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Feeling the Crowd:

Affective Responses to Crowd Violence

in Africa American Fiction

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Brandy Underwood

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Feeling the Crowd:

Affective Responses to Crowd Violence

in African American Fiction

by

Brandy Underwood

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Richard A. Yarborough, Chair

"Feeling the Crowd" uses affect theory to analyze representations of middle-class responses to the modern black violent crowd in African American fiction. My project demonstrates that writers ranging from Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* (1952) to Walter Mosley in *Little Scarlet* (2005) have continuously portrayed black middle-class anxiety in relation to perceived leadership gaps in the collective African American community brought to light by images of black collective violence. Echoing Hazel Carby's *Race Men* and Erica Edwards's *Charisma and the Fiction of Black Leadership*, I argue that these writers problematize gendered notions of black leadership while they explore anxieties triggered by crowds. I turn to recent work in affect studies to explore these class-based anxieties, in particular Sianne Ngai's *Ugly*

Feelings, which offers a critical lexicon that allows me to attend to both the individual emotions and the collective affective responses that characterize my subject.

While past scholarship on the black crowd in literature tends to focus solely on the collective body, my work, which attempts to recover lesser known novels in conjunction with more canonical texts, offers a fresh approach that considers the individual response to such violence. In the dissertation, each chapter examines a particular time period, with the first devoted to Ellison's reimagining of a Harlem Riot, which I suggest is depicted as an amalgamation of events that transpired in 1935 and 1943. My second chapter shifts to the 1960s social unrest depicted by Chester Himes, John A. Williams, Sam Greenlee, and Walter Mosley. The third chapter considers the post-1992 fiction written by Los Angeles-based women writers Bebe Moore Campbell and Paula Woods. Finally, my last chapter continues to focus on Los Angeles as it considers the juxtaposition of black collective violence with multiple references to the jazz musician Eric Dolphy in Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* (1996).

The dissertation of Brandy Underwood is approved.

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For Jonathan and Isabelle Segal

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INTRODUCTION:
Feeling the Crowd

> "When to earth and brute is added an environment of men and ideas, then the attitude of the imprisoned group may take three main forms, —a feeling of revolt and revenge; an attempt to adjust all thought and action to the will of the greater group; or, finally, a determined effort at self-realization and self-development despite environing opinion. The influence of all of these attitudes at various times can be traced in the history of the American Negro, and in the evolution of his successive leaders."
> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*[1]

By reimagining the 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina race riots, Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) is one of the first of several African American novels to depict the violent crowd. The novel's tragic riot scene questions whether black communities can strive in America's stifling turn-of-the century racial milieu; the violent crowd represents the chaotic breakdown of a fragile social system. In Chesnutt's novel, the protagonist, Dr. Miller, returns to Wellington—a fictionalized version of Wilmington—during a time widely considered the Black Nadir. In this moment of intense racial conflict, the young doctor intends to establish his medical practice in his southern home after studying abroad in Paris and Vienna. Black businesses and politicians thrived in Wilmington during the post-reconstruction era, yet, just as Chesnutt's fiction demonstrates, an angry group of white men initiated a riot that shattered racial harmony and marked a decline in African American prosperity in the city. Chesnutt's riot functions as a key event in the novel; here, the crowd is described as a living, evolving thing: "The proceedings of the day—planned originally as a 'demonstration,' dignified subsequently as a 'revolution'…had by seven o'clock in the afternoon developed into a murderous riot" (298). From "demonstration" to "revolution" to "riot," the crowd transforms from a quotidian political protest to a deadly scene. Nevertheless, the novel shows how all the stages of the white crowd are shielded from any prosecution by the law—here, violence is legitimized. That is not

generally the case with the depictions of black violent crowds in the African American novels that followed Chesnutt's *Marrow*.

Chesnutt's protagonist privileges the private sphere over the public sphere—where the races clash in a bloody battle over civic power. When Dr. Miller learns about the white mob that has invaded his community with the goal of threatening black residents, he chooses to risk his life to try to save his family. From the start, Dr. Miller and his wife, Janet, find it difficult to rejoin a segregated society; they struggle to fit in only to see their own young, innocent son killed by a stray bullet when the rioting gets out of control. His death symbolizes the limited future for the black community in a racially divided society. At a key moment, Dr. Miller faces the agonizing question of whether he should take on a leadership position and physically defend the black community or protect his established privilege. When a small group of black men tries to form a group to fight back against the angry mob, they ask Miller and his companion, a black lawyer named Watson, to serve as their leaders and both men decline. For Watson, his family's safety is his priority. Miller says that he believes he can serve the community better as a doctor rather than a leader in the fight: "I should like to lead you; I should like to arm every colored man in this town, and have them stand firmly in line, not for attack, but for defense; but if I attempted it…my life would pay the forfeit" (282). As a result of his decision not to lead the black community in their defense, Miller suffers a negative affective response; he was "conscious of a distinct feeling of shame and envy that he, too, did not feel impelled to throw away his life in a hopeless struggle" (285). The character's shame and envy demonstrate his internal struggle when faced with the violent crowd.

Unlike Miller, who must both contend with the white violent crowd that threatens his well-being and class position, later African American protagonists grapple with a similar internal

struggle ignited by witnessing the black violent crowd. The shift in African American literature from the depiction of the white violent crowd to a black violent crowd mirrors a trend in the history of the United States toward violence in black communities performed by black bodies. Beginning with Ralph Ellison's unnamed protagonist in *Invisible Man* to Walter Mosley's *Little Scarlet*, African American writers explore their protagonists' affective responses to black violent crowds in order to demonstrate internal struggles over whether to privilege class status above desires to function as leaders within the black community. Yet in reality, black leaders have often maintained a high class status, which, ironically, was sometimes directly related to their leadership positions.

"Feeling the Crowd" uses affect theory to analyze representations of middle-class responses to the modern black violent crowd in African American fiction. My project demonstrates that writers ranging from Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* (1952) to Walter Mosley in *Little Scarlet* (2005) have portrayed black middle-class anxiety in relation to perceived leadership gaps in the collective African American community brought to light by images of black collective violence. Echoing Hazel Carby's *Race Men* and Erica Edwards's *Charisma and the Fiction of Black Leadership*, I argue that these writers problematize gendered notions of black leadership while they explore anxieties triggered by crowds. I turn to affect to explore these class-based anxieties, but, as Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth explain in their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, there is no single, generalizable theory of affect. Therefore, my project is interdisciplinary in nature; it relies on theories of affect, gender, class, history and music.

Throughout this project, I often return to Sianne Ngai's articulation of affect theory in *Ugly Feelings* (2005) because it provides a critical lexicon that allows me to focus on both the

individual and the crowds that trigger protagonists' feelings. While Ngai acknowledges the trend in affect studies to focus on such subjective/objective divides, she intentionally, interchangeably uses the terms affect and emotion making it easier to consider feelings in a text. I argue that African American authors of fiction published from 1952 to the present depict these negative affective responses in order to demonstrate how individual class status complicates normative notions of collective racial group identity. Here, the black violent crowd symbolizes the nexus of class conflict within the African American community; and it conjures negative feelings that illuminate a protagonist's internal struggle over whether one should privilege class identity over racial group solidarity, particularly as these characters consider whether to take on leadership roles within their communities. My project uses affect theory to analyze the following works of fiction: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), John A. Williams's *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light* (1969), Chester Himes's *Blind Man with a Pistol* (1969), Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat at the Door* (1969), Bebe Moore Campbell's *Brothers and Sisters* (1994), Paul Beatty's *White Boy Shuffle* (1996), Paula Woods's *Inner City Blues* (1999), and Walter Mosley's *Little Scarlet* (2004). Each novel was selected because it offers insight into the feelings of middle-class protagonists who witness black violent crowds.

The protagonists' negative affective responses demonstrate that black middle-class identities provide these characters with a troubled inability to act on the more intense emotions, like rage, that are conjured in other characters. This project is mainly a work of literary analysis that adopts aspects of critical theory to grapple with how African American authors critique class divisions and identity formation. It also considers the question of how these characters consider their role as potential leaders within the black community, particularly when they are faced with the black violent crowd. Affect theory provides the tools to demonstrate how each author's

critique resides in a protagonist's internal reaction to crowd violence. Whether at work, at home, or in transit, these characters quietly internalize their negative feelings in the aftermath of witnessing a black violent crowd. What makes these minor feelings so intriguing is their bodily impact on the protagonist; negative affects have the ability to render a type of paralysis that, at least temporarily, prevents these characters from taking on leadership roles within their own communities.

