “WATCH OVER THIS BOY,” that this man is the boy who survived the Tulsa Race Massacre, the racial terror that decimated the community dubbed ‘Black Wall Street’ by Booker T. Washington and depicted in the first ten minutes of the first episode. Bracketed by these two spectacles of gratuitous violence (the first gratuitous in its pornotropic presentation of Black suffering, the second gratuitous in its disavow of present day lynchings of Black people which haunt the text), the first episode frames this statement that is also a question, “I know who you are.” This answer to the disavowed question (But who am I? Who is the Black?) inaugurates the real mystery of the series: not the ‘whodunnit’ that characterizes the Human idiom of justice (vigilantism versus the law), but the antagonism it structurally adjusts—that is, the ‘whodunnit’ of racial violence and intergenerational trauma.

What is justice for the post-traumatic ex-slave?²⁰² How to examine antiblack violence when to do so announces the violence of representation? What is the prescription for repair? The written plea for protection of the Black child (who other than in terror and trauma is nowhere to be found) we learn is inscribed on a propaganda leaflet airdropped by the Germans to Black U.S. soldiers during World War I. The leaflet, which is based on a real-world leaflet from WWI, details the second-class status and social death endured by Black people that belies American claims to

²⁰¹ Judd Crawford will be revealed to have been a member of the white supremacist group, Seventh Kalvary, by way of a time traveling loop and technique that can only be effected by the superhuman Dr. Manhattan.

²⁰² On post-traumatic slave syndrome, see Joy DeGruy Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Milwaukie, Oregon: Uptone Press, 2005).

freedom and democracy.²⁰³ The impossible plea for Black safety, to watch over this boy, is made to anyone or no one. The open and unanswerable imperative hurriedly scribbled on this artefact of propaganda is a sort of palimpsest that situates Black social death and gratuitous vulnerability to violence within global European imperial conflict, staging antiblackness as a matter of global proportions. Fungible Black soldiers are annexed for the Human drama, but no side of this Human conflict can serve Black people or protect Black life (Germany after all, before but especially in its most gruesome formation as the Third Reich was inspired by the techniques of racial domination developed through the American historical text and the ideologies of the U.S. eugenics movement).²⁰⁴ Instead, in this narrative the violence of racial terror indexed by the Tulsa Race Massacre destroys the boy's community and severs his familial ties, as we will see, in both genealogical directions.

The filial has a suturing effect in *Watchmen*. Will Reeves is the lost (Law of the) Father, the empty category who (also having lost his parents to white mob violence) we are made to imagine is restored to Abar through genetic ancestry testing and the recuperation of genealogical memory/history. The series attempts this restoration through its production as a counter-hegemonic discourse that targets the historical erasure of racial violence in the history of the national project. *Watchmen's* interpretative assumption that "all people have the capacity for history and anthropology, the power to transform time and space" is a racial suture that enables the narrativization of a contested drama of value; that is to say, rewriting racial trauma as superhero origin story as a corrective for a white-washed version of history, displaces the structuring

²⁰³ Matthew Dessem, "The World War I Propaganda Flyer in This Week's *Watchmen* Was Real," *Slate*, October 27, 2019, <https://slate.com/culture/2019/10/watchmen-world-war-i-flyer-92nd-infantry-real-hallo-boys.html>.

²⁰⁴ See James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

condition of racial trauma onto a cop-versus-extremist terrain of conflict, and “weds us to the notion of violence as a contingent event.”²⁰⁵ Wilderson notes that the assumptive logics of the “we” that “underwrites” (that is insures as a financially speculative operation) the drama of value “operate like police actions: they police our ability to contemplate how the Slave is not a lesser valued entity on a pole of higher valued entities but is instead exiled from the drama of value.”²⁰⁶

In so far as the “we” is a police action, it makes sense that *Watchmen* presents racial trauma as the source of Black desire for the law. The series will use this desire as the basis of its critique of the efficacy of the police in curbing racial violence, even as it privatizes and (mis)recognizes that violence. Bass Reeves, the real-world Black cowboy lawman, ex-slave, and native informant destined to be whitewashed as the Lone Ranger in our real-world popular culture, introduces the theme: Will Reeves takes Bass Reeves’ surname, channeling violence and loss into service in New York’s Finest and becomes the first vigilante superhero, Hooded Justice; Marcus Abar will serve his country like his grandfather serving in a war waged on behalf of U.S. imperial ambitions in Vietnam; and Angela Abar, orphaned by colonial insurgency, will return to the scene of the crime in Tulsa, Oklahoma as Detective Abar and Sister Night. What the figures of this genealogy share in common is their filial dispossession.

The trauma of antiblackness is the result of what Fanon calls “a cultural imposition” which produces in both white society and black interior life the *black imago*: “little by little I take into myself the prejudices, the myths, the folklore that have come to me from Europe.”²⁰⁷ The Black man has been selected for the function of “original sin” in the white imaginary, and the Black man, argues Fanon, also selects the Black man for this function. Modifying both psychoanalysis and

²⁰⁵ Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black*, 249.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 148.

Marxism to account for Blackness, Fanon argues that the Black imago is the product of a *historicity* that provides a set of images (“tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: ‘Sho’ good eatin’.”²⁰⁸) resulting in the “imposition of a second historical-racial schema on the corporeal subject proper.”²⁰⁹ This is the “racial epidermal schema” which replaces the corporeal ego, as the corporeal ego has “crumbled,” no longer having any meaning of its own.²¹⁰ As Marriott explains, the relationship between self and world disintegrates and the surface of the Black body becomes the “denotation” of this racist reality.²¹¹ “Consequently,” Marriott says, “racialization here signifies a rupture between body and world, between sense and symbolization. . . . the black body as sensed becomes bound to the trauma of how it is known, in whose awareness it finds itself ‘collapsed,’ ‘fragmented,’ and ‘assailed’ from without *and within* as part of the racialization of experience.”²¹² “[O]verdetermined from without,” Fanon says, “I am the slave not of the ‘idea’ that others have of me but of my own appearance.”²¹³

This overdetermination that becomes written on the flesh through epidermalization suggests that the change required is not to be located in contingent reappraisals of the value of Blackness, not in counter-representations, nor in the romanticization of a Black past. Historicity, the “appearance of the past in the present,” makes representation violent for Blackness and “limits the present expression by binding it in a closed circuit with the colonial constructions of the

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 84-5.

²⁰⁹ David Marriott, *Whither Fanon? Studies in the Blackness of Being* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 67.

²¹⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 84.

²¹¹ Marriott, *Whither Fanon? Studies in the Blackness of Being*, 68.

²¹² Ibid., my italics.

²¹³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 88.

past.”²¹⁴ For this reason, Fanon can only travel with Aimé Césaire and the negritude movement so far; what is needed is not a “return to a native land,” but a decolonial psychopolitics that begins with a diagnostic of the psychic life of the Black torn asunder by the spatial operations of colonial domination and material and violent decolonial struggle. Thus, Fanon instructs us that rather than seeking in history (and the European categories of thought we have inherited) the destiny of our struggle, we should recall that “the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence.”²¹⁵

“Look, a Negro!” The address is not an address insofar as address addresses and constitutes a subject; this call to objecthood exceeds Althusserian interpellation or Burkean identification because this call instead arrests subjectivity; the Black imago *visually and spatially fixes* the Black body and reduces it to object: “I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain the source of the world, and then found I was an object in the midst of other objects.”²¹⁶ Here identification is a fatal project for the Black as becoming “consubstantial” with the Human requires psychic and metaphysical violence:

“The black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about ‘our ancestors, the Gauls,’ identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages—an all-white truth. There is identification—that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts the white man’s attitude. He invests the hero, who is white, with all his own aggression—at that age, closely linked to sacrificial dedication, a sacrificial dedication permeated with sadism. [...] But he is a Negro. That he will learn

²¹⁴ Kara Keeling, *The Witch’s Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham: NC, Duke University Press), 30.

²¹⁵ Fanon *Black Skin, White Masks*, 179.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

once he goes to Europe; and when he hears Negroes mentioned he will recognize that the word includes himself.”²¹⁷

Somewhere the black boy knows that it is better to be the superhero than the criminal because he knows it is better to be Tarzan than the images of blackness that appear on the screen. This rupture in an identificatory process is not then the result of the Black child’s choice of identification, but “a prior collective identification” that has already arrested Blackness visually and morally in a racial-epidermal schema.²¹⁸ Thus, Fanon draws our attention to the anxiety of seeing and being seen in the movie theater: “I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me. The people in the theater are watching me, examining me, waiting for me.”²¹⁹ But unlike Fanon’s critique of the 1949 social problem film *Home of the Brave* which he says likens blackness to amputation and advises psychic resignation as the cure to Black socio-political paralysis, *Watchmen* offers us prosthesis.

The opening scenes of *Watchmen* places us in “the interval” doubly as we are shown a film-within-a-film (a technique that the series will use again with the *American Hero Story* television series to indicate the white-washing of Hooded Justice in the universe’s popular memory).²²⁰ *Trust in the Law!*, a fictional in-universe silent film produced by the real world black filmmaker Oscar Micheaux, positions our point of view as that of the black boy (who we later learn is Will Reeves) who watches the film in an empty movie theater (supposed to be the Dreamland movie theater in the Black Greenwood community of Tulsa). The identity of a hooded black figure who lassoes the white criminal in the silent film is revealed by a white church boy

²¹⁷ Ibid., 114.

²¹⁸ Kara Keeling, “‘In the Interval’: Frantz Fanon and the ‘Problems’ of Visual Representation,” *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003), 100.

²¹⁹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 107.

²²⁰ See Keeling, “‘In the Interval.’”

who, in an echo of Fanon's address, exclaims with glee, "Dontcha know who this is? BASS REEVES! The Black Marshal of Oklahoma!" As Bass Reeves pulls back his hood to reveal his badge, we witness a seeming reversal of roles where the white hat is revealed to be the bad guy, and the black hood, the good. The church boy's address in its reproduction of the Fanonian accusation (Look, a Negro!) returns the Black imago to the Black boy in the theater to whom the camera pans. He sits there, alone in the theater rows, eyes glued to the screen, as the white church congregation in the silent film cheers, "Lynch the thief! String him up!" This is clearly the boy's favorite film, so excited is he to exclaim in step with Bass Reeves the first words said aloud in the series: "There will be no mob justice today. Trust in the law!"

The cinematic techniques in *Watchmen* fix both the black boy in the scene of trauma and Blackness writ large, ventriloquizing the counter-insurgent command through the black boy's voice. The inaugural statement ("There will be no mob justice today. Trust in the law!") situates the *Watchmen* series within the real-world landscape of domestic warfare currently and continuously waged on Black, brown, and Native peoples in the United States. Damon Lindelof, the series creator, *almost* says as much: "as all these things were happening — not just Charlottesville but everything was happening through the lens of race and it felt like there was a great reckoning happening in our country, overdue and necessary. [...] To not tell a story about race in the context of a political text in 2019 almost felt borderline irresponsible."²²¹ Indeed, the series' immediate sepia-toned depiction of the violence of white mob justice in the Tulsa Massacre suggests that the law is not to be trusted. But nonetheless, Lindelof's inspiration in making this social problem series points to the disavowal of the injunction ventriloquized through the Black

²²¹ Damon Lindelof, "'Watchmen' Creator Damon Lindelof: Not Talking About Race Felt 'Irresponsible,'" interview by Noel King, *NPR*, October 22, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/22/771998690/watchmen-creator-damon-lindelof-not-talking-about-race-felt-irresponsible>.

boy; this injunction is made not to whites in Charlottesville who are deputized by the modern project to defend their right to “free speech” and assembly, but to the Black social unrest of Ferguson, Baltimore and Black Lives Matter who call attention to the state-sanctioned violence of (and in excess of) police brutality.

Dylan Rodriguez describes the contemporary articulation of U.S. domestic warfare as characterized by the statecraft of “a formally multiculturalist and ‘democracy-building’ national project” that articulates “the structural necessity of racist state violence—as ‘policing’—to the viability of the US national form itself.”²²² Lindelof claims the series is neither pro- nor anti-cop, but formally its cinematic techniques consolidate a prohibition to Black rebellion. As with other Black cop media depictions, the circumscription of racist violence to the “mob” of the Seventh Kalvary and racist whites in the Tulsa Massacre, evokes “bad apples” rhetoric that disavows the structural function of police and the security state as an antiblack apparatus to “preempt and disrupt political resistance and social unrest, particularly within black communities.”²²³

To put a point on it, while the series suggests that both the police and the nation are implicated in racial violence, the series doubles back, drawing Black suffering into a grid of intelligibility that can elicit empathy and recognition in viewers who can offset antiblack violence as regrettably present, yet still exceptional to the coordinates of civil society. As with the object-making address (“Look a Negro!”/ “It’s Bass Reeves!”) that is reiterated in the command (“Trust in the Law!”), *Watchmen*’s many spectacles of racial violence (lynchings, genocidal mob violence, blackface) serve as a “ruse of empathy,” that misrecognizes racial terror as a series of unfortunate

²²² Dylan Rodriguez, “The Terms of Engagement: Warfare, White Locality, and Abolition.” *Critical Sociology* 36 no. 1 (2009), 153.

²²³ Jared Sexton, “The Ruse of Engagement: Black Masculinity and the Cinema of Policing.” *American Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2009), 46.

events while facilitating white empathic enjoyment of Black suffering.²²⁴ Wilderson notes that empathy, as a structuring aspect of rhetoric,

“tenders the promise of a liberatory relation between ‘Human beings’ through catharsis (intense release of emotion) and cathexis (locating of emotion into an object, event or person), by staging an encounter that can renew or re-establish the kinship, or communal, structure of feeling that it presumes to exist ab initio, as if in a state of nature. It hails the spectator to a filial, natural essence by privileging ‘biographical time’, time that ‘locates causal agency (the “because” principle of why things happen) at the level of individual characters’ (164) and their essential being.”²²⁵

The privatization of Black suffering to the familial line suggests that this lineage of orphans, these victims of racial terror, are so because America has not lived up to its promise. As Black trauma becomes liberalized African-American²²⁶ trauma, figured as a conduit for white feelings of racial harmony, what must be cut out of the frame is the question which might shatter it: what is the spacetime of the figure who has no presumption of relationality, who cannot be reconciled through it, and whose demand is not for America to live up to its promise, but for the End of America and the World.