The Affects of Witnessing Violence

Affect theory plays a central role in this project because it provides a language to explore the connection between a protagonist's mind and body in the aftermath of witnessing black crowd violence. Put more simply, each novel that I explore focuses on the feelings and actions of the main character rather than those of the collective group. Scholars have adopted affect theory as part of a progression forward from the groundwork established by their earlier embrace of psychoanalysis and a later move towards new discursive ways to interpret trauma and memory.[2] Such a turn was ignited as critical theory faced "the analytic challenges of ongoing war, trauma, torture, massacre, and counter/terrorism," according to Patricia Clough, whose anthology *The Affective Turn* introduced scores of scholars to the diverse application of affect theory.[3] Indeed, affect theory's multiplicity poses a potential problem for scholars because it has not had a uniform evolution in each academic discipline; the result is that each scholarly cluster converses in a new, undecipherable language, according to the editors of *The Affect Theory Reader.* What has become a common thread for all scholars is affect's focus on the body's feelings or emotions.

Feelings sometimes lead to bodily actions or inactions. By embracing the musings of Baruch Spinoza, affect theorists explore these mind/body connections. Spinoza is "the philosopher who has advanced furthest the theory of the affect" according to Micheal Hardt, who in the foreword to *The Affective Turn*, elaborates on how Spinoza's ideas consider the body's feelings and actions in response to outside stimuli. Spinoza maintains that the mind and body develop in parallel, according to Hardt who reasons that "such a claim does not in anyway resolve the question of the relation of the body and mind; rather, it poses it as a problem or mandate for research: each time we consider the mind's power to think we must try to recognize how the body's power to act corresponds to it."[4] My project turns to Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* precisely because it considers this question of how the body's power to act corresponds to the mind. From Ngai's perspective, the body does not always respond. In fact, as noted earlier, she argues that when the mind experiences negative, ugly affects it tends to shut down the body. It is with Ngai's understanding of such paralysis or lack of action that I began this project that highlights depictions of protagonists in African American novels throughout the mid-twentieth century and beyond whose ability to act is stifled by the mere witnessing of the black violent crowd.

Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* offers an intriguing framework for applying affect theory to interpretations of African American literature by illuminating how minor feelings, like irritation, might explain a character's desire for political engagement, while, at the same time, he/she is unable to act. This inability to act is central to Ngai's thesis, and it also plays a key role in my project because it helps pinpoint a novel's social critique. What is most at stake for Ngai is how minor feelings differ from the more grandiose feelings, like rage. Here, she explains her interest

in deciphering just how authors depict these weaker feelings in conjunction with suspended agency:

> My exclusive focus is on the negative affects that read the predicaments posed by a general state of obstructed agency with respect to other human actors or to the social as such—a dilemma I take as charged with political meaning regardless of whether the obstruction is actual or fantasized, or whether the agency obstructed is individual or collective.[5]

For Ngai, whatever leads to a character's "obstructed agency" also exposes his/her political affiliations. She teaches us how to recognize and track a protagonist's inability to act. By pinpointing the exact moment or object that provokes a character's affective response, a scholar discovers the source that signals an author's critique. Indeed, Ngai's conceptualization of affect theory provides the groundwork for interpreting these feelings.

Ngai's affect theory is grounded in various fields ranging from philosophy to aesthetics to cultural criticism. Early on in her project, she credits Baruch Spinoza for inspiring her discussion of emotions within the context of suspended action. Her work embraces Spinoza's description of emotions as a "'wavering of the mind' that can either increase or diminish one's power to act."[6] And she argues that T. W. Adorno's concept of aesthetic autonomy in *Aesthetic Theory* suggests that:

> Literature may in fact be the ideal space to investigate ugly feelings that obviously ramify beyond the domain of the aesthetic proper, since the situation of restricted agency from which all of them ensue is one that describes art's own position in a highly differentiated and totally commodified society.[7]

Ngai also turns to the Italian philosopher Paolo Virno, who argues that "our emotions no longer link up as securely as they once did with models of social action and transformation theorized by Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, and others under the signs of relatively unambiguous emotions like anger and fear" (5). For Ngai, it is the "discourse of philosophical aesthetics, rather than that of political philosophy or economy, in which emotions have traditionally played the most pivotal role—from Longinus to Immanuel Kant."[8] Ultimately, her inspiration reaches as far back as Aristotle; she informs her reader that her work "turns to ugly feelings to expand and transform the category of 'aesthetic emotions,' or feelings unique to our encounters with artworks—a concept whose oldest and best known example is Aristotle's discussion of catharsis in *Poetics*" (6). These diverse voices all factor into Ngai's perception of affect theory.

Like Ngai's work, my project adopts a complicated understanding of the feelings that it investigates. These feelings are entangled within the protagonists' cognitive abilities to process and come to terms with violent crowd images. For Ngai, the feelings that she employs exist within a specific aesthetic framework and should not be oversimplified. Instead, she argues that they can be "thought of as a mediation between the aesthetic and the political in a nontrivial way" (3). Ngai's ugly feelings are "marked by an ambivalence that will enable them to resist, on the one hand, their reduction to mere expressions of class *ressentiment*, and on the other, their counter-valorization as therapeutic 'solutions' to the problems they highlight and condense."[9] For these reasons, my project turns to negative feelings to construct an innovative interpretation of African American fiction that depicts black crowd violence.

Using "anxiety" as a critical tool, Ngai examines works by Herman Melville, Alfred Hitchcock, and Martin Heidegger. She later considers the role of "irritation" in her discussion of Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*. Here, she connects the "particular irritation" felt by Larsen's

protagonist, Helga Crane, to the character's "particular offishness" (175). Her use of "offishness" deserves further explanation:

> the 'offish' (in the sense of 'off key' or 'off the mark') quality that comes to inflect the novel's organizing affect is very much in keeping with the way Aristotle characterizes irritation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: 'Those people who we call irritable are those who are irritated *by the wrong things, more severely and for longer than is right*.'[10]

Irritation allows Crane to ignore or even misread the reality of her situation. Later, Ngai posits paranoia "as a species of fear based on the dysphoric apprehension of a holistic and all-encompassing system" (299). She turns to paranoia to elucidate the political work accomplished in contemporary poetry by women like Juliana Spahr and Heather Fuller. These affective responses equip Ngai with the fuel to assert her claims about authorial intention; these feelings offer a roadmap to reaching a better understanding of a novel's critical thesis.

From Ellison's unnamed narrator in *Invisible Man* to Bebe Moore Campbell's Esther Jackson in *Brothers and Sisters*, the protagonists that I examine in this project explore their feelings after witnessing black crowd violence in detail, yet they ultimately experience some form of inaction or paralysis. At times some of the protagonists join the crowd, like the main character Gunnar Kaufman from Paul Beatty's *White Boy Shuffle*, who temporarily joins a group of rioters during the 1992 violence in Los Angeles before he is intercepted by his father, a Los Angeles police officer. Overall, these characters cannot fully join the crowd; they are never really of the crowd. They are outsiders, largely due to their middle-class status. It is their privilege, and the desire to maintain that privilege on some level, that keeps these characters separate. So, in fact is it the conflicting affects that these character experience—the concern for

their fellow African Americans as they riot and their desire to remain protected by their privileged status—that causes these characters to become, as Ngai would suggest, paralyzed and unable to act.

A Theory of the Crowd

Throughout the twentieth century, black violent crowds have been almost overwhelming called "riots." Nevertheless, the term riot is a loaded one that carries with it a sense of judgment. In fact, many scholars outwardly contest the term, particularly when referring to the 1992 event in Los Angeles, and they instead call "the Los Angeles Rebellion." What make a black violent crowd a rebellion rather than a riot? Is it a matter of mere semantics? Why should we reject the term riot when it has been commonly accepted and understood as an incident of chaotic crowd violence for decades? In this project, I often use the terms "riot" and "rebellion" interchangeably. In doing so, I do not intend to suggest that one incident of violence such as the Watts Riot was less politically motivated or intentional than say the Los Angeles Rebellion. Instead, my theory of the riot is that these events take place when a collection, or more simply put, a crowd of people reacts to some stimuli in a violent manner. In these novels, the members of the crowd, although acting in a wave of chaos, also generally adhere to some form of rule, which is to avoid damaging property owned by African Americans. In fact, the goal of the rioting body, whether we call it a riot or rebellion, is generally to loot non-black owned businesses and property: the riot is a purge.

If we begin to understand the riot as a partially regulated purge against property that belongs to those from outside the community, we begin to understand that a riot is always already a form of rebellion—which according to The Oxford English Dictionary is "an organized

armed resistance to an established ruler or government; an uprising, a revolt."[11] How can a riot not be a rebellion? Moreover, riots throughout history have often been associated with some form of loosely organized protest. In the early twentieth century, crowds made up of mostly white unionized workers filled the streets in violent protest against unfair business policies. These early riots were a form of protest, yet they have not been labelled by historians exclusively as rebellions. The chaos associated with riots is evident in every novel that I explore in this project. In fact, where organization does exist, as in the novels by Williams and Greenlee, the plans always fail and a chaotic, unplanned riot ensues. Perhaps, the riots in these novels are not rebellions at all, but, instead, they are failed rebellions—rebellions that failed to take shape.

The Black Violent Crowd

The study of the crowd is linked to the development of modern London; and violent crowds have long been depicted in British literature including the works of Shakespeare. Theorizing the crowd is nothing new. Freud did it in his work on collective psychology. What is new is that the figure of the black violent crowd has long had a solid presence in American literature. Some scholars have explored the role of the crowd in American literature, but none have examined how the crowd functions in African American literature throughout the twentieth century and beyond. Indeed, the African American violent crowd, and particularly its depiction by African American writers, has been largely overlooked. My intention here is to use affect theories, particularly as articulated by Ngai, to examine how these violent crowds have been portrayed in novels.

Riots in America, like those that tore through the country in the summer of 1919, were often associated with race or labor conflicts. Since the 1935 Harlem Riot, which I will discuss

further in Chapter 1, African Americans became participants in group violence often triggered by an act that the community perceived as an inequality and an example of ongoing oppression. In this project, I argue that the Harlem Riot of 1935 influenced the creation of the modern black violent crowd in African American fiction; these groups function in urban areas throughout the United States, particularly New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Each text takes place mainly in cities, and many of the authors that I examine here fluidly depict movement across the country as their protagonists travel from one space to the next. In the case of *Invisible Man*, the narrator takes us from his southern home to Harlem with the lingering, unfulfilled hope of returning to the south. Like Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the novels that I examine in the second chapter also take place in Northern cities including New York and Chicago. Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* ventures from Washington, D.C. to New York and eventually Chicago. The novels by Williams and Himes are set in New York. Williams offers us a protagonist who lives in New York, but takes a trip through the major urban African American communities in order to demonstrate the way middle class black people live throughout the country. On his return to New York, Williams's protagonist retreats to his own middle-class hideaway in Sag Habor. Meanwhile, Himes's detective fiction functions as a Harlem narrative that demonstrates how the boundaries of Harlem function as both a sense of reinforcement and a limitation. Throughout the novel, Himes refers to the people of Harlem as "citizens of Harlem," which suggests that their citizenship right end when they cross the community's borders. When the characters protected within the confines of the Harlem community venture outside what Ellison calls a city-within-a-city, they are killed and the same goes for those outsiders who venture into Harlem. Himes successfully constructs Harlem as a liminal space where the divided black crowd clashes with itself.

Los Angeles functions as a setting for the majority of the authors whose works I explore in the final chapter of this project. Like the other major urban spaces that appear in the novels with black crowd violence, Los Angeles represents a city where mass African Americans migrated with the hope to find a new life and the possibility of making a good living. These migrants found, like so many others before them, that the city also represented a space of oppression where blacks were forced into segregated communities. They were not allowed to live in other, more desirable neighborhoods due to public policies informed by prejudice, also known as redlining. Writers like Walter Mosely portray the early wave of black migration to California. Here, Los Angeles often functions as a promise turned sour. It is a space that allows authors to turn away from the vast urban settings that marked earlier works and focus their attention on the internal. More simply put, the turn towards exploring the emotions of the protagonists in all these novels is an affective turn.

Chapter Breakdowns

In the first chapter, I turn my attention to how Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* depicts its narrator's affective response to black crowd violence. The chapter charts the protagonist's development as he attempts to take on the role of community leader, but finds himself ultimately unable to control the chaotic, massive collective that concludes the novel. At various points in the text, the narrator takes on the role of a public speaker who refines his skill before each audience. Nevertheless, he begins to question his role in the Brotherhood, a group loosely representing the Communists that roamed Harlem in the early to mid-twentieth century. I suggest that Ellison's depiction of the black violent crowd potentially represents an amalgamation of the Harlem riots that occurred in 1935 and 1943. By turning to Ellison's own reporting of the 1943

riot, I show that the author borrowed images from his experience to craft the novel's final scenes. As the narrator unsuccessfully aspires to become what was commonly known as a race man, he finds that he cannot control the crowd—a collective body without a leader. In fact, his own desire to rise above the people leads to his eventual downfall. It is a literal falling from grace as he actually finds himself residing underground where he retreats to write, in a space away from the crowd. He loses his audience, and, in doing so, he also loses his ability to act.

The second chapter focuses on depictions of black crowd violence in the 1960s. The novels that I treat here include John A. Williams's *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light*, Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat By The Door,* Chester Himes's *Blind Man wit a Pistol*, and Walter Mosley's *Little Scarlet*. Each of these novels depicts violent crowd disorders that reflect actual historic events. I use affect theory, as articulated by Ngai and Lauren Berlant, to demonstrate how the characters' anxious feelings are entangled within their concerns about class divisions in the black community and a lack of established, long-term leadership strategies. I argue that the middle-class protagonists in these novels are consumed with an anxiety triggered by their own obsessions with the black community's divided leadership strategies, particularly the divide within the community regarding peaceful and violent approaches to empowerment in the aftermath of the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X.

Each novel that I examine in this second chapter, excluding Mosley's, was published in 1969. I have included *Little Scarlet* here because Mosley depicts the 1965 Watts Riot despite the fact that he wrote the novel after 1992. I argue that Mosley employs images from this earlier period to question why similar problems continue to plague Los Angeles's African America community more than two decades later. Mosley's novel also fits well with the overall hypothesis of this chapter, which is that the protagonists in these works find themselves unable to

act on their desires in the aftermath of witnessing the black violent crowd. William's protagonist Eugene Browning is a privileged professor who goes to work at a nonprofit civil rights organization only to become disillusioned by the group's inability to force change. Instead of continuing his work for the nonprofit, he sees an opportunity to make a change when a white police officers kills a black teenager; he hires an assassin to kill the officer. The novel criticizes the black bourgeoisie as Browning goes on a trip across the United States to collect donations for his organization only to use the money to hire the hit man, and he later escapes to a middle-class safe haven in Sag Harbor just as violence erupts in the city.

Sam Greenlee's novel pairs well with Williams's in this chapter because both protagonists plan collective actions that remain largely unfulfilled. These failed actions evoke Ngai's discussion of how negative affects lead to an individual's inability to act. In *The Spook Who Sat by The Door*, the protagonist Dan Freeman organizes an inner city insurgency in Chicago by creating a makeshift army out the gang he had once lead when he was a teenager. He secretly trains the young, black men with the techniques he learned himself, first, in the military and later as a government agent; yet he remains physically distant once the violence he coordinates begins. His inability to act in the violence ultimately leads to his death; he fails to bridge the gap between his conflicting desires to both maintain his middle-class privilege and violent change. Throughout the novel, Freeman seems attached to his possessions like his car, furniture, and clothes. Indeed, his status in the community as a wealthy, eligible bachelor who works for a nonprofit provides him with access to community leaders and fluid class mobility. He reluctantly resigns to give all this up in order to orchestrate the street violence. His leadership falls short when he is unable to act towards the novel's conclusion. This chapter demonstrates that these sorts of internal contradictions lead to anxiety that prevents action.

Like the novels by Williams and Greenlee, Himes's *Blind Man with a Pistol* also positions leadership at the forefront of its concerns. The protagonist Grave Dogger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson, police detectives in Harlem, are continuously tasked to answer the question: who is behind the random black crowd violent that plagues the city? These detectives would rather focus on solving the three gruesome murders that occur throughout the novel than try to answer the question. For them, the impetus behind the riots is unsolvable, and their inability to act when confronted with the task to solve the mystery demonstrates Ngai's hypothesis that these characters' anxiety reduces their ability to act. Instead, these character mainly operate in the novel as curious, and at time bewildered, witnesses to the violent crowds in their community. These men are at once motivated to interfere in the violence, and at the same time paralyzed by their commitment to the community as black men. The anxiety caused by this conflict renders these men unable to act. Ultimately, Himes offers a final commentary on the inability to comprehend the riots that were so common in the 1960s when he ends his novel with the image of a blind man with a pistol. The blind man mistakes what he hears on the subway as an insult to him and he begins to shoot randomly at the offenders whom he cannot see. His shooting causes a stampede out of the subway, which leads police to shoot him. An inaccurate, exaggerated story of his death quickly fills the community and causes a riot to break out. For Himes, the violent black crowd is random, unorganized and leaderless. In fact, the crowd's random violence is rather part of the problem than the solution that would bring about a better life for the working class people who reside in urban communities.