²²⁴ With the term “ruse of empathy,” Frank Wilderson combines the concept “ruse of analogy” with Hartman’s critique of empathy. See Frank B. Wilderson III, “‘Raw Life’ and the Ruse of Empathy,” in *Performance, Politics and Activism*, ed. P. Lichtenfels and J. Rouse (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 181-206.

²²⁵ Ibid., 182.

²²⁶ Here I refer to liberal African-American trauma to indicate the representational identity politics at work that I argue constrain considerations of Blackness that exceed representational regimes.

3.3 Genetic Reparation, National Healing, and the Sociologic of Exclusion

To solve the mystery of Judd's murder, both Angela Abar and the audience will need to first solve the mystery of her genealogy. Abar inadvertently discovers a clue in this existential investigation when she stops by the Greenwood Center for Cultural Heritage, an African-American museum dedicated to the preservation of the "untold and unacknowledged" history of the Tulsa Massacre that also provides genetic ancestry testing as part of the U.S. federal government's racial reparations policy, the Victims of Racial Violence Act.²²⁷ In the hopes of identifying her mystery suspect, Abar has gone to test Will's DNA away from the watchful eyes of FBI agent Laurie Blake. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s face appears on the kiosk screen as Abar approaches. Gates in this alternate-universe serves as the face of racial reparation in his role as U.S. Treasury Secretary, a nod to Gates' real-world role as genetic genealogy advocate and host of the popular PBS documentary television series *Finding Your Roots* which, using both genetic and non-genetic genealogy tools, dramatically reveals the genealogical histories of celebrities as they flip through the pages of their "Book of Life." Like Gates' vision for a genetically-empowered multicultural humanism and Nelson's vision of genetically-enhanced racial reconciliation, genetic ancestry testing in *Watchmen* promises to reveal hidden truths lost to the historical archive:

Gates: Hello, I'm United States Treasury Secretary, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. If you like you can call me 'Skip.' What's your name?

Abar: Will.

Gates: Hello, Will. What can I help you with today?

²²⁷ *Watchmen*, season 1, episode 3, "If You Don't Like My Story, Write Your Own," directed by Andrij Parekh, written by Damon Lindelof and Christal Henry.

Abar: I need to know who I am.

Gates: I'm sorry I can't help you with that. But I can check your eligibility, would you like me to do that?

Abar: Yeah. Yes.

Gates: Almost a century ago, on this very spot of which you now stand, the vibrant, affluent, African-American community of Greenwood was so prosperous that later it became known as the Black Wall Street. Then, in the space of a single day, it was all gone. The Tulsa Massacre resulted in profound loss of life, not to mention the property and treasure pillaged from its victims. For far too long this horrific chapter in our nation's history went untold and unacknowledged. On behalf of the entire United States government, President Redford offers his sincerest condolences for the trauma you or your family may have suffered. May I have your consent to test a sample of your DNA?

Abar: Yes.

Gates: Please take a cotton swab from the drawer, gently rub it on the inside of your cheek, then place it in the slot. Your DNA will be processed exclusively here at the Greenwood Center for Cultural Heritage. Only survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Massacre and their direct descendants are eligible to apply at this facility. Please tell us the best number to call you.

Abar: 539-176-2442.

Gates: Thank you. [The song "Battle Hymn of the Republic" beings playing from the kiosk] Our country appreciates the opportunity to right the wrongs of a dark past, so that we may all share a bright future. God Bless America.

We learn from HBO's supplemental in-universe material and Lindelof's *Watchmen* podcast that the Victims of Racial Violence Act was the product of a legislative compromise to forestall a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that would require a more expansive reparations program that might, as Lindelof says, "bankrupt the country."²²⁸ The policy, pejoratively referred to as "Redfordations" by resentful whites who in the series conjure the pathologization of the Welfare Queen, serves as commentary on real-world struggles for reparations for living survivors of racial violence and their descendants.

In particular Lindelhof references the 2003 Tulsa Oklahoma Reparations lawsuit, *Alexander v. State of Oklahoma*, in which a legal-team comprised of Charles J. Ogletree, Johnnie Cochran, Dr. John Hope Franklin, Cornell West, Randall Robinson, Manning Marable and others represented 171 still living survivors of the Massacre in their fight for legal recognition and redress.²²⁹ The case, which was "dismissed due to a rigid application of the Statute of Limitations" at the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals, and then was dismissed without comment by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2005, tragically points to the ways in which this world does not seem capable of considering the continued impact of racial terror on Black people in the United States. In this sense, *Watchmen* makes a powerful statement in its oppositional account of racial injury as intergenerational, something that the real-world U.S. judicial system was incapable or unwilling to recognize. As its own form of redress, *Watchmen* presents a world where we might valuably be able to imagine the enactment of reparations (even in limited form) that were not granted in reality;

²²⁸ Damon Lindelof and Craig Mazin, "Masks."

²²⁹ Damario Solomon-Simmons, "'Running the Negro out of Tulsa': Victims still wait for justice 95 years after Greenwood Massacre," *Oklahoma Policy Institute*, June 1, 2016, last modified May 2, 2019, <https://okpolicy.org/running-negro-tulsa-victims-still-wait-justice-95-years-greenwood-massacre>; "Reparations Coordinating Committee Members," *USAToday*, February 21, 2002, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/general/2002/02/21/slave-rcc-members.htm>.

the genetic imaginary provided then assumes an ethical register in its articulation of the cyclical drama of racial tension.

Mirroring *Watchmen*'s vision for a genetically-backed claim to restitution, Nelson describes African Ancestry's participation in the slavery reparations lawsuit *Farmer-Paellmann v. FleetBoston et al*, which sought restitution from private companies who had participated in and benefited from the slave trade.²³⁰ Though the case was not won, its lasting effects are significant. Nelson explains, "the plaintiffs showed considerable ingenuity in putting genetic genealogy testing to unprecedented use and, in doing so, opened new areas in the struggle for racial equality, while also extending a generations-long campaign for reparations that will not abate."²³¹ Indeed, as Nelson further notes, and *Watchmen* also attests to, "[t]he conversation reignited by Ta-Nehisi Coates in the summer of 2014 is an indication that the issue will not go away until some measure of reconciliation is accomplished."²³²

In "The Case for Reparations," Coates details successive generations of planned racial terror from slavery through Jim Crow and redlining. Outlining the expropriation of land, resources, and labor from Black folk, Coates forcefully argues that Black folk "did not live under the blind decree of justice, but under the heel of a regime that elevated armed robbery to a governing principle."²³³ Coates' investigation speaks to what Spillers calls, "high crimes against the flesh," the ways in which theft and commodification is a fundamental condition of existence for the Black captive and her ex-slave descendants. The demand for Black reparation, like the racial injury that gives rise to it, is as old as Black people; as Randall Robinson clearly stated, there

²³⁰ See Nelson, *The Social Life of DNA*.

²³¹ Ibid., 138.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631>.

is “debt” that has been incurred through Black dispossession, and it must be paid.²³⁴ But what are the stakes of that debt? Is it one that disorients the coordinates of civil society with the force of its demand, or is it one that returns us to the scene of the crime? For Coates, it appears it may be more the latter than the former. Coates compellingly puts forth the case for reparations as a necessary mode of racial healing that, even in the absence of full monetary repayment, will produce a national conversation for reckoning with the sins of the past and present that would represent “America’s maturation out of the childhood myth of its innocence into a wisdom worthy of its founders,” thereby restoring “humanity” to an otherwise ethical American democratic project.²³⁵ Here, Coates returns the debt to a politics of recognition and accounting that, as Wilderson says, “dull[s] the knife” which is the force that debt demands, by adjusting it within a petition for national belonging.²³⁶

Likewise, *Watchmen* undermines the force of its critique by situating its vision for genetically-confirmed reparation within the domain of privatization and nationalism. As the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” plays, recalling the state’s presumption of ethicality in relation to Blackness by virtue of the Civil War, we are reminded of the assemblage of antiblack civil society, which connects historical recognition to genealogical wholeness, genealogical wholeness to the racist security state (which pretends that it is not), and the filial to redress. *Watchmen*’s corrective ties recognition for historical injury to the genetically-confirmed genealogical line: only those who are descendants of the victims and survivors of the Tulsa Massacre are eligible for reparation. The genetic genealogy line circumscribes the violence of racial injury away from the *total violence* of

²³⁴ Robinson. *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*.

²³⁵ Coates, “The Case for Reparations.”

²³⁶ Frank B. Wilderson III in “The Position of the Unthought,” with Saidiya V. Hartman, *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2003), 198.

“the total value produced by slave labor [which] continues to sustain global capital,” fixing justice as a question of inherited wealth and equal opportunity.²³⁷ There are several misrecognitions involved: that Blackness and Black people writ large do not experience injury that exceeds genealogical descent; that repaying “the debt” would constitute something short of the End of the World (something short of “bankrupting” the United States, which is posed by Lindeloff as a sort of incomprehensible limit to redress), which exists by way of this continued expropriation; and that Black humanity is an issue of access rather than a concept that is oxymoronic within the humanist grammar. These misrecognitions are the product of what Ferreira da Silva calls “the sociohistorical logic of exclusion,” which “through the thesis of discrimination, allows for a celebration of social inclusion measures to mark states’ commitment to equality of opportunity.”²³⁸ The thesis of discrimination is aptly found in several “social constructivist” accounts of racism; it formulates redress as an issue of access and inclusion within the modern liberal project, and understands racial subjugation as the effect of a failure to realize universality and historicity.

The sociologies of exclusion understand the racial subaltern as a particularity that has not been—but must be—adequately folded into a more expansive universality/humanism through the making transparent and representable subaltern interiority; these are the moves toward the recovery of subaltern culture and history that dominate the celebrations of diversity-in-unity of multiculturalism today. Ferreira da Silva warns that the sociohistorical logic of exclusion which invites the turn to History and Culture as the solution to racism relies on the very onto-epistemological regimes which produce racial subjugation in the first place. The thesis of discrimination that informs such analyses of racial subjugation reiterates “the analytics of

²³⁷ Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics,” 82.

²³⁸ Denise Ferreira da Silva, “The Racial Limits of Social Justice: The Ruse of Equality of Opportunity and the Global Affirmative Action Mandate,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2016), 185.

raciality” that are deployed through scientific signification and guides anti-racist movement toward the quest for recognition as the catalyst for redress. In doing so, they fail to account for how universality and historicity are themselves ontological fields of signification (of the scene of juridical regulation and the scene of temporal representation, respectively) of the “transparency thesis” that produces “meanings and beings,” and resolves in the figure of the Subject: the figure of Man as the transparent (universal) and self-determined (interior/temporal) Being against all other modes of being.²³⁹

From within this onto-epistemological modern text, the racial subaltern can only be apprehended as an outer-determined, non-transparent subject, as what Ferreira da Silva calls the affectable ‘I’, who, being the effect of an irreducible and unsublatable difference, must be obliterated, whether by assimilation, genocide, or indifference, through total violence which must be necessarily figured as the solution to racism. The nation, which, as an effect of signification, “produces modern subjects as an effect of historical (interior) determination, which assumes a difference that is resolved in an unfolding (temporal) transcendental essence,” serves as a seductive tool in liberal calls for racial redress.²⁴⁰ Thus, we can recognize a constant refrain in discourses of racial reconciliation that tie the rendering of racial subalterneity as historically representable to a sense of national accountability and incorporation. Left intact in these reparative strategies is the whole of the modern onto-epistemological project that assumes the post-Enlightenment (which is to say Hegelian and scientific) Human and its ethico-juridical architectures as a natural given and moral good. Thus, Ferreira da Silva says pointedly, “We need to abandon constructions of the

²³⁹ See Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, xxxvii.

racial as an add-on, an unbecoming device that reinforces the constitutive effects of otherwise appropriate modern political strategies.”²⁴¹

Most sinister for Ferreira da Silva however, is the way in which analyses and projects subtended by the sociohistorical logic of exclusion do not just fail in producing an ethical crisis or achieving sought redress, but inadvertently aid the racist security state and global capital in its genocidal project. According to Ferreira da Silva, the thesis of discrimination authorizes state action predicated on “compelling state interest” in meeting “the security needs of global capital,” and relies on the modern liberal imperatives of liberty, equality, and security.²⁴² As equality becomes transformed into social inclusion and liberty is folded into security, a “perverse racial dialectic” between the sociologies of exclusion and obliteration takes hold of the racist security state that uses “the analytics of raciality” to delimit those who fit within its mandate for self-determination and self-preservation and those who are rendered “persons without value, or ‘nobodies’” who, rather than falling under the protection of the law, are instead posed as a threat to Human (sovereign) life and are targeted for annihilation.²⁴³ Because the thesis of discrimination inherits the scientific signification of raciality as exteriority or spatial foreignness, it recalls the “theory of racial and cultural contacts,” and “race relations cycle,” which naturalize colonial expropriation and situate racial difference as the cause of racial subjugation. Genetic genealogy, predicated as it is on the sociologies of exclusion and the thesis of discrimination, likewise appeals to universality (scientific reason and juridical reason) and interiority (History) for redress and

²⁴¹ Ibid., xxxvi.

²⁴² Silva, “The Racial Limits of Social Justice,” 196; For more on the theory of the state, self-preservation and self-determination see also “No-bodies: law, Raciality and Violence,” *Griffith Law Review* 18, no. 2 (2009), 212-236.

²⁴³ Silva, “The Racial Limits of Social Justice,” 188, 184.

social inclusion, but in doing so obscures the manner through which scientific signification has already presumed that racial subjection is ontologically pre-political:

In the global juridical architectures, raciality works through the notions of the human and naturalized cultural (intellectual and moral) difference. Whenever the post-Enlightenment notion of the human is deployed in a juridical context, it combines with cultural difference to enable the statement that (a) the idea of the human conveys a unity of diversity, (b) the ethical principle of dignity (the sanctity of human life), but also that (c) the view that the “cultures” of the racial subaltern (“nobodies”) do not respect the latter principle. Not surprisingly, whenever the U.S. state’s self-protecting forces (the police or the military) deploy (or authorize) total violence against Black, Latino, Arab, or Muslim persons, they consistently (and more often than not successfully) justify these actions on the basis that these persons constituted a threat to those who killed them because these “nobodies” have no respect for the sanctity of human life.⁵ No wonder then, in the absence of a “compelling state interest,” before the liberal halls of justice, the racial subaltern becomes consistently nobody, a person without value. Both in moral and legal interpretations of equality, the thesis of discrimination reproduces the occlusion of colonial expropriation and oblivion to injuries to racial subaltern collectives—as such, it acts as an ethical check on state-mandated or state-supported remedies beyond the protection of the right to equality before the law.²⁴⁴

This is a different argument from the ones which are concerned that genetics might usher in a return to “biological racism” or “scientific racism,” because it seeks out a scientific or biological

²⁴⁴ Silva, “The Racial Limits of Social Justice,” 190.

determinant of race that threatens to undermine the social constructivist critique.²⁴⁵ Ferreira da Silva's account of scientific signification alternatively attends to the way in which science—in both its “hard” traditions which emerge from physics and the life sciences, and in its “soft” traditions found in the humanities—is predicated on an onto-epistemological paradigm that maps racial difference onto exteriority through scientific/philosophical strategies of particularization and intervention and engulfs exteriority-as-raciality through techniques of historicity, culture and nation, which are themselves effects of scientific signification. Genetic genealogy then combines, even as it disavows, these effects of scientific signification (history and empirical racial difference) in its quest for the truth of the historically injured racial subject. The quest for a wholeness or transparent historicity of genealogical Blackness becomes a quest for what Ferreira da Silva calls “borrowed transparency,” just as the suturing ‘we’ of the filial becomes an aspiration for what Wilderson and Sexton call “borrowed institutionality.”²⁴⁶ Genetic genealogy's desire for a historical wholeness serves as a sophisticated and seductive ruse that ultimately relies on a tautology that understands the solution to racism as the de-pathologization of Blackness; this de-pathologization of Blackness becomes itself a pathologization, a technique of racial subjugation that is also obliterating, as it becomes the justification for the racist security state to enact its genocidal violence on those populations that are rendered affectable and therefore threatening to the social order, which is nothing less than the transparent Human Being spatially inhabited by Europeanness/whiteness.

²⁴⁵ An example of this kind of account can be found in Dorothy Roberts, *Fatal Inventions: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-first Century* (New York/London: The New Press, 2011).

²⁴⁶ Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, 162; Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black*, 38. Wilderson credits Sexton with the creation of this concept in their private correspondence.

Thus, the calls for racial uplift that inhere in reparations projects oriented toward civil inclusion, Black capitalism, and the family as a site of social reproduction are also what give way to the racist security states' projection of military and police force against Blackness regardless of any Black person's class aspirations. The Black Matriarch and Welfare Queen become libidinal sources of anxiety that subtend race relations much like the accusation that one has received "Redfordations." Likewise, the genocidal humanitarian interventions staged by the US domestically and globally become policing apparatuses while the pathology of racism in the unseemly Alt-Right is brought into equivalence with the Black urban rebellion of Ferguson and Baltimore. Therefore, we should not understand genetic genealogy's application in racial reconciliation projects as contingently related to its terrifying forensic applications, but rather as *necessarily linked*; they are two sides of the same coin, the one producing the aspiration for transparency which, through the other, must simultaneously be weaponized against the affectable racialized populations which threaten transparency. Here genetic genealogy can once again be read through *Watchman*'s opening injunction, which we see is in fact the humanitarian security states' pre-emptive injunction: "There will be no mob justice today (and the racial Other must necessarily be the mob). Trust in the law!"

3.4 Pharmacogenetics, Genealogical Transparency, and the Ruse of Empathy

Watchmen's crowning episode, "This Extraordinary Human Being," provides an engrossing account of Will Reeves' superhero origin story. With the use of a pharmaceutical called Nostalgia, Abar is made to live Will's experience of racial terror at the hands of Cyclops, a white supremacist organization operating in New York City in the 1930's, his subsequent transformation into Hooded

Justice, the first masked vigilante and superhero, and his eventual loss of wife and child to the trauma he suffers. As Nostalgia evokes the promise of pharmaceutical applications for genetic testing, particularly in genetic science's potential to assess genetic risk for Alzheimer's disease and to one day eradicate it, *Watchmen's* genetic genealogy imaginary presents a world in which genetic testing and pharmacogenetics can provide both racialized subjects and disabled subjects life-giving transparency. The use of monochrome in this flashback likewise evokes a mood of nostalgia that will turn ironic as the analeptic telling of Will's life unsettles contemporary romantic notions of a simpler time.

Every detail in this moving and affecting episode is organized to evoke the subtler and overt racism Will faces in the world. While locked a jail cell in the present day, the in-color Abar "awakens" in and fades into the role of black-and-white Will. Angela-become-Will is being inducted into a police force that is racially segregated; rather than the white higher up who walks past Will as if invisible, the Black Lieutenant Battle pins the badge on Will, congratulating him and warning him, "Beware of the Cyclops." As they shake hands Will appears as Angela (or vice versa). The cinematic techniques in this scene—the narrative, the fade from color to black and white, and the cuts which interchange Angela and young adult Will—evoke a continuity of intergeneration and the struggles of racial uplift. Will has joined the police force because of Lt. Battle's inspiration. The whispered warning, said out of the hearing of the whites who crowd the room, evokes the Black cultural tradition of secretly sharing information beyond the gaze of whites as a tactic of survival. Likewise, Angela has unknowingly inherited, by way of the force of history and intergenerational trauma, a legacy that even if still unknown to her, has driven her to the law.

June, the baby who also survived the Tulsa Massacre and is now Will's wife, is worried for Will. "They gave you a gun and a stick. That's what I'm worried about. What you're gonna

do with them. Because you are an angry, angry man William Reeves.” As Angela-as-Will refutes, “I’m not angry,” and we flash back to the sepia-toned scenes of the Massacre, we are reminded of the series’ central injunction: “There will be no mob justice today. Trust in the Law!” The cuts and fades from Will to Angela and back also evoke the series’ earlier use of the technique in showing Will’s genealogical inheritance from his father Obie when he discovers the German propaganda document in his father’s coat pocket. This is the line they are all made to walk, becoming but iterations of a continuity of trauma through and against the law with which this family seems destined to remain entangled. “That was a long time ago,” Will says as if in defiance of the haunting image of the Klan firing down on a Black woman that invades the jazz club mise-en-scène. “I don’t want to live in the past,” Will says. But this is a past that will not go away, that remains in the present. “And that, Will Reeves, is why you are so goddamned angry.”

Sepia toned images and sounds of the Tulsa Massacre continually frame the diegetic unfolding and intrude in the background of Will’s story. As he walks the beat, Will passes his mother playing the piano in the Dreamland theatre while he witnesses an attack on a Jewish delicatessen. Cuts to Will’s father sending him away and the sound of planes during the Massacre liken Will’s origin story to that of Superman’s, who is referenced by way of the DC Action Comic easter egg dropped in the episode; like Superman, Will is an orphan, sent away by loving parents fleeing a destroyed world. The dragged bodies recalled from Will’s memory of the Massacre now appear dragging behind a police car, foreshadowing Will’s kidnapping and lynching at the hands of his fellow officers.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ This scene of dragging bodies also recalls the 1998 dragging and murder of James Byrd, Jr. by three white supremacists in Jasper, Texas.

Will's vocalized outrage that "Fred," racist vandal of the delicatessen, has been released from jail serves as the impetus for the next scene of racial terror. The over-the-shoulder camera shot follows Will as he walks down an alleyway and pans to his face, displaying his fear as he is approached by racist police officers. As he is beaten to the ground, the camera moves back over the shoulder, and then assumes Will's gaze as he beaten to unconsciousness. The camera continues to shift from medium close shots of Will's face, body, and back as the noose is placed around his neck and the executioners mask is placed on his head. The camera then assumes Will's point of view, so that the viewer, like Abar, witnesses this lynching through Will's eyes. Assuming Will's "position" gives us the sense of being hoisted into the air as Will is strung up, seeing through the partially opaque mask the white face of the police officer and the headlights of the cop car that recall Angela's discovery of Judd, hanged by Will in the first episode. We are still as one with Will when he falls to the ground gasping for breath and the officer looming over him cuts him loose. "You keep your black nose out of white folks' business, nigger. Or next time, we won't cut you down." As the camera cuts back to show Will lying on the ground, it is no longer Will we see but Angela, terrified, bloody, and gasping for breath.

In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman explores "the precariousness of empathy and the uncertain line between witness and spectator" through the accounts of slavery provided by the prominent anti-slavery figure, John Rankin, who, in detailing slavery's horrors, imagines his family and himself in the position of the slaves on the coffle.²⁴⁸ Rankin's screed against slavery is enabled by what Hartman calls "empathic identification."²⁴⁹ Imagining himself as the brutalized being, Rankin brings Black suffering near, closing the distance between himself and the slave in

²⁴⁸ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 4.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

order to create a “shared experience of horror” for himself and his audience.²⁵⁰ It is here, in the moment of seemingly progressive sentimentality, that Hartman locates the insidious nexus of pleasure and terror that is constitutive of Blackness. Following Toni Morrison’s description of the Africanist persona as a “surrogate” for whiteness and its meditations on the human condition, Hartman argues that empathic identification with Black suffering, or the “[substitution of] the self for the other,” re-elaborates that suffering as it confirms Blackness as a “property of enjoyment,” or material and figurative resource that consolidates the irreducible difference between the Master and the Slave.²⁵¹ Slipping into Blackness dissolves the distinction between spectator/witness and melodrama/minstrelsy, as the witness-in-blackface becomes witness not to Slave-making violence (and especially not to the Slave-making violence of this very affect), but to their own pained and innocent image; the shared feeling of sentiment and outrage that characterizes empathic witnessing confirms the ethicality of white solidarity and valorizes Black suffering as a metaphysical resource. In the process, the actual slave is obliterated and her body is rendered fungible, not only as a laboring tool or commodity, but in the Slave body’s compulsion to serve as “the imaginative surface upon which the master and nation [come] to understand themselves.”²⁵²

Enjoyment, notes Hartman, “entails everything from the use of one’s possession to the value of whiteness, which can be considered an incorporeal hereditament or illusory inheritance of chattel slavery.”²⁵³ That is to say the capacity to slip into the position of the suffering Black body organizes non-Black enjoyment and produces a non-Black solidarity as a as a property of *generational inheritance*. What’s more, this mode of empathic identification effaces the material

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 18.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 7, 23.

²⁵² Ibid., 7.

²⁵³ Ibid., 24.

relations of violence, metaphysical ownership, and the property relation which constitute it and normalizes Black suffering under the guise of its valorization. Thus, “the elasticity of blackness enables its deployment as a vehicle for exploring the human condition.”²⁵⁴

The many spectacles of Black suffering in *Watchmen* work to similar effect, drawing us to a feeling of catharsis despite the series’ open-ended conclusion and seeming turn away from police as a credible source of order. Episode six marks a turning point in the series, as the genealogical investigation inaugurated by a saliva sample, which is inaugurated by a white lynching, which is inaugurated by antiblack massacre, which is inaugurated by... Both as physical gratuitous violence and as seemingly benign libidinal, affective, and metaphysical gratuitous violence (which are always occurring simultaneously and constantly), antiblack racial terror pays back dividends in transparency. Indeed, part of what makes this episode so compelling is that the viewer does not “see” Will’s lynching, but instead is placed in the position of experiencing it. Black sacrifice is ennobled, as it is this violence that serves as the critical point of inspiration for Will’s turn to vigilante justice. This turn, we should recall, is not however a turn away from the law; it is a turn to the law insofar as the force of law is always already desiring and securitizing itself against its Black outside. The justice Will seeks—that the ex-slave seeks, that Blackness seeks—exceeds the grammar to which *Watchmen* has structurally adjusted it.

Just as the paradigmatic structural antagonism of Master and Slave must be reduced to the terrain of contingent conflict in the Humanist grammar, appearing in *Watchmen* as an inter-generational conflict against Cyclops and its contemporary iteration as the Seventh Kalvary, justice is collapsed into the redemptive arc of genetic genealogy’s promise of total historical recall. Wearing his many masks, hiding his “true self” from the world, from his wife and from his son,

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 34.

Will once again loses the filial and the historical, as his own legacy is lost to a whitewashed history. Natal alienation, a structuring condition of the Slave, is reduced to sinister or accidental ignorance, suggesting that the liberatory horizon for roots seekers should be one of archival perfection. Genetic genealogy here is a technique for organizing interiority—an interiority which can only ultimately produce the very dismemberment of the Black body and psyche which is promises to restore. In “setting the record straight,” genetic genealogy’s promise compels borrowed institutionality, a gift of subjectivity, which as Ferreira da Silva explains, does not produce a transparent subject, but in fact redeploys the operations of raciality it professes to undermine.

As genetic genealogy commoditizes the trauma of historical obliteration called natal alienation, Black suffering in *Watchmen* becomes a resource of enjoyment not simply because we “witness” the suffering, but because the series offers our spectatorship as the catalyst for real-world racial healing, just as Abar’s discovery of “who she is” provides the catalyst for her own unmasking. Here the transparent promises to restore wholeness to the dehumanized Black subject and the nation through the recovery of a genetically-confirmed history. Here, we who are the inheritors of this violent legacy and are responsible for the ethicality of this nation are given credit for having acknowledged the debt. But what is rendered transparent and given credit here is not Black life but, as with Rankin, the antiblack solidarity that organizes its own enjoyment by carving out a space of ethicality that can imagine this World as innocent of its own constitutive violence. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to detail all the ways in which the *Watchmen* ambiguously closes the series, but I do want to note that this turn to accounting-via-transparency also marks the beginning of a resolution to the “race relations cycle” popularly imagined by genetic genealogy. After having lost her transracial husband to egomaniacal machinations, Abar sits with an egg in her hand that represents the possibility to become, like Dr. Manhattan, a different species

altogether. Thus, we are left with a gesture toward a beyond of Blackness, a moving out of Blackness that signals a “what if I wasn’t Black?” Thus, the technoimaginary of genetic genealogy in this cosmology figures the “race relations cycle” (conflict → competition → assimilation → amalgamation) as brought to resolution by way of a genealogical revelation of our collective inheritance of Black suffering, only to offer us a way out through racial and genetic admixture.