Finally, I turn to Mosley's *Little Scarlet* in order to demonstrate how the author employs images from the 1965 Watts riot to question why similar problems triggered another incident of crowd violence more than 20 years later. In this last section of chapter 2, I suggest that Mosley

sets up his novel in such a way to engage with a recent incident of black crowd violence through evoking an earlier incident. I argue that Mosely returns to Watts in the aftermath of the 1992 violence in order to illustrate that the inequalities and lack of opportunities that plagued the community so long ago still remain a problem. By evoking Ngai's *Ugly Feelings*, as well as postmemory, first articulated by Marianne Hirsch and later by Arlene Keizer within the context of African American cultural production, I intend to demonstrate that Mosely employs the memory of a previous traumatic event—Watts in 1965—in order to deal with a more resent trauma that occurred in 1992. His protagonist struggles to reconcile complex identities as both a member of the collective African American community, represented by the rioters, and a privileged member of the middle class. Mosley sets up the novel with the image of family at its center. The protagonist Easy Rawlins interprets the crowd violence he witnesses as a threat to his family's security, which he values most. The police recruit Rawlins to help solve the murder of a black woman killed at the height of the violence, and they have taken he woman's aunt, Geneva Landry into custody at a mental health hospital because her grief renders her unable to function. In the hospital, Landry seems to represent the black community's history, particularly the black women's experience, as she recalls her childhood sexual trauma. As a victim of sexual assault by a white male, Landry also suspects that Little Scarlet's new white male friend has abused and then killed her, and police worry that the rumor of a white man killing a black woman will only trigger more violence. As the novel progresses, Landry's health deteriorates and eventually she dies from an infection that she gets at the hospital, the very space where the police take her to heal. Landry's death acts as a metaphor for the larger city represented in the text, and particularly the African American community that resides with the city. She represents the city's inability to heal after Watts, and the repeated threat of destruction.

My third chapter focuses on Bebe Moore Campbell's *Brother and Sisters* and Paula Woods's *Inner City Blues.* These authors consider the interior healing and development of their female protagonists in the aftermath of the 1992 crowd violence, while at the same time evaluating the individual's role in rebuilding a community. Campbell's protagonist, Esther Jackson, embodies Ngai's notion that negative feelings lead to inaction. Here, I partner Ngai's articulation of affect with Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* to demonstrate how quotidian, gendered affects like irritation function in these novels. Campbell's Jackson represents the division within the African American community in the aftermath of the 1992 events; she is a successful middle-class woman who does not identify with the individual members of the violent crowd. Although she carries her own concerns, particularly regarding her career and the desire to find a suitable mate, she also searches for a way to contribute to the larger African American community. Her internal struggle to reconcile these dueling desires causes anxiety that leads to her inability to act or, more appropriately stated, react to the needs of the community that resides just outside her door. She wants to make a change, but she also has the desperate instinct to protect her class privilege. Her struggle to find an equally successful black mate and, as well as black female friends, forces her to look deeper for a solution that will not leave her socially isolated. Jackson's choice at the novel's conclusion to abandon her successful career to instead work at a black-owned business demonstrates her limited ability to act on a larger, global scale. Ultimately, Campbell creates a protagonist who is only willing to make changes that are suitable to her own proclivities and allow her to exist within her comfort zone, much like Williams's Browning.

In a similar vein, Woods's protagonist, the LAPD officer Charolette Justice, finds herself in a conflicted position as she must grapple between her own career responsibilities and her

desire to contribute to the larger African American community in the aftermath of the 1992 incident of crowd violence in Los Angeles. In *Inner City Blues,* Justice must do a significant amount of personal development on the eve of the riots when she tries to solve the murder of the man who years before had killed her own husband and child. In this case, the character's own past stands in for the community's suffering, and the protagonist's journey toward resolution, forgiveness, and self-love mirrors the larger community's need for a transformative experience that will allow for a rebirth. The fact that Justice comes from a successful middle-class family, and still decides to take a job as a public servant, suggests that she is devoted to the community that she represents. Indeed, she largely sets her own personal life aside after her family's tragic death—her husband and child were killed in a drive-by shooting—in order to focus on helping others. For Justice, her inability to act is located within her private life. Within the public sphere, she operates with intention and strength. Nevertheless, she is somewhat powerless in private. She leans on her middle-class family for support; their safe, privileged world offers her a reprieve from the quotidian realities that she faces on the Los Angeles streets. The black crowd violence frames the story—it is a moment of reckoning for both the community and the character. In fact, the violent event shakes up the passive individual's life and causes her to begin to evaluate her internal self development. After witnessing the violence, Justice slowly begins to heal from her earlier family trauma and begins building a new life, which is exactly what the city needs to do. Ultimately, Justice finds solace within a romantic relationship with a doctor—he represents the healing that she seeks. Like Campbell's Esther Jackson, the 1992 violence in this novel shines a light on the individual's needs, as well as the community's, to health and move forward from past traumas such as inequality, oppression, and violence.

In my final chapter, I consider the reoccurring references to the jazz music of Eric Dolphy during scenes of black crowd violence in Paul Beatty's *White Boy Shuffle*. Like the novels of Campbell and Woods, Beatty's novel also takes place in Los Angeles during the 1992 violence. The novel's central conflict is between an African American teenager and his father, a member of the Los Angeles police force. The protagonist, Gunnar Kaufman, struggles against his estranged father's authority as he also becomes a leader in the African American community during this bildungsroman. Also, at the heart of the novel, resides Kaufman's growing friendship with Scoby, the jazz fan who introduces Kaufman to Dolphy's music. By deploying the sound of Dolphy's music in the novel, Beatty infuses his scene of collective violence with a jazz aesthetic that links Dolphy with Beatty's character Scoby. Turning to Anahid Kassabian's *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity*, I argue that Beatty deploys Dolphy's music to create what Kassabian calls distributed subjectivity—the term refers to a kind of collective identity created by the ubiquitous sounds that people encounter everyday, sometime without actively listening.

Here, I argue that Scoby's decision to play Dolphy's music on his car stereo as the 1992 violence begins is meant to evoke an affective response from Kaufman that will perpetuate a certain kind of black masculine identity associated with both jazz music and the type great man leadership that Erica Edwards, after Hazel Carby, have described. Nevertheless, Kaufman fails to feel the music, and, in failing to feel the music, Kaufman rejects the collective identity that is meant to be triggered by Dolphy's music. I argue here that the collective identity represented by the music is associated with jazz performed during the mid-twentieth century in the United States, an identity that Nichole Rustin-Paschal calls jazzmasculinities.

Beatty's nod to Dolphy, who grew up in Los Angeles like Beatty, signifies to the reader that a monumental shift, much like the transition that Dolphy helped perpetuate in jazz music, is about to occur in the protagonist's life. Dolphy's presence in the text bears unpacking here; it evokes multiple questions such as: What does Beatty convey by having his protagonist listen to jazz, an African American cultural product, as the 1992 violence begins? Is it particularly significant that Beatty chooses to mention Dolphy, when some might argue a reference to a more well known artist like Mile Davis would be more powerful or meaningful to the average reader? Could it be that Beatty chose Dolphy because he grew up in Los Angeles and was a strong presence in the city's jazz community before moving to the global stage? According to Rick Anderson, 1960 and 1961 were the most significant years of Dolphy's career. Anderson highlights Dolphy's "novel use of bass clarinet" on "Booker's Waltz" as well the musician's flute playing and "John Coltrane-influences alto saxophone technique for which he was most famous."[12] Is the way that the black media tried to protect and highlight Dolphy's masculinity after his death something that Beatty knew about? If so, does he evoke Dolphy to complicate traditional notions of black masculinity? Does Dolphy's training as a classical musician as well as a jazz musician, much like Ralph Ellison, signify Dolphy's ability to move fluidly through race and class barriers just as the protagonist does? Finally, is it Dolphy's early death, he unexpectedly died in his thirties, that makes him an intriguing figure for Beatty, whose novel also lingers on the issue of death and suicide as rebellion to the continuous commodification of black bodies and cultural production?

Beatty's novel has been largely read as a portrait of shifting notions of black masculinity; I suggest that the author complicates such notions of masculinity when his protagonist fails to feel Dolphy's music. In this chapter, I juxtapose Ngai's assertion that minor, negative feelings

result in thwarted action with the extensive body of scholarly work devoted to the connection between affect and music. Beatty's protagonist experiences a sense of delayed agency due to an intense focus on his own affective response to collective violence. By locating Beatty's depictions of the violent crowd within the realm of jazz aesthetics, I contend that the protagonist cannot feel Dolphy's innovative, experimental music because his negative feelings of self-double, ineffectiveness, and inauthenticity prevent him from fully performing as part of a collective, and therefore, he also fails to successfully take on a long-term leadership role in larger African American community. Like Paula Woods's Charlotte Justice, Beatty's protagonist is directed to focus on and explore his feelings in the midst of the collective violence; it is an act that demonstrates a division between the middle-class black body and the crowd.

[1] Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. (1903; rpt. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 37.

[2] See Spillers, Hortense J. "All the Things You Could Be by Now, If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother: Psychoanalysis and Race." *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. Eds. Elizabeth Abel, Barbara Christian, and Helene Moglen. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Spillers makes a clear argument in support of including psychoanalysis in the toolbox of African American literary interpretation. She cautiously embraces psychoanalysis: "I think it is safe to say, however, that the psychoanalytic object, subject, and subjectivity constitute the missing layer of hermeneutic and interpretive projects of an entire generation of black intellectuals now at work" (136). For Spillers, the long absence of psychoanalysis from African American literary discourse is "not only glaring but also perhaps most curious in its persistence" (136).