3.5 Conclusion: Fugitive Kinship

“They had fled slave raiders, predatory states, drought, and exhausted land, and they desired never to know any of it again in this sequestered niche of the savannah... For all of this, they were willing to begin anew. Knowing that you don’t ever regain what you’ve lost, they embraced becoming something other than who they had been and naming themselves again. Newcomers were welcome. It did not matter that they weren’t kin or that they spoke a different language, because genealogy did not matter (most of them could not go back more than three or four generations, anyway), building community did. ‘We’ was the collectivity they built from the ground up, not one they had inherited, not one that others had imposed.” – Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*²⁵⁵

This chapter examines the ways in which genetic genealogy and pharmacogenetics are imagined as a prescription for repair of the broken genealogical line of Blackness that nonetheless calls us back to the scene of suffering and makes Blackness the conduit for white feelings of racial harmony. Reading *Watchmen*’s genealogical promise through the natal alienation and

²⁵⁵ Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 225.

cartographic incoherence of Blackness and her pathologized modes of social reproduction may instead open other ways of thinking relationality that do not return us to bourgeois narratives of racial uplift or reinvest us in the coordinates of civil society that re-elaborate Black dispossession.

This chapter is not to suggest that there are not ways in which Black intramural life sometimes seeks support in the family form nor is it a referendum on Black reparations. The demand for reparations contains within it two registers, one which returns us to an antiblack grammar predicated on the good intentions and benign ignorance of antiblack society and state, and one which draws on the irreparable debt to (re)inaugurate an impossible demand which exceeds that grammar. Likewise, the filial is but one mode of relationality that overdetermines others, obscuring both the mechanisms of social death and the possibilities of Black life in social death. As Jared Sexton explains,

“black life is not social life in the universe formed by the codes of state and civil society, of citizen and subject, of nation and culture, of people and place, of history and heritage, of all the things that colonial society has in common with the colonized, of all that capital has in common with labor—the modern world system. Black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in, but it is lived underground, in outer space.”²⁵⁶

What then of other relational possibilities if not the filial and if not in Human time? During her visit to Gwolu, a village in Ghana established by fugitives of the slave trade, Hartman imagines a form of fugitive kinship. The fugitive’s legacy reminds us to dream not of nationhood, royal and dignified lineages, or the arrival of a “great emancipator,” but to “dream of an elsewhere, with all its promises and dangers, where the stateless might at last, thrive.”²⁵⁷ Tiffany King likewise

²⁵⁶ Sexton, “Ante-Anti-Blackness: Afterthoughts.”

²⁵⁷ Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 234

considers the fugitive dream as an entry to family abolition. She reminds us that “the Black fugitive evading capture must become something other than what lineage, kin and genealogy beget.”²⁵⁸ The inheritance of the fugitive is this possibility that we might create relations otherwise. It draws on the legacy of those who in fact did and are creating relations otherwise, who reside in the underground and outer space of genealogical coherence. This reading of *Watchmen* suggests that genetic repair is a politics of recognition that offers credit for the debt of racial terror, but also rehearses that terror, seeking suffering to affectively commodify. Rather than return to the scene of the crime, fugitive movement flees and connects with other dispossessed in wayward directions, inviting us to, as Moten says, “tear this shit down completely and build something new.”

²⁵⁸ King, “Black ‘Feminisms’ and Pessimism,” 84.

4.0 Without You, the Story Stops Here: Incorporative Moves and Neoliberal Futures in Genetic Ancestry Advertisements

“Every analysis that attempts to understand the complexities of racial rule and the machinations of the racial state without accounting for black existence within its framework—which does not mean simply listing it among a chain of equivalents or returning to it as an afterthought—is doomed to miss what is essential about the situation. Black existence does not represent the total reality of the racial formation—it is not the beginning and the end of the story—but it does relate to the totality; it indicates the (repressed) truth of the political and economic system.” – Jared Sexton, *People-of-Color Blindness*²⁵⁹

“To break up the colonial world does not mean that after the frontiers have been abolished lines of communication will be set up between the two zones. The destruction of the colonial world is no more and no less than the abolition of one zone, its burial in the depths of the earth or its expulsion from the country.” – Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*²⁶⁰

A key part of the joy of taking a genetic ancestry test is discovering your genetic admixture. And yet, what admixture suggests can obviously not be the same for all people. For white people,

²⁵⁹ Jared Sexton, “People-of-Color Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery,” *Social Text* 103 28, no. 2 (May 2010), 48.

²⁶⁰ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Trans. Constance Farrington (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1963), 41.

admixture suggests exoticism, an opportunity for tourism, or an increase in “color capital,” while for Black and Latinx people admixture suggests a legacy of colonialism and enslavement.²⁶¹ Neoliberal configurations of multiculturalism and multiracialism share in the dominant conception of racism that understands racial purity as the assumptive rule of global racial formation, against which various arrangements of race mixture can be posited as the end of racial rule. This framework appears in both conservative and progressive registers: for example, in the white supremacist fear of “white genocide” and conservative and Far-Right anxieties regarding the “rise of the minority-majority” or the supposed over-breeding of the Black and brown other that inform regressive immigration and welfare policy; and in various liberal, progressive significations of race mixture as anti-racist subversion as well. Whether in the guise of liberal progressivism or reactionary conservatism, racialization is presumed to be an empirical status of human variation from which a socio-cultural difference in racial types springs.

For Ferreira da Silva, such an assumption is precisely the product of the analytics of raciality produced in the scientific text through which raciality, nation, and culture are understood as already given within the modern onto-epistemological text. Ferreira da Silva reminds us that the modern human figure, *homo modernus*, is constituted at the nexus of two ontological contexts: historicity (the ontological register figured by the nation), and globality (the ontological register figured by the racial).²⁶² Genetic genealogy, in its staging of human variation through genetics, recalls the scientific text which figures racial difference as immutable and unoblatable, which can then be attached to figurations of cultural or national difference as historicity. It thus emerges in and primes us for neoliberal multiculturalism and multiracialism as projects of obliterating

²⁶¹ Wendy D. Roth, “Genetic ancestry tests don’t change your identity, but you might,” PBS, July 8, 2018. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/genetic-ancestry-tests-dont-change-your-identity-but-you-might>.

²⁶² See Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*.

incorporation, figuring racial subalterns as affectable populations who must be (but never can be) rendered transparent in the humanist framework.

In “Notes on Passage (The New International of Sovereign Feelings),” Fred Moten remarks on the dominant forms of cosmopolitanism, both in European and Afro-diasporic variants, which, in their “overlooking” of and “detachment” from Blackness, enact a simultaneous seeing and nonseeing of the very figure at stake: the refugee in and as “underground” Blackness—Blackness as the name for homelessness.²⁶³ The detachment from this stake “helps to enact “a kind of meta-cosmopolitanism to the extent that it redoubles a certain constitution of cosmopolitanism as the ‘womb in which all original predispositions of the human species will be developed,’ a tendency” which awaits the achievement of a global civil society external to the state.²⁶⁴ Here Moten recalls that cosmopolitanism is a racial operation as much as it is a juridical or economic one. Cosmopolitanism, in its locating statelessness as the difference between citizen and noncitizen, reimposes “state-sanctioned or naturalized difference” and indebts us to a “strictly racialized responsibility for de-racialization.”²⁶⁵ Thus, what at first appears as an integrative move is actually posed as a critique of Blackness “leveled from a vast range of colonial outposts that have been and remain man’s staging area and theater of operations.”²⁶⁶

This chapter examines ancestry testing advertisements to interrogate the ways genetic genealogy imaginaries invoke this responsibility for de-racialization and impose it on the very people who have not had access to subjectivity under Humanism in the appeal to multiracial cosmopolitanism. I contend that in genetic ancestry testing advertisements, ‘admixture’ in

²⁶³ Fred Moten, “Notes on Passage (The New International of Sovereign Feelings),” *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 3, Issue 1 (2014), 52.

²⁶⁴ Moten, “Notes on Passage,” 52.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 52, 53

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 53

population genetic science is made to rhetorically appear as the celebrated figure of an antiblack miscegenated and cosmopolitan future. In an effort to rethink admixture as the conduit to scientifically authorized multicultural racial capitalism, this chapter will think through Blackness as the deracinated ontologically incapacitated medium of communication. From this vantage point I examine the ways in which genetic genealogy imaginaries cohere a neoliberal, humanist, and multi-post-racial future that nonetheless re-elaborates Black fungibility.

All advertisements discussed in this chapter are produced for AncestryDNA; AncestryDNA is the largest for-profit genetic genealogy company in the world and regularly receives high rankings for its genetic genealogy products.²⁶⁷ While other DNA analysis companies, most notably 23andMe, have focused a great deal of their marketing on DNA testing for genetic health risks, AncestryDNA has focused its DNA analysis products on genetic genealogy. As of 2019, AncestryDNA's blog boasts that the company has provided DNA results to more than 15 million customers, far above its competitors.²⁶⁸ The high ratings for the company are due in large part to the fact that it is understood to have the largest DNA database and database of historical genealogical records with which to assist genealogy seekers.²⁶⁹ Here I am especially concerned with advertisements that draw on the technique of historical narrativization to produce a sense of temporal and inherited continuity with past figures or events and advertisements that produce a sense of spatial continuity across multicultural and multiracial geographies.

²⁶⁷ Molly McLaughlin, "The Best DNA Testing Kits for 2020," *PC Mag*, last modified January 22, 2020, <https://www.pcmag.com/picks/the-best-dna-testing-kits>.

²⁶⁸ Ancestry Team, "Ancestry Surpasses 15 Million DNA Customers," Ancestry, May 31, 2019, <https://blogs.ancestry.com/ancestry/2019/05/31/ancestry-surpasses-15-million-dna-customers>.

²⁶⁹ See Dieter Holger, "AncestryDNA review: The largest DNA database for finding relatives and heritage," *PCWorld*, November 21, 2018, <https://www.pcworld.com/article/3302381/ancestrydna-review.html>; Ancestry, "Ancestry Company Facts," Ancestry, accessed April 1 2020, <https://www.ancestry.com/corporate/about-ancestry/company-facts>.

This chapter examines three Ancestry DNA advertisements.²⁷⁰ First, I examine “Courtney’s Story,” as a text which draws a continuity between Black descendants of slaves and a romanticized Africa. Here racial and gender politics come together to produce an affective connection that eclipses the Middle Passage as a structuring event and interpolates Black women on each side of the Atlantic into disciplining discourses of development. Drawing on Hartman and Spivak I use Black feminism and post-colonial theory to explain how genetic genealogy imaginaries are shown to be implicated in neoliberal multiculturalism that figures the historicized genetic subject as a cosmopolitan citizen while simultaneously producing differential mobilities for subaltern others. I then examine “Anthem,” a montage advertisement that juxtaposes “Courtney’s Story” and other advertisements into a panorama of differentiated human history. Ferreira da Silva and Wilderson’s insights into scientific signification and the ontological incapacity of Indigenous and Slave positionality are used to explain the violent erasures that occur as the advertisement structurally adjusts the racial other into its humanist spacetimes. Thus, “World History” and “Human History” are shown to be violent operations. Finally, I examine “Inseparable,” a controversial advertisement which Ancestry DNA pulled after outrage at its romanticization of interracial sexual relations in the antebellum south. Here I draw on Black feminism and Sexton’s critique of multiracialism to articulate the temporal violence of genetic genealogy’s production of a naïvely celebrated multiracial and miscegenated future.

²⁷⁰ As of April 2020, all advertisements discussed in this chapter except for “Inseparable” can be found on ispot.tv. “Inseparable” has been pulled from most websites. This chapter provides a link to that video later in this chapter.

4.1 Finding and Forgetting Your (Queen) Mother: Courtney's Story

“Courtney’s Story” is an AncestryDNA advertisement that aired in 2018.²⁷¹ As of the writing of this dissertation, a supplemental advertisement featuring Courtney’s testimony is featured on the Ancestry.com website, suggesting that this advertisement is especially significant to AncestryDNA’s marketing program and its vision of what its genetic genealogy products offer to both Black and non-Black consumers. It also speaks to the importance of “Black DNA” for genetic genealogy in a multiracial/multicultural globalized political economy.

“Courtney’s Story” features Courtney, who appears to be a light-skinned, perhaps mixed-race, Black woman,²⁷² who discovers that “3%” of her ancestry is of the peoples of the “Ivory Coast/Ghana,” specifically from the Akan region. The thirty second video begins with a close-up shot from the back of an African woman, positioning the viewer as following behind, or we might say in the footsteps of, this figure of history who made possible Courtney’s existence. Percussion music that evokes a feeling of being in a far off primitive African landscape sets the mood as the camera moves to a long-shot in which we watch a group of dark-skinned peoples in traditional garb walk in a mountainous desert to a large clay structure, where they encounter another group

²⁷¹ A subsequent advertisement that provides a “behind the scenes” look at Courtney’s story is featured on Ancestry.com’s website as of March 23, 2020. In that video, Courtney provides a testimonial of her experience taking the test and the importance of discovering the “matrilineal societies” of the Akan region.

²⁷² I have identified Courtney as a mixed-race Black woman, not because she identifies herself as such (we do not know Courtney’s racial or gender self-identity from this advertisement, though Courtney identifies herself as “African-American” in her separate testimonial), but because the advertisement presents Courtney as a mixed-race Black woman through the emphasis on her African ancestry and the connection to the matrilineal governing structures of pre-modern African society. Her pie chart shows that her ancestry is comprised of both European and African groupings. Though both historical and imagined racial mixing is a central and violent inheritance of the African diaspora, many Black people obviously resist “mixed-raced” or “interracial” labeling, and I do not seek to impose it on Black people here. Instead, I identify Courtney as “mixed-raced Black” because the advertisement makes her intelligible as such. The colorism implicit in the advertisement through the presentation of her as an attractive light-skinned interracial person juxtaposed to the dark-skinned African of the past situates Courtney within the popular mixed-raced discourses of our time. I am arguing that it is the advertisement itself that renders Courtney intelligible as a mixed-raced Black woman, regardless of personal identification.

of dark-skinned Africans. They have entered a meeting space, where presumably important political matters will be discussed and negotiated. As we follow this coming together, Courtney voices over the video a love letter to her ancestors:

“Dear foremothers, your society was led by a woman, who governed thousands, commanded armies, yielded to no one. When I found you in my DNA, I learned where my strength comes from.”²⁷³

Behind the imposing African matriarch stands her people, one wielding a sheathed knife who the camera focuses on as Courtney says, “commanded armies,” and the group’s members come face to face with others on the other side of the meeting space. These men²⁷⁴ on the “other side” are made to submit, to literally sit down, before the authority of the woman-leader who “yielded to no one,” and with whom the viewer is brought “face-to-face” in a close-up shot as Courtney says, “When I found you.” The camera then transitions from the close-up of the African woman-leader’s face to Courtney’s face as she stands in a picturesque wherever looking optimistically into an unseen distance—which we can imagine is the future—proud and armed with her heritage that is the source of her strength. Next to Courtney a pie chart labeled “Courtney’s AncestryDNA Results,” is drawn on the screen, revealing Courtney’s ancestry make-up as 31% “Ireland and Scotland,” 16% “England and Wales,” 15% “Cameroon (Congo & Bantu),” 14% “Benin/Togo,” 9% “Mali,” 3% “Ivory Coast/Ghana,” and an unmarked percent “Other.”

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Once again, we know they are “men” not because contemporary gender configurations would be sensical in pre-modern Africa, but because the video spatializes these figures in a binarism to the woman-leaders who are Courtney’s foremothers. They are apparently on the “other side” of the meeting.

We know that the scene we have just witnessed is a depiction of a spacetime signified by “Ivory Coast/Ghana” because this section of the pie chart has been highlighted and a map of the Akan region of present-day Ghana appears next to it. A little investigation into the gender relations of the Akan region will quickly reveal that the source of the inspiration for this historical reenactment is the *Ohemaa*, a political and social position of great import in pre-colonial West Africa. *Ohemaa*, or “female king” in Twi and “Queen Mother” in its colonial English translation, designates a position in the Akan system of chieftancy through which women rulers played a pivotal role in the social and political order in pre-modern West Africa.²⁷⁵ Chieftancy is “an indigenous system of Akan governance with executive, judicial, and legislative powers.”²⁷⁶ In matrilineal Akan society, *Ahemmaa* or Queen Mothers “are female monarchs in a hierarchical social system with a central authority that is lineage based and characterized by gender parallelism.”²⁷⁷ Within the system of chieftancy, Queen Mothers wield dual-power alongside chiefs, having advising roles as well as authority in performing ceremonies, the nomination of new chiefs, and conflict arbitration.²⁷⁸ Furthermore, Queen Mothers serve as the possessors of wisdom, morality, and traditional knowledge and genealogy of the people, and embody the responsibility for the welfare of their villages or larger constituencies, especially where it concerns women and children.

²⁷⁵ Marijke Streegstra notes that *Ohemaa* in Twi did not refer to all Queen Mothers of different status, but only the paramount Queen Mother. There are different terms for Queen Mothers of different stations, but in the English all stations are designated as Queen Mother. See Marijke Streegstra, “Krobo Queen Mothers: Gender, Power, and Contemporary Female Traditional Authority in Ghana,” *Africa Today* 55, no. 3 (Spring 2009), 105-106. See also, Beverly J. Stoeltje, “Asante Queen Mothers: A Study in Female Authority,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 810, no. 1 (1997), 52.

²⁷⁶ George Bob-Milliar, “Chieftancy, Diaspora, and Development: The Institution of Nk suohene in Ghana,” *African Affairs* 108, no. 433 (2009): 543.

²⁷⁷ Stoeltje, “Asante Queen Mothers: A Study in Female Authority,” 49.

²⁷⁸ See Stoeltje, “Asante Queen Mothers: A Study in Female Authority,” and Beverly J. Stoeltje, “Asante Queen Mothers: Precolonial Authority in a Postcolonial Society,” *Institute of African Studies Research Review* 19, no. 2 (2003), 1-19.

Though chieftancy has proven to be resilient, surviving waves of European colonization and imperial ambition, it has not survived without modification, particularly in response to changing political economies. While Queen Mothers today retain their relevance and their ties with the pre-colonial past, the violent imposition of European colonial gender and juridical and economic architectures in West Africa suppressed the role of the Queen Mother while incorporating (what were perceived to be) male roles and destabilized the pre-contact chieftancy system in its absorption into colonial governance.²⁷⁹ As a result, Queen Mothers today wield considerably less political power than they did in pre-colonial Ghana and the Ivory Coast. The use of the figure of the Queen Mother in “Courtney’s Story,” especially when Courtney’s racial admixture would seem to suggest that there are other potential lineages to narrativize, indicates the extent to which genetic technoscientific imaginaries are shaped by the disavowed legacies of conquest, colonization, and slavery. The selection of this narrative also indicates the ways in which romantic depictions of Black genetic genealogy imaginaries capitalize on natal alienation.

What do we make of this imagined re-enactment of a matriarchal African society and what does it suggest about the figurations of racialized spacetimes genetic genealogy promises to the mixed-raced Black person of the present? The close-up of the woman-leader that transitions to the close-up of Courtney’s face can be read as a moment of what Deleuze and Guattari call “faciality.” “The face is a politics,” which is not so much a universal or an ideology as much as it is a particular organization of power that is the representational system of the Human that organizes other faces, other subjectivizations or normalities, and their deviants (“child, woman, mother, man, father,

²⁷⁹ See Stoeltje, “Asante Queen Mothers: Precolonial Authority in a Postcolonial Society,” and Kathleen M. Fallon, *Democracy and the Rise of Women’s Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

boss, teacher, police officer”).²⁸⁰ In the advertisement, Courtney, woman-leader, and genetic ancestry testing—which is also given a face in and as the pie chart that evokes scientific objectivity—are drawn into a continuity through faciality, suggesting that genetic ancestry testing reveals the truth of the racialized historical subject; here the crystallization of identity in the advertisement serves as a template of the self-same construction of racialized identity and historicism with which genetic genealogy works through the assemblages of racial capitalism, colonization, capture, enslavement and scientific signification, saturating and overcoding space and time with seductive meaning, which is to say, affectively calling its spacetime forth.²⁸¹

The continuity produced in the advertisement promises to close the breach of the Middle Passage, affectively playing on yearning Black folk of the diaspora experience. For diasporic Black folk, Ghana and the Asante have long occupied an important place in the Black collective memory of pan-Africanism. In this context, there is no doubt that “Courtney’s Story” plays on diasporic Black sensitivities to the legacy of Marcus Garvey’s Back to Africa Movement, of the Black internationalism of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X; and, especially in the context of Ghana, of the centrality of the “Gold Coast” in the storing and shipping of slaves in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but also of the anti-colonial war waged by Queen Mother Yaa Asantewaa, and of Kwame Nkrumah’s inspiration to U.S. Black liberation movement and his call for the descendants of slaves to return ‘home’ and “assist in the development of the first ‘Black’ nation

²⁸⁰ Deleuze and Guattari also locate the face at year zero, privileging Christ as the face. Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 181; 168.

²⁸¹ Though I do not want to assume the vitalism of Deleuze and Guattari’s politics, I highlight faciality in this advertisement’s cinematic techniques to indicate that the importance of thinking through the visual rhetoric at work here not only according to its diegetic “content,” but as an expression of the Humanist regime of signification that ontologizes racial otherness by submitting difference to identity.

south of the Sahara to break off the colonial chains.”²⁸² “Courtney’s Story” affectively taps into this sensitivity—as well as popular belief in the royal lineage of the diaspora—for uncritical and deradicalizing ends, offering scientific positivism and historical plentitude as the salve for the pain of the Middle Passage. Here genetic genealogy shows itself as historically revisionist, as it tropes Black radical traditions, as well as cultural skepticisms regarding civil society or outright non-integrationist stances, and instead turns Black desires for dignity toward neoliberal subjectivization and governance.

Genetic genealogy imaginaries in this case put collective memory to work in the service of a global capitalist economy. Hartman reminds us that some forms of public memory are more a forgetting than they are a remembering. She provides a prescient cautionary tale regarding the promises of genetic genealogy, where those promises tap into Black anxieties regarding status and personhood. In the 1990s, the Ghana Ministry of Tourism and the Museum and Monuments Board directed a tourism industry of slavery remembrance “for the ten thousand black tourists who visited the country every year hungering for knowledge of slave ancestors.”²⁸³ The state sanctioned public remembrance rituals as well as “the cottage industries in slave route tourism,” indicate for Hartman a lost opportunity for genuine reckoning with the impact of slavery on the peoples existing on both sides of the Atlantic.²⁸⁴ Remembering slavery in these enactments “became a

²⁸² I want to note that Kwame Nkrumah was of course forcibly removed from power through a CIA-backed coup, as his anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist politics threatened U.S. and European interests in Africa. The United States, before and after Nkrumah, has proven itself more than willing to violently intervene in affairs elsewhere in order to ensure its future imperial ambitions. In this sense, the speculative future authorized through the active erasures of the past depicted in “Courtney’s Story” easily aligns with the United States’ contemporary imperial ambitions and speculations. On the U.S. involvement in the coup, see Seymour M. Hersh, “C.I.A. Said to Have Aided Plotters Who Overthrew Nkrumah in Ghana,” *New York Times*, May 9, 1978, <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/05/09/archives/cia-said-to-have-aided-plotters-who-overthrew-nkrumah-in-ghana.html>.

²⁸³ Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 162.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

potent means of silencing the past in the very guise of preserving it, since it effectively curbed all discussion of African slavery and its entailment—class exploitation, gender inequality, ethnic clashes, and regional conflict.”²⁸⁵ While Black tourists hope for a reconciliation and a heritage, the enactments continue to enable Ghana to leave slavery’s import resolutely in the past, cleansing the country’s implication in that history and serving as a technique for profiting off it—this history which had once enriched the Akan region and directly impacts its contemporary struggles in the global present. Hartman poignantly explains,

“The heirs of slaves wanted a past of which they could be proud, so they conveniently forgot the distinctions between the rulers and the ruled and closed their eyes to slavery in Africa. They pretended their ancestors had once worn the king’s vestments and assumed the grand civilization of the Asante as their own. They preferred to overlook the fact that the Asantehene (king of Asante) had helped to shove their ancestors onto slave ships and refused to admit royal power emanated from ‘the abuse of human beings and things.’ It was comic and tragic at the same time.... The story of slavery fabricated for African Americans had nothing to do with the present struggles of most Ghanaians. What each community made of slavery and how they understood it provided little ground for solidarity. African Americans wanted to regain their African patrimony and to escape racism in the United States. Ghanaians wanted an escape from the impoverishment of the present, and the road to freedom, which they most often imagined, was migration to the United States. African Americans entertained fantasies of return and Ghanaians of

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 164.

departure. From where we each were standing, we did not see the same past, nor did we share a common vision of the Promised Land.”²⁸⁶

The enactment of public memory in slavery tourism itself participated in bifurcation of those who were marked with the stain of having been descended from slaves and those who, in part because of class-relations internal to the Akan, were not. Lost in these enactments of public memory were the very exploitative class-relations that facilitated the slave trade and its afterlives for both Ghanaians and the diaspora. In its promises to overcome the wound of the Middle Passage, genetic genealogy thus draws the stateless Black figure into the fold of tourism and the (post-)Westphalian cosmopolitan order.

4.2 The Call to Neoliberal Multiculturalism

Reading the advertisement’s temporal and spatial configurations requires that we situate its recuperation of the Queen Mother figure in contemporary operations and discourses of imperial capitalism, neocolonialism, conquest, and slavery. Though chieftancy has been a mechanism for socio-economic community building and resource allocation even in pre-colonial and post-colonial eras (in the present-day, eighty percent of land in Ghana is held in trust and managed by traditional local authorities), today chieftancy is directed toward development as one of its central tasks.²⁸⁷ The figure of the Queen Mother has become the target of “Gender and Development” initiatives and financial instruments such as microfinance, as women in the global south experience “unprecedented visibility as objects of global governance and [have become] the public ‘faces’ of

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 164-5.

²⁸⁷ Bob-Milliar, “Chieftaincy, Diaspora, and Development,” 543.

international development.”²⁸⁸ Queen Mothers are celebrated recipients of microloans and other instruments because it is expected that they have a form of responsibility and attachment for the well-being of local communities and economies, especially in concerns of housing, healthcare, transportation, employment and local arbitration. Queen Mothers “represent a mode of economic agency that is more responsible, altruistic, and therefore conducive to sustainable, post-crisis capitalism.”²⁸⁹

Gender and development initiatives link liberal imperialist humanitarianism under the guise of Western conceptions of gender and sexuality to the imperatives of the market and security apparatuses, justifying structural adjustment and Western military intervention in the name of “human security.”²⁹⁰ As state-sponsored economic activity shifts to the regulation of social reproduction according to market rationalities, women “constitute a reserve of ‘untapped’ human capital [which] results in the promotion of a range of biopolitical interventions to instill market mentalities and shape market-compatible subjectivities.”²⁹¹ The gendered and racialized discourses of human capital are subjectivizing, as the figure of the underdeveloped woman becomes the extractive site for international development under neoliberal economic rationalities.