[3] Clough, Patricia Ticineto. "Introduction." *The Affective Turn: Theorizing The Social*. Ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough with Jean Halley. Durham: Duke UP, 2007:1.

[4] Hardt, Michael. Foreword: What Affects Are Good For." *The Affective Turn: Theorizing The Social*. Ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough with Jean Halley. Durham: Duke UP, 2007: x.

[5] Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 3.

[6] Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 2.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Oxford English Dictionary. Online reference at www.oed.com.

[12] Anderson, Rick. "Reviewed Work: The Best of Eric Dolphy by Eric Dolphy." *Notes*. 61:4, (June, 2005) 1086.

1. CROWD CONTROL: Class Anxieties and Speechmaking in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

On August 2, 1943, Ralph Ellison published a first-person account of the Harlem riot in the *New York Post* that would serve as a model for his climatic, surreal crowd scene in *Invisible Man*. Just like his protagonist, Ellison reports that he encountered unbelievable chaos in Harlem: "At 3 a.m. this morning, I left the Eighth Av. Subway at 127th St. and St. Nicholas Av. When I came out, there was the sound of gunfire and the shouting as of a great celebration."[1] Ellison's protagonist uses similar language to convey his impressions of the riot; he even places himself on the same street: "When I reached Morningside the shooting sounded like a distant celebration of the Fourth of July, and I hurried forward. At St. Nicholas the street lights were out. A thunderous sound arose."[2] In light of these similarities, scholars struggle to situate this scene within its proper historical context. While Eric Sundquist contends that many contemporary accounts indicate that the 1943 riot "had taken on a sometimes wild, festive atmosphere, which may have influenced Ellison's conception of the event when he reimagined it in *Invisible Man,*" Cheryl Lynn Greenberg places Ellison's novel within the context of the 1935 Harlem riot.[3] The riot scene in *Invisible Man* could arguably be set in either 1935 or 1943; nevertheless, the majority of this Bildungsroman is clearly situated within the interwar period, especially the 1930s. Ellison himself refers to his 1943 *New York Post* report when he discusses the novel.[4] Although Ellison reports that the gunfire sounded of celebration, in reality there was not much for the people of Harlem to celebrate. Instead, they were expressing frustration after a police officer shot an African American WWII soldier who was trying to protect a black woman as that same officer was harassing her. Ellison's report examines the confusion felt by the rioters. He recounts that someone had circulated the news that a cop had shot a soldier out at Braddock's

bar; an editor's note attached to the *New York Post* article said: "This evidently referred to the shooting of a Negro Army military policeman in the Braddock Hotel, which precipitated the outbreak. The M.P., Pvt. Robert Bandy, was shot in the back; his condition is serious."[5] In *Invisible Man*, Clifton's death—another police shooting—triggers the riot that Ellison's narrator experiences at the novel's climatic conclusion.[6]

Throughout *Invisible Man*, the protagonist observes, interacts with, and attempts to control the black crowds that he encounters. In this chapter, I argue that such crowds signal leadership opportunities heavy with the potential to engender the narrator's class advancement, but these encumbered, proximate bodies also trigger his middle-class anxieties. The potential to control a collective group of African Americans offers potential class uplift for the protagonist, and he discovers that speechmaking provides a certain power over some crowds. Nevertheless, it is the unruly crowd—the crowd that the protagonist cannot control, like the chaotic group of dispossessed Harlem residents in Ellison's riot scene seeking redress for the inequalities that continuously plague their community—that frightens him. It is this type of chaotic crowd, composed of black working-class individuals, that triggers the narrator's middle-class anxieties, or more simply put, his fear of joining the crowd, and becoming an anonymous member of the collective, rather than taking his place as its culled leader. From the battle royal, to the Golden Day, and into the streets of Harlem, the narrator takes on the grandiose, seemingly quixotic, task of controlling the unruly crowd that has openly and intentionally disavowed the fetters of normative social confines. During the battle royal, the protagonist fights alongside a group of black teenagers whom he considers to be rough and beneath him. He stumbles upon an unruly troop of mentally unstable African American veterans at the Golden Day. He begins to recognize his power as an orator during his time in Harlem. By the novel's conclusion, the

protagonist falls in with a bunch of rioters as they plunder Harlem's distressed commercial district.

Sianne Ngai's conceptualization of affect theory offers a useful tool for interpreting the narrator's anxious feelings in response to the crowds that he fails to control. Ngai's work examines what she calls negative, "ugly feelings," and she argues that "the unsuitability of these weakly intentional feelings for forceful or unambiguous action is precisely what amplifies their power to diagnose situations, and situations marked by blocked or thwarted action in particular."[7] Indeed, Ngai's work provides a valuable framework for analyzing the suspended action that some protagonists in African American fiction experience as a result of their anxieties. In this chapter, I use Ngai's notion of "blocked action" to argue that the protagonist's affect responses, particularly his middle-class anxieties, illuminate his desire to control crowds rather than exist within them. At times, Ellison's protagonist tries to sway disorderly groups of African Americans with speeches; yet he ultimately suffers a form a paralysis, or inability to act, from the middle-class anxieties that surface when he cannot control the black working-class mob during the Harlem riot scene. By the novel's conclusion, the protagonist retreats to an isolated underground space. He chooses to exist outside of class and race; therefore, he must also exist outside of society, much like the Golden Day vets who fail to exist as independent agents within a segregated world that would place them on society's margins.

Historical Background: The Harlem Riots

The major Harlem riots in 1935 and 1943 attracted the attention of the black intellectual community including Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, E. Franklin Frazier, Ann Petry, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison. These moments of crisis during the Interwar Period in the largest,

most established African American community in the United States inspired more than fictionalized versions of riots in Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Petry's short story, "In Darkness and Confusion." The riots also inspired nonfiction, first-person accounts from McKay, Ellison, and Baldwin. Moreover, after the 1935 riot, Mayor La Guardia appointed a multi-racial committee to investigate the causes of the riot that included the African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, who would go on publish his seminal, though controversial, *The Black Middle Class*, as well as the poet Countee Cullen. The mayor asked Alain Locke, the Howard University scholar who compiled the foundational anthology *The New Negro*, to review the commission's report.[8] Although there was much outcry following the 1935 riot, many of the social problems that led to the public outrage of the thirties spilled into the forties. Both events targeted the commercial property owned by non-African Americans that seemed to symbolize the economic instability of the community and the need for a new direction, a new leadership to uplift the stagnating, once glamorous Harlem.

The 1935 Harlem riot marked the first massive outbreak of racial violence since the tumultuous summer of 1919.[9] The event in Harlem began at 3:00 p.m. March 19 after a sixteen-year-old boy, Lino Rivera, attempted to steal a penknife from a store on 125th Street in Harlem, the area's main shopping district that had been at the heart of a controversial labor dispute that plagued the neighborhood.[10] African American community members had been calling for businesses to hire black clerks, and their efforts were making some headway. The 1935 incident changed the tone of those ongoing negotiations. What exactly happened at the store remains unclear.[11] Varying accounts suggest that store employees confronted the boy, reprimanded him, and sent him, unharmed, out the back of the store. Nevertheless, a woman who had witnessed the event screamed that the boy had been beaten, which caused a great stir among the crowd that

had gathered outside as police arrived. To add to the confusion, a hearse was soon parked in front of the store, which only fueled the circulating idea that the boy had been killed. The agitated crowd grew increasingly restless, and by nightfall, people gathered outside the store with protest signs; some began to make speeches, and eventually someone threw a rock that shattered the store window. That started the rioting that would last for two days.[12]

Following the rioting, the damage to the previously thriving Harlem district was visually devastating and economically extensive. According to Greenberg, "seventy-five people, mostly black, had been arrested for 'inciting to riot, felonious assault, malicious mischief and burglary, all the direct result if the disturbance.' Fifty-seven civilians and seven policemen were injured and 626 windows broken." The cost of the damage would add up. Sundquist explains, "the violence left several African Americans dead, resulted in close to $2 million in property damage, and crystallized the desperate condition of many in Harlem."[13] Merchants whose businesses suffered sought resources from the city to minimize their losses; meanwhile community residents voiced multiple outcries over the lack of city services and relief available to them. The opinion pages in African American newspapers like the *New York Amsterdam News* quickly filled with debates in the aftermath of violence, speculating the causes and demanding a solution to the poor conditions that triggered the riot.