Transformed into a feminized entrepreneurial subject for the extraction of profits, women of the global south are brought once again into the credit system, compelled to seek credit for the debt of colonialism (and especially in the context of West Africa, slavery, which cannot be disimbricated from colonialism in the context of sub-Saharan Africa) and are made responsible for

²⁸⁸ Sydney Calkin, “‘Tapping’ Women for Post-Crisis Capitalism: Evidence From the 2012 World Development Report,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 17, no. 4 (2015), 611.

²⁸⁹ Calkin, “‘Tapping’ Women for Post-Crisis Capitalism,” 614.

²⁹⁰ Zubairu Wai, “The empire's new clothes: Africa, liberal interventionism and contemporary world order,” *Review of African Political Economy*, 41:142 (2014), 483-499.

²⁹¹ Calkin, “‘Tapping’ Women for Post-Crisis Capitalism,” 612.

resolving the irreparable debt that the World's existence owes to race-making and gendering violence into the good debt that is continually produced and re-elaborated through the structural adjustment programs and relations of indebtedness African nations and others are made to bear in the world-system. Queen Mothers, who are increasingly celebrated by the West for a number of activities, including caring for HIV positive community members, developing microfinanced economic cooperatives, speaking out against "female genital mutilation," and generally "bringing social and economic changes to women and children across the country and the continent," index the process by which "empowerment-based development initiatives" and the feminized form of human capital "aim[s] to responsabilize the woman as an 'entrepreneur of herself' who carries out self-care and the care of others through (unpaid) social reproductive labor."²⁹²

"Courtney's Story" reveals the manner in which genetic genealogy subscribes to racialized and gendered temporalities that collapse past(s) and present(s) into a globalized multicultural (and multiracial) cosmopolitanism that commoditizes natal alienation, evacuates ethics for the morality of the historical and economic credit-debt system, and depoliticizes migration as the necessary and inevitable dislocation of peoples rather than the outcome of past and ongoing Settler/Master logics. It is important to remember that the very operations of imperial racial capitalism which seek out and target women and girls of the global south for "human capital-building interventions" are the same operations which dislocate populations that appear at and inside the borders of Western nations as immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.²⁹³ Remarking on the ways in which

²⁹² Veronique Mistiaen, "The formidable Queen Mothers of Ghana: 10,000 amazing women who are taking back their power and driving change," *Thomson Reuters Foundation News*, December 18, 2015, <https://news.trust.org/item/20151218102419-eo2kt>; Calkin, "'Tapping' Women for Post-Crisis Capitalism," 617-8.

²⁹³ Calkin, "'Tapping' Women for Post-Crisis Capitalism," 616.

neocolonialism through development transforms radical alterity into the “other woman” of an imagined global civil-society, Spivak says,

“Modernization was international. Postmodernization is global. The boundaries of nation-states are now increasingly inconvenient, yet must be reckoned with, because the limits and openings of a particular civil society are state-fixed. The globalization of capital requires a post-state system. The use of women in its establishment is the universalization of feminism of which the United Nations is increasingly becoming the instrument. In this re-territorialization the collaborative international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are increasingly being called an international civil society, precisely to efface the role of the state as agent of social redistribution. Saskia Sassen has located a new ‘economic citizenship’ of power and legitimation in the finance capital markets. Thus, elite, upwardly mobile, generally academic women of the new diasporas join hands with similar women in the so-called developing world to celebrate a new global public or private ‘culture’ often in the name of the underclass or the rural poor as ‘other.’”²⁹⁴

As Courtney in the advertisement is placed into identarian unity with the Queen Mother and her ancestral matrilineal society, Courtney also comes to represent the imperative of Western imperial feminism that “reconceptualize[s] girls and women as misallocated capital [and] has been one of the primary ways that ‘femocrats’ and advocates have been able to successfully sell gender expertise to policy makers.”²⁹⁵ Spivak, in thinking the question of ethics for the “other woman” suggests that there is an impossible ethical relation to radical alterity in something like “Courtney’s Story.”

²⁹⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 100.

²⁹⁵ Calkin, “‘Tapping’ Women for Post-Crisis Capitalism,” 616.

Genetic genealogy seeks to render the gift of ancestry—which I consider to be the bad debt of Blackness that cannot be redeemed because what is represented as African continuity is what has been ruptured in the Middle Passage—into the gift of heritage through the given datum of Black DNA ‘admixture’ and indigenous African DNA (‘isolate of history’) coalesced into a coherent whole of globalized citizenship. For Spivak, there is a gap, or what she calls a “fracture,” in capitalism’s presumed relationship between the global image produced through development and the multicultural image of immigration, where the gendered subaltern “facing the global directly, falls through.”²⁹⁶ Genetic genealogy shares in capitalism’s narrative of global cosmopolitanism which subjectivizes through both images, inviting us (which is to say, demanding of us) to become the postcolonial, multicultural economic-citizen of global civil society who is also the “‘woman’ trainer of other women to become ‘woman,’ eligible for benevolence, ‘development’ coded loosely as ethical-political action.”²⁹⁷

“Courtney’s Story” shapes and is shaped by the global racial formation Jodi Melamed terms “neoliberal multiculturalism.” This more recent iteration of racial capitalism reconfigures and obscures the exploitative and biopolitical procedures of neoliberalism under the guise of antiracism, cultural inclusion, and representational politics. The institutional complexes of neoliberal multiculturalism are diffuse, including U.S. and global universities, “institutions of international civil society (the United Nations, international NGOs, think tanks, and global media), and... those of global economy and security (international regulatory agencies, multi-state alliances, and multinational corporate entities).”²⁹⁸ Genetic genealogy, and population genomics

²⁹⁶ Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, 103.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁹⁸ Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 44.

writ large, too serves as a material-semiotic apparatus of neoliberal multiculturalism. We can again look to genome mapping projects' and DNA testing companies' professed representational politics of 'antiracialism' and 'data democratization' that simultaneously (and under this racial regime, necessarily) facilitate the extraction of bioinformatic surplus value from consumers, while privatizing genetic information for race-based pharmaceutical and forensic development. Neoliberal multiculturalism conditions the post-genomic age, imbuing it with a racial sensibility that promotes neoliberal agendas as the key to a post-racist world of freedom and opportunity, while normalizing global operations of exploitation, extraction, and incarceration.

"Courtney's Story" educates us in this new racial sensibility as well; as Black women on both sides of the Atlantic are interpellated according to neoliberal rationalities (being the asymmetrical mirror image/face of each other), the advertisement also places the viewer-cum-prosumer in "an order of similitude [with these figures] that conjures a neoliberal-multicultural universal and an order of difference that explains the exclusion of some persons on the basis of their unfitness for neoliberal-multicultural subjectivity."²⁹⁹ One implication of this reading is that though the advertisement is made in order to appeal to Black roots seekers at the level of shared racial identity, capitalizing as it does on natal alienation and racial uplift narratives, it is *also* designed to appeal to non-Black viewers who are interpellated through the codes of multiculturalism which saturate the text, and who are affectively and subjectively rewarded for their interracial/multicultural identification. "Courtney's Story" is emblematic of the process by which genetic genealogy's technoscientific imaginary interpellates both Black and non-Black

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 141.

viewers as putative “multicultural world citizens” made so through the consumption of genetic information that produces and demarcates racialized global geographies.³⁰⁰

4.3 Ontological Incapacity in the Panorama of Genetic Histories

The AncestryDNA advertisement “Ancestry Stories: Anthem” (“Anthem”) aired in 2018 and during the 72nd Annual Tony Awards on CBS. It consists of a montage of clips from four other historical re-enactment advertisements, including “Courtney’s Story.” Other source advertisements featured in the montage include: “Ancestry Stories: Heidi” (“Heidi”), about a white prohibition-era bootlegging great-great-grandfather who was eventually captured by the law; “Joseph’s Story,” about unspecified Native American ancestors who were “pushed out of [their] homeland”; and “Joshua’s Story,” about a Portuguese great-grandfather who fled from unspecified persecution to the Americas.

The “Anthem” montage cuts to various source advertisements as background piano music creates a sentimental mood. A masculine sounding voice rhythmically guides us through the ancestral scenes. The voice begins “If you knew,” as a clip from “Courtney’s Story” depicts a long shot of African people in the desert approaching a structure, and then continues: “that your great grandfather built an empire,” while showing an image of a white man in a distillery from “Heidi.” The voice then says, “or that your great-grandmother fought one,” as it returns to “Courtney’s Story,” and an image of the woman-led collective entering a building opposite the collective of men. “If you knew they stayed strong in a time of pain,” the voice continues further,

³⁰⁰ Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 146.

with scenes from “Josephs Story” showing a group of Native Americans trekking by foot through snowy woods, led by a white man on horse before cutting to a woman carrying a child on her back, and then to a tanned man with pleated black hair. As the narration adds, “or wild in the face of the law,” we see a man from “Heidi” running from sirens being captured by law enforcement, and then crying out in pain as they cuff him. “If you knew how they fled the old world to build a new one,” the narration offers as we are shown a man in a powdered wig from “Joshua’s Story” running, and the camera cuts to long shot of a 17th century ship, alone, sailing the ocean. Continuing with its direct address to the viewer, the narrator adds again “and never let anyone tell them no” as the camera looks into the face of the Queen Mother from “Courtney’s Story,” with her people behind her, and cuts to an image of a standing man who moves to sitting down. “If you knew what they did,” the narrator implores the viewer once again, as the ad depicts Courtney’s face staring in the distance with expectation and resolve, “what would you do?” At this last question, the camera pans to a non-descript blurred backdrop, where imprinted are the words, “ancestry. Unlock your past. Inspire your future.”

The montage is meant to inspire in the viewer a feeling of unity, a sense of shared history that comes from sharing in the fact of having a genetic/genealogical inheritance. Significantly, each of the component stories concerns a conflict or struggle and a moment of represented or implied suffering; suffering here not only serves to dramatize and hold the attention of the viewer, but also invests the viewer in the Humanism of what Wilderson calls “cartographic coherence,” possessing the capacity for time (historical) and space (cultural) coherence.³⁰¹ The advertisements’ deployment of the ontological descriptors of universality and historicity implicate it in the rehearsal of the transparency thesis thus: the racial/cultural (which here is the apparent

³⁰¹ Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*, 181.

givenness of geographic human variation) is incorporated into history (which is here conflict and resolution) in a transcendentalizing movement which resolves in a multicultural amalgamation, that ontologizes itself as “World History,” when it is in fact, “Human History,” the Master/Settler temporality.

This process of *transcendental poesis*, which Ferreira da Silva identifies with Hegel’s historicism, rehearses the transparency thesis which writes the post-Enlightenment European subject as the apex of self-determination and representational truth, and writes the racial other as affectable, outer-determined subjectivity. Thus, AncestryDNA’s call to “unlock your past [and] inspire your future,” merely invites one to re-elaborate the modern onto-epistemological text. This is what the advertisement has already signified (and as a future-worlding project) through *transcendental poesis* and what, under this grammar, it is precisely impossible for the nonhuman to do. The racial other that is seemingly brought into transparency—or in Wilderson’s language structurally adjusted—cannot actually achieve self-determination, as it is the very forms of thought, wor(l)d-order, and spacetime of Man, which is ontologized. That is why no matter how much a popular Black imaginary thinks the diaspora as descended from Kings and Queens, it will not change the ontological incapacity that conditions Black existence, but which also gestures toward the (im)possible outside of the very ontology that would have non-European modalities of existence transmogrified by Eurocentric conceptions of monarchism.

Though the snapshot histories depicted here are not representative of all racial types with which we could imagine a given viewer might identify, they nonetheless are indicative of a universality through which the advertisement specifically, and the genetic genealogy imaginary generally, serves as a technique for the production of the World of Man. It is the advertisement’s deployment of the modern ontological descriptors of universality and historicity that implicate it

in the rehearsal of the transparency thesis. Let us look at it another way. The technique of montage produces what Jared Sexton calls “a chain of equivalents,” as the grammars of fungibility and accumulation that constitute the (non-)position of the Slave/Black, and the grammars of genocide and sovereignty that constitute the position of the ‘Savage’/Native are flattened into the spacetime of the Master/Settler, whose grammars of exploitation and alienation organize and dramatize the entire ensemble.³⁰² First, the montage suggests that the ongoing violence of genocide and land theft that structurally conditions Native existence can be rendered in the same idiom of conflict as the European settler who “emigrated” from the “Old World” to the “New World,” which is to say, genocidally settled and colonized the world and peoples that already inhabited it. That Native DNA is made to index the loss of homeland, while European DNA is made to index the project of empire building (twice actually, since the bootlegger’s criminality is valorized as the building of an empire) reveals the libidinal desire for genocide that constitutes Settler subjectivity. The advertisement’s “move to settler innocence,” in its assumption of reconciliation, situates the ‘Savage’ and the Slave within the same ethical register as the Settler, which is itself a genocidal operation that writes settlement and genocide into the future.³⁰³ The advertisement thus effects a “crowding out, or disavowal [of] the genocide modality [which] allows the Settler/’Savage’ struggle to appear as a conflict rather than as an antagonism.”³⁰⁴

Scenes from “Courtney’s Story” are depicted more often than any other advertisement in “Anthem.” “Courtney’s Story” also indexes a structural antagonism that is disavowed through the recuperative and incorporative adjustments to the Humanist grammar. In this case, the Slave,

³⁰² Jared Sexton, “People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery,” 48. On the grammars of Slave, Savage, and Master/Settler, see Wilderson III, *Red White Black*.

³⁰³ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012).

³⁰⁴ Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black*, 153.

constituted in the grammars of fungibility and accumulation, is brought into equivalence with the grammars of exploitation and alienation that constitute the Master. However, unlike “Joseph’s Story,” which dramatizes genocide and land dispossession, “Courtney’s Story,” elides any confrontation with the violence of slavery, instead centering this dramatization on the image of African female royalty, as described earlier in this chapter. It is as if there could be no narrative that could recuperate becoming-human cargo destined for the hold of slave ship, no language with which to resolve the ethical dilemma inaugurated in the largest forced migration in history, to step through the Door of No Return and then turn the camera back toward life on the continent.³⁰⁵ The Slave has no heritage and no presumption of cartographic coherence.