The African American writer Claude McKay was one of the significant public figures who offered their interpretation of the 1935 Harlem riot for public consumption. McKay's essay "Harlem Runs Wild" appeared in the April 3, 1935 *Nation*, and it considers the political events that troubled the community in the years leading up to the riot.[14] McKay begins in the aftermath of the violence: "Docile Harlem went on a rampage last week, smashing stores, looting them and piling up destruction of thousands of dollars worth of goods." He makes the conservative

assertion that the rioting did not add up to a "race riot" because "there were no manifest hostility between colored and white as such," and he argues that it was police restraint that "saved Harlem from becoming a shambles." From McKay's vantage point, the widely circulated notion that Communists were responsible for the riot, did not ring true. Instead, McKay, who had traveled to Russia, focuses on the wider impact of the Depression: "The façade of the Harlem masses' happy-go-lucky and hand-to-mouth existence has been badly broken by the depression. A considerable part of the population can no longer cling even to the hand-to-mouth margin." In a sense, McKay claims here that the culturally thriving Harlem that inspired his novels like *Home to Harlem* (1928) no longer exists. The 1935 riot marks the devastatingly clear end to an earlier era of literary and cultural productivity, and the beginning of a period of stark poverty.

Unlike Ellison's later reporting on the 1943 Harlem riot, McKay spends little attention exploring the actual riot and, instead, considers the complex political conditions that led to its outbreak. He claims that "for the past two years colored agitators have exhorted the colored consumers to organize and demand of the white merchants a new deal: that they should employ Negroes as clerks in the colored community. These agitators are crude men, theoretically." McKay devotes a large portion of his essay to one community activist in particular, Sufi Abdul Hamid, whom he describes as "outstanding and picturesque. He dresses in turban and gorgeous robe. He has a bigger following that his rivals." Hamid's organization, the Negro Industrial and Clerical Alliance, was the first to initiate a picketing campaign to demand the hiring of African American clerks, an afford that, although successful elsewhere in Harlem, was widely rejected by the merchants on 125th street. McKay describes Hamid as an outsider here, "a different type. He does not belong." Nevertheless, his organizing began to pay off when the popular Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. joined his picketing efforts. Their efforts led to the development of a

new organization called the Citizens' League for Fair Play, and the group eventually saw some success in getting African American clerks hired on 125th street; however, Hamid would later leave the group due to personal pressures. Eventually, the group broke down and many of the newly hired clerks were mostly all fired, according to McKay.

To conclude his article, McKay indicts African American leadership. With no organization behind them, the clerks had no support as one after the other lost their positions. In a melancholy tone, McKay offers his closing remarks: "So the masses of Harlem remain disunited and helpless, while their would-be leaders wrangle and scheme and denounce one another to the whites. Each one is ambitious to wear the piebald mantle of Marcus Garvey." Rather than blame the merchants or the Communist organizers for inciting the violence, McKay looks to the fractured black leadership. He wonders how it is that the community fails to unite and offer support to its citizens and workers. Finally, he returns to the 1935 riot in his last few sentences: "On Tuesday the crowds went crazy like the remnants of a defeated, abandoned, and hungry army. Their rioting was the gesture of despair of a bewildered, baffled, and disillusioned people."

McKay was not alone in voicing his reaction to the riots in print. In the April 6, 1935 issue of the *New York Amsterdam News* one column listed the names of other authors from Harlem who chimed in on the riot. According to the column, "the riot brought forth a flood of articles from the local pens…Louise Thompson did a piece for *New Masses*…Earl Brown contributed an article to *The New York Times*…the Rev. Adam Powell had three in the *New York Evening Post;* Claude McKay wrote one for *The Nation*, and Lester Grange scribbled an article for *Common Sense*."[15]

With such a wide range of public outcry following the riot, local politicians, including Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, were called upon to mend the situation, find workable solutions, and appease the anger. As a result, the new commission was formed. Mayor LaGuardia responded to immediate calls for an investigation into the cause of the riot when he issued the following press release on March 20, 1935: “I am appointing a committee of representative citizens to check all official reports and to make a thorough investigation of the causes of the disorder and a study of necessary plans to prevent a repetition of the spreading of malicious rumors, racial animosities, and the inciting of disorder.”[16] The biracial committee, which held 25 hearings and operated for about a year, would eventually be composed of a diverse group of seven African American and six white commissioners. In addition to the committee members, the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier was hired by the committee to serve as the group’s research director. As the commission’s work came to a conclusion, Alain Locke was asked to implement the commission’s recommendations.

As a poet, rather than a politician, Cullen’s position on the mayor’s commission was largely scrutinized in public forums. The *New York Amsterdam News* reported that numerous speakers at the Harlem Committee on Public Policy spoke in opposition to the commission’s composition contending that it lacked serious policy experts. According to the newspaper, “speakers at the meeting held that only one person named, A. Philip Randolph, was qualified to investigate the economic condition which precipitated the riot. Special censure was directed at the naming of Mr. Cullen, a poet, and Mr. Delany, a Fusion appointee on the body.”[17] Fusion was name given to the Republic ticket at the time, which was associated with Mayor LaGuardia. According to Blanche Ferguson, those critical of the commissioners “complained that these people belonged to the privileged class and did not understand their grievances,” but the

commission continued its task despite the many vociferous concerns.[18] As a result, the commissioners were divided into smaller groups with Cullen assigned to the education subcommittee. Limited sources discuss Cullen's personal experience as a member of the committee; however, at least one biographer cites his role on the committee as an example that "his insistence on being thought of a quite simply a poet was by no means a pose or an excuse to shun the problems of the Negro in America, or to disassociate himself from any artistic endeavors made by his contemporaries."[19]

With Frazier, then a black sociologist at Howard University, acting as research director, the commission's final findings were complete within a year. Its results, however, were not made immediately available due to the fact that the commission revised the report three times before the mayor's office accepted it. LaGuardia had insisted that the report be "modified so as to be caustic, and indeed it was modified. In fact, the report went through two iterations, each meant to lessen the severity of the tone, before its final draft. Regardless, the report was never released."[20] Instead, the report was eventually leaked to the press, and the *New York Amsterdam News* published a full version on July 18, 1936. The group's report highlighted "the need for basic economic and social reforms, asserting that discrimination and in security were the underlying causes of the March 19 disorders. And they predicted future eruptions if these conditions were not remedied."[21] The final report acknowledges systemic racial discrimination even within the health care available to Harlem residents, as well as the unfair treatment of the community by the police department, particularly in its handling of the riot. Nevertheless, the final report was "watered-down" and "less biting" than earlier versions.[22] Indeed, the commission's findings were sometimes "broad" or "vague" and generally "sweeping," which made their implementation "incredibly difficult."[23] According to Ralph Crowder, LaGuardia

asked Alain Locke to evaluate the commission's final report.[24] By August 1936, however, *The Baltimore Afro-American* reported that both Locke and Cullen had left the country and were in Paris.[25]

Despite the commission's extensive work, another riot broke out in Harlem only eight years later that would influence Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The Harlem Riot of 1943 began in the evening of August 1, 1943, at Braddock Hotel on West 126th Street when a routine police arrest went awry. A white police officer attempted to arrest a woman for disorderly conduct, but another woman, Mrs. Roberts, interfered. Her son, a uniformed soldier named Robert Bandy, punched the officer. As a result, the police officer arrested Bandy, but Bandy ran when another man hit the officer. The officer threw his nightstick at Bandy, who caught it, and then the officer shot the soldier with his gun. The wounded Bandy, still under arrest, was taken to the hospital, but a rumor quickly began to circulate that the officer had killed a black soldier who was simply trying to stand up for his mother. Angry crowds began breaking windows throughout Harlem and the looting began. By the end, 1,469 stores were vandalized; 606 people were arrested, and 189 injured. Six African Americans were killed and damages were reported to be between three to five million dollars.[26]

Ellison experienced the rioting first hand and published his account in the *New York Post* article "Eyewitness Story of Riot: False Rumors Spurred Mob." He describes the multiple responses of Harlem residents as they watched their community crumble around them. Some seemed filled with fear while other displayed rage, all operating under the false assumption that police had unjustly killed an African American soldier. Careful to capture the moment, Ellison highlights the uncomfortable, ongoing sounds of sirens, the endless flashing lights and the ringing of bells in the dark night. Almost like a nightmare, he reports how the sounds of shots

were fired from nowhere. Like Ellison's surreal riot scene in *Invisible Man*, here the author as journalist recalls the image of boys and men quickly hauling away rolls of linoleum, mattresses and clothing across streets dirtied with broken glass. Ellison tells of how the angry mob "wreaked its revenge" on pawnshops, grocery stores, second-hand furniture stores, hardware stores, and the like. He carefully inventories the items the crowd took: "second-hand chairs, cheap coffee tables with blue mirror tops, articles of clothing and food."