Instead, the advertisement turns toward the presumptive African subject. Except that her awesome display of power will not be wielded against some external threat—say, against the British colonizers. We are given no Queen Mother Nana Yaa Asantewaa leading her army against British rule, shooting whites in the face. If, in viewing “Courtney’s Story” there was still ambiguity about what meaning to ascribe to the gathering depicted, in “Anthem,” it becomes clear that intramural gender conflict characterizes the scene. While the bootlegger builds a criminal empire in “Anthem,” the Queen Mother is given the honor of fighting an “empire” of African men. The Queen Mother yields to no one, and never takes no for an answer; thus, in this scene the man who has been checked, subserviently takes his seat. Why is this fairly mild display of authority and deference narrativized in “Anthem” in the idiom of war or struggle? This scene is striking not

³⁰⁵ This is not to suggest that there are no representations of slavery. There are obviously slave narratives and narrativizations of slavery in multiple media formats. But even in these cases, narrativization is circumscribed. What I hope to signal here is not that one cannot attempt to represent slavery, but rather that the grotesque scale of terror and violence of the Middle Passage exceeds representation. And in any case, dramatizing captivity would not make for a very romantic advertisement. Hartman has developed “critical fabulation” as a method for working through the archival impasse. On archival (im)possibility and critical fabulation, see Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008).

only because of its evasion of the ethical dilemmas inaugurated in the Middle Passage that produced the diasporic Black root seekers the advertisement is meant to address, but because of the deployment of the trope of the Black Matriarch in the depiction of matrilineal Asante society.

In “Courtney’s Story” and “Anthem” Black female power is celebrated, but only insofar as that power can be exercised against Black men. As antagonism is crowded-out, so too is the Master/Slave struggle. Black men are figured as Black women’s primary adversary while Black women are made the source of Black emasculation. The gender pathologization troped onto Black relation here cannot be analyzed through the presumption of colonial gender formation. Spillers’ examination of the effects of captivity on gender coherence clarifies the way in which “Courtney’s Story”/“Anthem” re-enact the structuring disavowal of slavery’s conditioning of Black kinship exemplified by the *Moynihan Report*, even as these texts attempt to imaginatively rescue the ex-slave from her natally alienated condition. Borrowed relationality to multicultural cosmopolitans and Master grammars serves to confirm the perversion and pathology of the Black filial, re-laborating the structural condition once again. As Ferreira da Silva explains, projects which turn to universality (science) and interiority (history) as the launching pad for racial justice are bound to fail because the modern grammar which produces racial subjection is onto-epistemological and already assumes raciality in the spatial and temporal configurations designated by universality/science and interiority/history. Thus, multicultural cosmopolitanisms will—however attentive they may be to racial and cultural discriminations and exclusions—reiterate the analytics of raciality that delimit and signify racial difference as immutable and unoblitable and will write the Black subaltern in affectability rather than transparency and self-determination.

If science represents itself as an unassailable order of knowledge through the production of raciality—here understood as the temporal and spatial operation that writes post-Enlightenment

Man as the apex of representational truth—we might say that in genetic ancestry testing imaginaries, science renders itself transparent through the representation of admixture that is then authorized as history. Genetic genealogy confirms that one has a “history” so to speak, and therefore belongs to Humanity and its drama of value.

4.4 The Interracial Desire of Genetic Genealogy

On April 18, 2019, AncestryDNA issued a public apology, which was released to several major U.S., Canadian, and U.K. news publications, after an advertisement drew harsh public criticism for romanticizing interracial sexual relations in slavery.³⁰⁶ “Ancestry is committed to telling important stories from history,” the public statement said. “This ad was intended to represent one of those stories. We very much appreciate the feedback we have received and apologize for any offense that the ad may have caused. We are in the process of pulling the ad from television and have removed it from YouTube.”³⁰⁷

The advertisement, which aired April 2, 2019, is titled “Inseparable.”³⁰⁸ The thirty-second ad features Abigail, an enslaved woman presumably in the 19th century antebellum south, with an unnamed white man who hurriedly proposes that they marry and escape to the north. Having quickly located an alleyway for some modicum of privacy, the man pulls out a ring from a pocket

³⁰⁶ Laura M. Holson, “Ancestry.com Apologizes for Ad Showing Slavery-Era Interracial Couple,” *New York Times (Online)*, Apr 19, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/19/us/ancestry-dna-slavery-commercial.html>.

³⁰⁷ Megan Graham, “Ancestry is pulling ad with apparent slavery-era theme,” *CNBC*, April 18, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/19/ancestry-pulling-disrespectful-ad-with-apparent-slavery-era-theme.html>

³⁰⁸ The video has been taken down on youtube, ispot.tv and most other places. However, you can still view the advertisement here: Sophia Ankel, “An advert on the Ancestry site released an interracial slavery romance advert and people were furious,” *Indy100*, April 19, 2019, <https://www.indy100.com/article/ancestry-advert-romantic-slavery-twitter-backlash-8879081>.

and holds it to his intended's face. "Abigail, we can escape to the north." Abigail begins to mouth, "I don't k—," when the man cuts her off. "There's a place we can be together, across the border." Abigail has been furtively glancing sideways throughout this brief proposal. Her smiles are intermingled with fear. A piercing flute note heightens the anxiety of the scene as the man says to Abigail, "Will you be with me?" As Abigail gathers herself to respond, the scene cuts to black, then appears the statement, "Without you, the story stops here." As the name, "Abigail Williams" appears on the screen, the camera pans back, and in fades a mock-up of a marriage certificate for Abigail Williams and James Miller, dated 9 April 1857, and an old photograph of a black and white couple, framed by an animated laptop.

The advertisement was initially released on AncestryDNA's youtube channel (it has since been removed), aired in Utah, and was supposed to air in Canada and elsewhere in the U.S. before it was canceled.³⁰⁹ By April 18, the ad had sparked outrage on Black twitter; where many saw the advertisement as a historically inaccurate depiction of the violence of slavery, especially where it concerned the sexual violation of enslaved Black women.³¹⁰ While a great many of the white responses on twitter expressed varying levels of hostility to Black criticism of what they perceived to be a plausible and positive depiction of interracial romance, some expressed surprise that so many Black twitter users held a shared sensibility and knowledge of the institution of slavery and had considered how it affected their own sense of lineage—an awareness that, by contrast, revealed the glaring gaps in their own educations. These types of white/non-Black responses are indicative of a general white sensibility regarding anti-Black violence that is conditioned by how the Humanist grammar forecloses the possibility of anti-Black violence rising to the level of an ethical

³⁰⁹ Dream McClinton, "Ancestry pulls ad that appears to romanticize slavery after backlash," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/19/ancestry-slavery-ad-canada-pulled>

³¹⁰ The outrage spread throughout parts of twitter, but we know Black twitter was in that tang.

crisis in civil society. Indeed, I don't think that we can say here that this controversy ever went further than a problem of public relations for AncestryDNA, and it certainly did not produce a wide spread controversy that could be understood to signal a contradiction in civil society. It is however certain that without the organic intellectualism of Black twitter, neither AncestryDNA nor those whites with varying responses would ever have had to consider that there was an issue at all.

In this section I extend this conversation on AncestryDNA's depiction of interracial romance in "Inseparable" to examine the ways in which genetic genealogy figures genetic admixture as interracial desire. I contend that "Inseparable" serves as an example of genetic genealogy's "twin investment in multiracialism" as both empirical (as admixture) and symbolic (as amalgamation).³¹¹ Because DNA testing companies seek out Black DNA for 'clinical' and 'immaterial' labor and because they are "committed to telling important stories from history," they must address the "racial contacts" that genetic admixture signifies. As admixture draws from the tools of scientific signification, they do so by deploying the analytics of raciality developed in the anthropological and sociological texts, namely the "theory of racial contacts" and "race relations cycle," and by evacuating an analytic of violence from the question of racial/genetic admixture in order to produce a coherent narrative of ethical racial encounter.³¹²

"Inseparable" is subtended by an assumptive logic that Blackness is constituted in relations of consent. The narrative presents "forbidden love" where the couple, so passionate in their love for one another, is willing to risk everything for freedom. Freedom is the place across the border, "where we can be together." The geo-political border between slavery and freedom for Abigail—

³¹¹ Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 231.

³¹² On the analytics of raciality, the theory of racial contacts, and the race relations cycle, see Denise Ferreira Da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*.

and only Abigail since the white man is already free—is in this case most likely the Canadian border, since 1857 is also the year of the Dred Scott decision which legally codified the already socially codified potential enslavement of any nominally free Black person in the U.S. north.³¹³ The advertisement also suggests however that “the border” is a border between white and Black interracial intimacy, a border brought about by the anti-miscegenation laws that we are supposed to presume impose themselves from the outside on an otherwise healthy and ethical relationship. In the idiom of multiracialism, genetic genealogy discourse once again deploys the “neoliberal containment strategies of multiculturalism, wherein cultural diversity is managed as a depoliticized term of experience.”³¹⁴

The Slave, however, is not constituted in relations of consent; consent presents itself as an impossibility for the Slave, who is bifurcated as a “property of enjoyment” for the Master—not only the single master who held ownership rights, but for all whites. Enjoyment, Hartman notes, denotes both pleasure and use. In the sentient commodity this enjoyment collapsed pleasure, pain and terror, where not only the pain experienced by the Slave, but even her pleasure became the property of enjoyment for the Master:

Indeed, there was no relation to blackness outside the terms of this use of, entitlement to, and occupation of the captive body, for even the status of free blacks was shaped and compromised by the existence of slavery. Although, as I have argued, enjoyment was predicated on the wanton uses of slave property, it was attributed to the slave in order to

³¹³ Of interest here is that AncestryDNA was said to have also used as excuse for the PR blunder that they had intended to air the commercial mostly in Canada. The admission of intent to target Canadians would seem to suggest that they believed Canadians, being situated on the other side of the historical and metaphorical border, would be especially ready to invest in the racial significations at work here because they already share in the advertisement’s sentimentality of white saviorism and pornotropic desire.

³¹⁴ Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 247.

deny, displace, and minimize the violence of slavery. As a result, in spectacles like the coffle, it appeared not only that the slave was indifferent to his wretched condition, but also that he had nonetheless achieved a measure of satisfaction with that condition. Thus, the efficacy of violence was indicated precisely by its invisibility or transparency and in the copious display of slave agency. Like the imputation of lasciviousness that dissimulated and condoned the sexual violation of the enslaved, and the punitive recognition of will and responsibility that justified punishment while denying the slave the ability to forge contracts, testify, or sustain natal and conjugal relations, enjoyment registered and effaced the violence of property relations.”³¹⁵

If we take seriously the advertisement’s diegetic world, the white man most certainly would not have been prohibited from possessing Abigail because of the ‘border’ of anti-miscegenation. Anti-miscegenation, which was rather meant to regulate contact between white women and Black men (also an instance of the imputation of lasciviousness on the Slave and the negrophobic genital fantasies of whites), did not serve as a limit to white enjoyment (even in the instance of white women who, no less than their men, terrorized, brutalized and raped the enslaved), but rather marked the place of transference of sexual violation into slave agency.

Sexual violation of the Slave, Hartman notes, was not only not understood to be a violation—never rising to any valence of ethical condemnation found in the term “rape”—but, more terrifyingly, such violations were also understood to be fundamentally non-transgressive as the object of desire was transformed into the desiring object, the seductress whose excessive and criminal desire becomes the causality of the violence and punishments inflicted. The trope of seduction is everywhere in the global cultural imaginary, from the figure of the Jezebel (often

³¹⁵ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, 25.

depicted as mulatto, the reproductive issue of unrecognized sexual violation) to the contemporary figure of the promiscuous and over-breeding Welfare Queen, who is somehow at once a Black matriarch and also a leech on state resources. Seduction, Hartman explains, is a ruse of power designed to confer a consenting agency to the mutilated captive only in and as the moment of her own violation. Thus, the agency of consent is granted only insofar as it is also a criminal agency. Here we see the centrality of sexual violation to racial formation, and it is in this sense that Spillers means that Slave-making violence—the direct relations of force that quite materially call the Slave into being—is always sexual violence even as, and especially because, it cannot register as such. The pornotrope, which transmogrifies consent in the very desire for the Slave, names the structures of feeling and suffering where pleasure and pain collapse into one another making violence unrecognizable. “Inseparable” exactly deploys the pornotrope in its conferral of consent to Abigail and the evacuation of the question of violence.

Though “Inseparable” suggests consent by way of the marriage certificate and photo that closes the advertisement, we never get affirmative consent from Abigail. In fact, Abigail can’t even get a word in, as her speech is cut off by the overly passionate pleadings of the white man. Furthermore, the narrative is cut right before the moment of Abigail’s response to his proposal, and thus the advertisement follows the logic, which has been thoroughly subjected to feminist critique, that the absence of a ‘no’ means ‘yes.’ Thinking in the feminist analytic of alienation and exploitation reveals Abigail as a degraded subject, whose silence can be understood as consent. More pointedly, analyzing “Inseparable” in the analytics of fungibility and accumulation provided by afropessimistic critique reveals that the fact that the narrative cut of Abigail’s diegetic response is ultimately irrelevant to her purpose, which is to serve as a resource of enjoyment for white fantasies of interracial transgression. This afropessimistic level of analysis marks the difference

between the transgressive violation of consent that produces a degraded subject who nevertheless enjoys a coherent relationality at the level of contingency and conflict in Humanist feminism, and the incapacity for consent of the fungible Slave that subjects her to gratuitous violence and makes her unrecognizable suffering an exchangeable commodity for Human enjoyment in an antiblack solidarity.

Presumably the creators intended for the abrupt end to the narrative to invite the audience to insert themselves into the story, in effort to transform viewers into future consumers. “Without you the story ends.” Here again is the invitation to occupy the Black female body and use it as a resource for the continuation of “our” own story, which is, in the multiracial/multicultural idiom, Humanity’s story, the amalgamation of all “our” stories unfolding in Human time. This story is not Abigail’s story at all. It is rather just a story of how genetic genealogy can confirm the Master’s subjectivity and a lesson in how the mute Black body serves as the surface for her supposed lover’s monstrous inscription of desire.