It is Ellison's delicate image of Harlem waking up to the reality of the riot that makes his newspaper account of the riot feel real, human, and heartfelt. He recalls the women, who had been sleeping throughout the night, surprised to discover debris on their doorsteps; he tells us "women stood on stoops in their nightgowns and wrappers and when the fire trucks went through with their flashing lights, you could see them framed in their tenement windows." He offers a careful comparison between 1935 and 1943, noting that similar to the previous riot, no stores owned by African Americans were intentionally bothered. From his perspective, the riot was "a naïve, peasant-like act of revenge;" and, in order to prove his point, Ellison recounts a comment from a longshoreman who claimed that he was acting solely out of revenge. He tells his readers that he gets the impression that the rioters were giving way to resentment over the high price of food and other necessities, police brutality, and general indignities born by African American soldiers. To conclude, Ellison writes: "As I see it, the situation has not ended. Much will depend upon how well Mayor LaGuardia, working with Negro elements who would rather not see this type of thing, is able to reach the people of Harlem."[27]

Ellison was not the only African American author whose work directly responds to the rioting in Harlem in 1943. Among those influenced by the unrest in the community were Ann Petry and James Baldwin. In 1947, Petry published the novella *In Darkness and Confusion*,

which depicts the tale of an older couple, William and Pink Jones, whose son, a soldier like Bandy, also gets arrested in 1943, but in Georgia, where he is stationed. The couple is also caring for their niece, Annie May. When William gets word that his son has been shot after a conflict with a white MP who insisted that he sit in the back of a segregated bus, his hopes and dreams for his son quickly melt away. Later, Petry positions William as a witness to an event that resembles the incident that sparked the actual riot of 1943, a soldier getting shot by a white police officer in a hotel bar in Harlem. According to Beverly Smith, "Petry captured the flavor of the real incident without copying it. The Harlem community was already angered by the treatment received by its soldiers at home and abroad and by its children in the streets at the hands of the police. The hotel incident encapsulated their feelings and fears."[28] In Petry's story, once Pink gets word of her son's situation, she becomes enraged, joins the rioting crowd, and becomes the first to throw a brick into a shop window. Others follow Pink's lead and chaos ensues. It is this kind of chaos that Baldwin also depicts in his *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), a book of essays, in which he juxtaposes the violence of the 1943 Harlem 1943 with the solemn reality of his father's funeral on the same day. Like Baldwin and Petry, Ellison imbues his groundbreaking modernist novel with the fears, hopes and anxieties of the African American community during its mid-century struggle to establish a strong identity, voice, and position within the larger American landscape.

The Battle Royal: Fighting Against the Crowd

Class anxieties and issues of racial group belonging plague the invisible man during the battle royal scene where the community's white leaders force him to join in a chaotic form of entertainment that pits blindfolded African American boys against each other in a boxing ring.

The battle royal deals with the life of the invisible man before invisibility—he does not sense it; he lives within a corrupt racist system without realizing the extent of that corruption or anticipating his own fate. His story is one of hopeful class aspiration—he believes that he is better than other men, both in intellectual ability and class, and that these characteristics might somehow privilege him within a segregated society. Eager to please the white male authorities in his hometown, he participates in the battle royal as a means to perform his graduation day speech—he was invited to give the speech at their private club—and win their illusory praise. By the end of the scene, he does gain the men's approval, but it is tainted by their determination to label him not as a leader of men, but as a black leader. "He makes a good speech," one of them comments. "Some day he'll lead his people in the proper paths" (32). What makes the men's pronouncement so problematic for the narrator is that his own community, represented by the other nine boys in the battle, clearly rejects him. The battle royal demonstrates the invisible man's problematic relationship with a diverse, unpredictable African American community and his misplaced strategy to become a leader of his people by appeasing the desires of the "town's leading white citizens" (17).

The battle royal offers a complicated spatial representation that groups the young narrator at times with, and at other times against, his African Americans peers. The boys all crowd into an elevator to get to the room where the battle takes place. In the elevator's confined space, the narrator finds himself trapped with the boys, but rejects his collective membership in the group. He considers himself a potential Booker T. Washington and nothing like the other young men, whom he refers to as "tough guys." In the elevator, he realizes that "the other fellows didn't care too much for me either…I felt superior to them in my way, and I didn't like the manner in which we were all crowded into the servants' elevator" (18). The invisible man's

dislike of the restricted servants' elevator illuminates his feelings of not only intellectual superiority, but also his own perceived class privilege; he feels disconnected from the boys. At the heart of this scene is the issue of group belonging. The invisible man's desire to lead his peers also causes him to feel superior to them. His sense of superiority ignites the group's collective hate toward him, which only makes the group's sense of cohesion stronger and leaves the naïve young man without a support base.

Ellison's depiction of the black body during the battle royal is significant because the boys in the ring are young adolescents without the power of adult masculinity; their bodies are juxtaposed with that of the naked white female dancer, who trembles with fear as the wild, drunk men at the club lift her in the air and cause her to become a literal damsel in distress. The image of the black boxer has been a mainstay in American literature since the expatriate American writers gathered in Paris. Both Ernest Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises* and Scott F. Fitzgerald in *Tender is the Night* depict the black boxer, whose body represents the power and possibility for the black American. In the battle royal, the boys in the ring are young; they embody an incipient masculinity. Usually, the fictional portrayal of children contains a sentimental element; the reader sees a negative event through the eyes of a child and, therefore, judge the adults harshly. Here, the boys seem more naïve than innocent. Some have the bodies of men, like the last boy whom the narrator must fight. These boys are not innocent, but they represent a stifled possibility. They are confined to limited, tight spaces throughout the battle royal passage. From the elevator, to the boxing ring, to the electrified rug, their encumbered bodies are restricted to finite spaces and their ability to develop into something more than corporeal is limited by the hegemony of the audience that taunts them.

In the boxing ring, the blindfolded young black bodies are grouped together to perform violence against each other as entertainment for the white male audience that resides safely beyond the ropes. The fact that they fight blindfolded highlights their inability to see the reality of the situation; the boys' blindness acts as a metaphor for their failure to navigate through a society that relegates them to its peripheries. As the rowdy white men shout commands at the boys, they helplessly—hindered by blindness—feel around to gain their bearings. The narrator's own blindness causes an immediate sense of paralysis. He experiences "a sudden fit of blind terror" and explains that "it was as though I had suddenly found myself in a dark room filled with poisonous cottonmouths" (21). The snake imagery suggests a sort of dangerous, dormant masculinity awaiting the adolescent boys. Within the ring, the narrator loses his individual identity in favor of a shared identity that the audience bestows upon him and the other boys—it is a collective identity of chaotic, uncontrollable violence. His own blindness, which appears here in his pre-invisible days, mirrors his own later invisibility. The difference between being unable to see and being invisible seems blurred in the ring, but it is his very invisibility that later allows him to see his own complicated individuality within the context of a collective. As the crowd outside the ring pits the boys against each other, the narrator accidentally achieves some sense of sight when his blindfold slips. It is this half-sight that begins to shed light on the problems of group identity explored throughout the text.

The narrator's newly achieved half-sight allows him to observe the fractioning off of the boys into smaller groups, which hints at Ellison's critique throughout the novel of complicated, problematic, and often conflicting group identity politics. From the invisible man's perspective, the boys seem to be hysterically fighting each other; he describes the scene as "complete anarchy" (23). Nevertheless, the chaos leads to intermittent order and temporary, though

generally random, group formations: "No group fought together for long. Two, three, four, fought one, then turned to fight each other, were themselves attacked" (23). First taking on the role of observer, and then moving into the role of instigator, the invisible man chooses to manipulate the small groups, playing "one group against the other, slipping in and throwing a punch then stepping out of range while pushing the others into the melee to take the blows," all in order to preserve himself (23). Unfortunately, his plan backfires. His sight gives him an advantage: it allows him to play the role of a trickster. Yet the group turns on him; they planned to leave the ring and let him remain to fight the biggest boy in the group for the final prize.

Although the narrator clearly functions as an outsider throughout the battle scene, the white male audience continues to group him with the other boys. He cannot escape his racial group identity; hence he is again confined to a particular space when the men force the boys to earn their final pay by retrieving money from an electrified rug. The rug symbolizes a limited, hard earned currency because the boys are forced to compete with each other to gather their pay and, at the same time, provide a painful form of entertainment. No matter how many coins they pick up from the electrified rug, the men above them control the currency and the means by which the boys earn their money. And the money turns out to be worthless, nothing more than tokens made for automobile advertising—the purchase of a car represents a kind of social mobility that the boys are clearly denied in this situation. Although they may not identify with each other individually, the narrator and his peers are trapped within an economy beyond their control. They chaotically compete with each other without the possibility of competing with the audience who only gives them a minor fraction of their own wealth.