Multiracialism follows the dominant racial reasoning that understands racial purity, or anti-miscegenation, as the condition of racial rule and therefore understands race mixture as its solution. This is a presumption shared by both the right and the left, as racial mixing announces (albeit in different valences) the end of racial rule. For example, the white supremacist obsession with “white genocide,” and Far-Right fears of being overtaken by a “minority-majority” presume that miscegenation spells the end of whiteness, while progressives extol the virtues of diversity initiatives and interracial love as forms of anti-racist subversion or reform.

Sexton, in his symptomatic reading of multiracial discourse and politics, examines the affective structures that reveal the political ontology of multiracialism. His interest is not in adjudicating the lived experience of multiracial-identified persons or interracial relationships, but

rather to explain how multiracialism, as a political sensibility and discourse, does exactly that. Multiracialism, Sexton contends, is a form of antiblack solidarity. As we see with “Inseparable,” multiracialism judges and regulates relationality according to the “mythology of the recuperated interracial relationship,” which in its attempts to “cleanse the interracial relationship” of the pornographic returns us to logics of racial and sexual purity.³¹⁶ Seeking the mature, healthy, interracial relationship outside of the relations of force and power that produce both race and the fantasy of interracial relationship, multiracialism designates the pathological and reiterates the binarism of the enlightened European and the primitive African (“‘civilized-savage,’ ‘restrained-promiscuous,’ ‘honest-deceitful’”) that characterizes the antagonisms it seeks to overcome.³¹⁷ The problem in large part is that multiracialism (mis)recognizes the structural antagonism (Black/not-Black) as an issue of whiteness (white/not-white), so that miscegenation can be seen as an attack on presumed purity even as it produces its own politics of purity. Thus, in its attempts to move us beyond race and racism, multiracialism transfers the “vacated acrimony” that characterizes the color line onto Blackness itself.

Multiracialism becomes an antiblack post-racialism, hostile to the perceived intractability of Blackness to move beyond the white-Black binary, imagining the movements for civil rights and Black Power to have been important precursors but no longer relevant to the struggle. Blackness becomes an object of derision, an anachronism that victimizes multiraciality in a sort of reverse-racism. Sexton describes this transference as the demand that Blacks be “deniggerized.”³¹⁸ He continues:

³¹⁶ Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 174,169.

³¹⁷ Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 174.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

“Thus, the constructed commonalty between black and white Americans is... strictly homologous to the social bond that allows the racist communities of white supremacy and antiblackness to cohere in the United States. But it only pretends to be an extension of that bond. Black and white Americans become legitimately attractive to one another, at this level, because they are, in the parlance, not the “niggers” that Africans are supposed to be. We might say that so long as U.S. blacks are “de-niggerized” (Fanon writes poignantly of “denegrification”), the relationship among “Americans” is rendered permissible... However, racism begins and ends in an emotional involvement with the black body. The essence of racism is located in the obsessive attention fixed upon the black body, its imputed sexuality, and the immorality of those who would risk an encounter with it. In this way, racialization and sexualization are inextricable. In order for interracial relationships to be ‘valued in this culture and society’ and ‘triumph over prejudice and taboo,’ the relationship itself must be desexualized and, in a precise way, deracialized, which, as we have seen, requires a distance toward and denigration of blackness.”³¹⁹

In the context of the post-Civil Rights and Black Power era, the myth of the recuperated multiracial relationship reproduces civil society’s injunction against Blackness with the command that Black people dissociate from Blackness and its demands (demands which threaten to discohere multiracialism’s conception of “racial reconciliation”) as the pre-requisite for entering into harmonious relationships with whites and non-Blacks in civil society or in the sexual/romantic relationship. As Fanon says, “Simple enough, one has only not to be a nigger.”³²⁰

³¹⁹ Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 174-5.

³²⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 87.

4.5 Conclusion: Undercosmopolitanism

“Against the grain of (the) man’s brutal self-projections, which often result in the addictive tendency of his others to settle for the settler’s delusional sovereignty, blackness still has the fugal, fugitive, radically imaginative sociopoetic work of refusal to do... This other ana- or extra- or subcosmopolitanism, which will not have been from but rather will have remained below, is proper—in its radical impropriety and expropriative inappropriability—only to the dispossessed and to the trace of the dispossessed, a category whose membership is open, where dispossession is understood within the context of its historical racialization and engendering and ungendering and the ongoing challenge that resistance in and before these processes offers to possessive subjectivity. Thinking the undercosmopolitan requires being circulated. You have to be moved, in having declared that you shall not be.” – Fred Moten, *Notes on Passage*³²¹

In the midst of pervasive anxiety regarding the eclipse of transparent (racially white) nationhood in an increasingly globalized and transnational world, the figure of the amalgamated nation or globality serves once again as a way to celebrate a future way forward in the midst of uncertainty. Genetic genealogy, and population genetics more broadly, both participate in the deconstruction and reconstruction of racial logics, reorganizing the space and time of racialized existence for a biocapitalist multicultural cosmopolitanism. Such a cosmopolitanism never realizes its expressed promise, instead producing uneven modes of mobility and differential modes of citizenship, where the science of logistics inaugurated in the Middle Passage, which still underprivileges Black

³²¹ Fred Moten, “Notes on Passage,” 54.

people, also generalizes its fungiblizing operations of containerization and shipping; where forced migrations produce simultaneous stopping: stopped at the border and the check point, stopped and frisked, stopped and asked to show papers, confined and incarcerated in the prison or in the ghetto or in the camp, keeping in mind that “[s]topping is both a political economy, which is distributed unevenly between others, and an affective economy, which leaves its impressions, affecting those bodies that are subject to its address.”³²² Genetic genealogy participates in and invites us to participate in the worlding operations of racial capitalism, which is whiteness and antiblackness, seeking the exotic flesh or tissue to consume, quite literally at the level of life itself. It is no wonder then that the genetic scientists questing for the “vanishing isolates of history” also disavowed the implication that these “isolates” were “vanishing” because they—and violent world order they brought—kept seeking them.

In such a context, we should think of the obliterating effects of the “miscegenated” future which genetic genealogy tautologically envisions not as an invitation to return to a primordial notion of race purity (which never existed), but as an invitation to consider our interrelationality otherwise. Sexton poses the “event of miscegenation” as a way to think the outside of racializing logics.³²³ The event of miscegenation is not a reference to interracial sex acts or multiracial people, but is rather that space of exteriority which, in its unrepresentability “prevents either appearance from attaining a discernible image or a fixed and stable meaning, whether as object of desire or aggression or both.”³²⁴ To think of the event of miscegenation in terms of population genetics, we might recall the ways in which the technology of admixture both presumes human origin in the “Out of Africa hypothesis” and imposes anachronistic racial types on past migratory patterns that

³²² Sara Ahmed, “A phenomenology of whiteness,” *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007), 161.

³²³ See Sexton, *Amalgamation Scenes*.

³²⁴ Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 194.

cannot be accessed through modern conceptualizations except by way of enacting the scientific racial logics which emerged through conquest and slavery.³²⁵ Genetic genealogy attempts to close the gap between difference and unity by coalescing both terms in a telos of Human History, such that we might think, we have always been mixed *in this way and under these terms*. But the very knowledge that we have not been mixed always in these terms, that we have been racially constituted in coerced and genocidal migratory patterns, that we have been made to migrate under the regimes of civil society and capital, might invite us to think, from the vantage of our very historical embeddedness, of the outside of the modern onto-epistemological text.

The Other presents to the self-possessed transparent subject the possibility of ontological madness and death. For those of us who are already constituted in and through deathly logics (which is, one way or another, all of us), might we consider a way of communing that does not return to the deadly vitalism of present, but instead refuses it? Moten, like many Black feminist new materialists, thinks through Black matter, which is materialized in and through civil society as lawlessness and statelessness, as gesturing toward a different kind of generative principle, a form of life lived underground, that though always under assault, is also militantly preserved in its refusal of incorporation and universality. This is the undercosmopolitan, the figure who, in refusing to be moved and incorporated, is moved and moving as fugitive sociality.

³²⁵ For more on the tautology of racial typing in admixture technology see Fullwiley, “The Biological Construction of Race” and Rajagopalan and Fujimura, “Making History via DNA, Making DNA from History.”

5.0 Conclusion

“If you want to know what the undercommons wants, what Moten and Harney want, what black people, indigenous peoples, queers and poor people want, what we (the “we” who cohabit in the space of the undercommons) want, it is this – we cannot be satisfied with the recognition and acknowledgement generated by the very system that denies a) that anything was ever broken and b) that we deserved to be the broken part; so we refuse to ask for recognition and instead we want to take apart, dismantle, tear down the structure that, right now, limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places that we know lie outside its walls. We cannot say what new structures will replace the ones we live with yet, because once we have torn shit down, we will inevitably see more and see differently and feel a new sense of wanting and being and becoming. What we want after “the break” will be different from what we think we want before the break and both are necessarily different from the desire that issues from being in the break.” – Jack Halberstam, “The Wild Beyond: With and For the Undercommons”³²⁶

“The power to pose the question is the greatest power of all.” – Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*³²⁷

³²⁶ Jack Halberstam, “The Wild Beyond: With and For the Undercommons,” in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2013).

³²⁷ Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black*, ix.

In late 2019, *Business Insider* noted that while sales were slowing for direct-to-consumer genetic ancestry testing, ancestry testing tourism is on the rise, suggesting that—COVID-19 notwithstanding—there is still yet a long life ahead for genetic genealogy.³²⁸ Genetic genealogies’ multiple functions in reparations claims, as a tool for people to claim exotic multiracial identities, or simply to advance one’s own personal genealogical research also suggests that it will remain an important cultural feature. Population genetics writ large, as an assemblage of technologies connected to broader pharmaceutical and bioinformatic industries, will no doubt continue to shape our social, political, and cultural landscape. Genomics, says Kaushik Sunder Rajan, “is a game that is constantly played in the future in order to generate the present that enables that future.”³²⁹ It is more significant therefore that we consider technoscientific imaginaries for their world-making visions than for the durability of a given product. In this dissertation, I therefore examined the rhetorical appropriation, apprehension, and (mis)recognition of Blackness in genetic genealogy imaginaries.

Biotechnology is also deeply implicated in the “speculative maneuver[s]” of financialized neoliberalism which, in seeking to push “life beyond the limits,” generalizes the logic of fungibility across the globe, even at molecular levels of life.³³⁰ The intensification of the logic of fungibility in neoliberalism then suggests that we turn our attention to that figure who is constituted in the grammar of fungibility; those who, in being subjected to that logic of fungibility in the largest forced migration in the world, were reduced to human cargo, and thus inaugurated the logic of fungibility now generalizing itself across the globe. This dissertation thus began with a personal

³²⁸ Wiley, “The golden age of at-home genetic testing may be over — but it's still a critical part of one of the biggest trends in how people will be traveling in 2020,” *Business Insider*, Nov 28, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/ancestry-tourism-travel-trend-genetics-heritage-ancestrydna-23andme-2019-11>.

³²⁹ Rajan, *Biocapital*, 34

³³⁰ Cooper, *Life of Surplus*, 26.

and profound belief in the possibilities of Black matter and a concern for the persistent disavowal of what Blackness can teach us about biocapitalism, biotechnology, and what otherwise possibilities we may yet find in the life lived against all odds under that logic of fungibility.

Inspired by Armond Towns' application of Black feminist new materialism to communication studies and his refiguring of Blackness away from representation towards "communicative medium" informed this study of the genetic technoscientific imaginaries produced through the simultaneous appropriation and disavowal of Blackness. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks provided by afropessimism and Black feminist new materialism and considering questions raised in rhetoric and media studies, this dissertation examined genetic genealogy discourse as it has been figured in popular culture and ancestry testing advertisements. There I found that genetic genealogy imaginaries are indeed invested in a world-making project that mirrors the speculative maneuvers of biotechnology writ large. In this context, genetic genealogy invests and arrests Blackness through motifs of loss and recovery, and an incorporative logic of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. These operations of structural adjustment neither simply forefront a color-conscious politic nor a post-racial one. Instead, these operations are indicative of a racialized command that one assent to deracialization in order to enter the drama of Human value. The movement of loss and recovery is both spatialized and temporalized. As this dissertation's reading of *Watchmen* demonstrates, genetic liberalism temporally figures genetic genealogy as a conduit to the overcoming of intergenerational trauma and the recovery of the filial, thus folding Black potentiality into the spatial operations of the nation, civil society and capital. As this dissertation's reading of AncestryDNA advertisements demonstrate, genetic liberalism figures genetic genealogy spatially as the overcoming of the gap of the middle passage, using spatial operations such as juxtaposition and interracial proximity to figure a deracinated Blackness

within the folds of Human World History. In rhetorical and media sites, Blackness is entered into an affective and material economy of debt, in which the Black debtor is given credit for having assumed cartographic coherence, and the non-Black creditor-debtor is given credit once again for his empathic recognition of Black suffering. What is continually (mis)recognized in these fungibilizing operations is Blackness, which is to say that what is foreclosed are the radical possibilities of Black criminal and fugitive sociality.

I open this conclusion with the quote above by Frank Wilderson because I believe that interrogating the antiblack logics of the world we are given is important work. It is in that spirit that I pursued this project. Nonetheless, one limitation to this dissertation is that I did not directly take up an examination of those moments and praxes where we might rhetorically locate those radical possibilities of Blackness. That too is important work, and I am indebted to those who have taken up the call to do the work I could not accomplish in these pages. I therefore also began this chapter with a quote from Jack Halberstam who, though not-Black, thoughtfully articulates with Moten and Harney what orientations we can joyously configure in the non-any-where-place of the undercommons. Refusing recognition and the forced choice is not a masculinist event, but a process that begins in mutuality. In the process our desires change, oriented away from those gifts provided in our biocapitalist present, where what we desire before “the break” will be different from what we will desire after it.

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