College: The Anxiety of Class Limitations

The narrator's college experience, which takes place on Founders' Day, methodologically juxtaposes the invisible man's class aspirations with the harsh reality of the social and economic limitations that plague members of the black community within a segregated environment. While the narrator feels connected to Mr. Norton, a wealthy white donor from the North, and Dr. Bledsoe, the college's black president, his encounter with Jim Trueblood and the Golden Day veterans highlights a strong distrust in racial group identity and his fear of falling into the lower class. Despite his academic success, the protagonist remains plagued with class anxiety throughout Founders' Day. He correctly fears that one wrong move on his part during this pivotal day may diminish his class standing and revoke the esteem he has earned from Dr. Bledsoe, who has given him the task of assisting Norton. Close proximity to Norton triggers the narrator's race and class anxiety because the wealthy visitor embodies a class position to aspire to: "His manner was aristocratic, his movements dapper and suave" (38). Everything about Norton points to his status: his wafer-thin pocket watch, soft silk shirt, and the perfect blue-and-white bow tie. Bledsoe asks the narrator to drive Norton around; the car that he uses even inspires the narrator's discomfort. For the narrator, the powerful motor fills him "with pride and anxiety" (37). His uneasy feelings control him; the vehicle's ostentatious nature leads to embarrassing situations. For example, the car attracts the attention of other students, which makes the narrator self-conscious. The very fact that Bledsoe has tapped the narrator as responsible and well-mannered enough to chauffeur the important visitor speaks to the protagonist's success at the college and his potential for upward mobility.

As Norton reminisces about his early friendship with Bledsoe from the backseat of the vehicle, the protagonist feels a sense of class solidarity with both Norton and Bledsoe. He recalls

an old photo that he had seen of Bledsoe with Norton taken during the college's early days. The two men reside above the "blank faces" of African Americans in the crowd; Bledsoe is situated with the wealthy Northern donors like Norton (39). The narrator aspires to Bledsoe's elevated class status as an African American leader, and he suddenly feels himself take Bledsoe's place at Norton's side, right there in the car. He explains, "Now I felt that I was sharing in a great work and, with the car leaping leisurely beneath the pressure of my foot, I identified myself with the rich man" (39). The protagonist's identification with Norton suggests that he also rejects his potential position with the "blank" faces in black crowd. Within the confined space of the car, he and Norton are connected. The narrator fails to see the difference between his role as a student driver and Norton's leisurely position in the backseat. Although there is no partition, the division between the two is palpable to the reader.

The protagonist's encounter with Jim Trueblood, an impoverished African American sharecropper whose way of life evokes the antebellum pastoral, threatens to rupture the illusory connection that the narrator feels he has established with Norton; Trueblood's mere proximity triggers the narrator's class anxieties. Trueblood embodies the griot, someone who passes down stories within the African American community, particularly folktales—he is a caretaker of folk culture. Unlike the narrator, Trueblood symbolizes the gifted, self-taught black orator. The narrator recalls that the sharecropper has a way with crowds; it is a natural skill he possesses. Moreover, Trueblood also symbolizes disgrace, trauma, and moral corrosion to members of the black middle class—he has committed a shameful act of incest, and he willingly shares his own story with the world. The narrator worries that he has inadvertently exposed Trueblood's disgrace to Norton and, that in doing so, he has also shamed the entire black college community. The narrator recalls that before Trueblood's disgrace, he "had been well liked as a hard worker

who took good care of his family's needs, and as one who told the old stories with a sense of humor and a magic that made them come alive" (46). Although Trueblood represents a traditional black performer, he causes discomfort in the narrator's middle-class black community. Trueblood and his troupe had been known to sing "authentic" spirituals at the school for Northern visitors like Norton; yet the students mock his performances: "We were embarrassed by the earthy harmonies they sang," the narrator explains, "but since the visitors were awed we dared not laugh at the crude, high, plaintively animal sounds Jim Trueblood made as he led the quartet" (47). Words like "crude," "earthy," and "animal" limn the pastoral nature that Trueblood embodies. I am most interested in what makes the narrator and the other students feel "embarrassed" by Trueblood, even before the act of incest that leads to his disgrace. Perhaps it is the concern that they share a racial identity with Trueblood; they are part of the same community. For the white visitors, Trueblood functions as a portal into the authentic black experience, something that relegates the students and faculty, with all their strivings for uplift and middle-class values, to something less than authentic.

Somehow the students do not seem to understand their own embarrassment, shame, and desire to laugh at the sight of Trueblood in performance. The protagonist's feelings highlight the class anxieties that he and the other students at the school experience in Trueblood's presence. Even the name "Trueblood" suggests that somehow he embodies the reality of what it means to be black in America: connected to the land, full of folk knowledge, and indebted to others. The narrator admits, "I didn't understand in those pre-invisible days that their hate, and mine too, was charged with fear. How all of us at the college hated the black-belt people, the 'peasants,' during those days! We were trying to lift them up and they, like Trueblood, did everything it seemed to pull us down" (47). The narrator's statement alludes to his own desire for a class mobility that

favors movement away from poverty. According to Houston Baker, "In the Trueblood episode, blacks who inhabit the southern college's terrain assume that they have transcended the peasant rank of sharecroppers and their cohorts. In fact, both the college's inhabitants and Trueblood's agrarian fellows are but constituencies of a single underclass."[29] Concerned with uplift, the students and college administrators fear the reality of Trueblood's situation and are concerned that outsiders will see Trueblood as the real, authentic articulation of the black experience. That would mean that the college is nothing more than a mimetic community modeled after the Northern founders like Norton.

Proximity to Trueblood causes the narrator to experience anxiety; he literally finds himself "between the sharecropper and the millionaire," which mirrors his own ambiguous class position as both a black man and a student at the college. As Trueblood tells his story about having a dream that leads to his incestuous act and his subsequent rejection from the black community, he offers his small audience an intriguing performance. Like in the past, Trueblood profits from the story. Norton gives him money for the tale, which shocks the narrator. As Houston Baker explains, he "has indeed accepted the profit motive that gave birth to that (minstrel) mask in the first place."[30] Like Norton, the narrator is captivated by the story: "As I listened I had been so torn between humiliation and fascination that to lessen my sense of shame I had kept my attention riveted upon his face" (68). For the narrator, Trueblood's tale demonstrates his story-telling capability, his rural cadence, and also his hate for the bourgeois blacks at the school.

Norton suffers a traumatic affective response after witnessing Trueblood's performance, and the narrator seeks a cure at the Golden Day Bar, only to run into a chaotic crowd of mentally unstable black veterans—a group of former upper-class black men in "therapy" who have fallen

out of class and society altogether. Unlike Trueblood, the veterans were previously successful professionals. Their inability to function as members of the middle-class makes the narrator anxious, and he explains his feelings in the following passage:

> Many of the men had been doctors, lawyers, teachers, Civil Service workers; there were several cooks, a preacher, a politician, and an artist. One very nutty one had been a psychiatrist. Whenever I saw them I felt uncomfortable. They were supposed to be members of the professions toward which at various times I vaguely aspired myself, and even though they never seemed to see me I could never believe that they were really patients. (74)

As "doctors," "lawyers" and "teachers," these men were members of the black elite that the narrator hopes to join, and their fall frightens the narrator and inspires his insecurities. Instead of giving these men his compassion, the invisible man focuses on his own discomfort. His thoughts are consumed by the fact that these men, at one time, had been able to achieve some of the career goals that he himself aspires to; yet they ultimately failed to sustain their success. He is unable to acknowledge the loss these veterans might have suffered from their traumatic experiences in the war. As soldiers, these men wore a uniform that certified their citizenship and illustrated their commitment to protecting the nation-state from which they came. They gave up their hard fought, comfortable positions within the black middle class to go to war. The narrator describes the veterans as "shell-shocked;" yet it could be that the shock they suffer may not be from the bombs they faced in Europe. Instead, their sense of shock emerges from a realization that when they returned to their own nation, they were expected to simply ease back into their Southern, segregated, black-middle class identities.

Just as Norton had never previously seen the Trueblood cabin, the school's officials had shielded him from these veterans who no longer occupy positions within the black middle class. The Golden Day itself represents a way of life that the school officials would rather hide. It is an establishment perpetually threatened with closure. It is also a space that has seen many transformations: "It was a church, then a bank, then it was a restaurant and a fancy gambling house" (80). The Golden Day functions as a space with a shifting identity and the school officials reject the building in its current state. With his visit to the Golden Day, Norton's image of the school and surrounding community continues to transform. Left without their black attendant, Supercargo, these men become a reckless crowd that shakes Norton's already fragile stability. They are members of a group of black mentally unstable veterans, but they also possess an individual identity that surprises the narrator whose notion of a homogenous black community had been previously manipulated and constructed by the school's leadership. Norton's inability to articulate these men's identities within his own terms and expectations leads him to see them simply as a crowd of unstable vets. This crowd becomes increasingly violent during Norton's visit, and the chaos climaxes as the veterans attack their attendant.

When the vets attack Supercargo, their actions represent a collective rejection of and disregard for authority that anticipates the riot at the novel's conclusion. After the vets gaze upon Norton, an authority figure they cannot defeat, they turn their attention immediately to Supercargo, who stands above them, large, drunk and demanding. The vets, all former soldiers, ignore his orders and, instead, take him down:

> Supercargo grabbed wildly at the balustrade as they snatched his feet from beneath him and started down. His head bounced against the steps making a sound like a series of

gunshots as they ran dragging him by his ankles, like volunteer firemen running with a hose. The crowd surged forward. (83)

The vets collectively act as an obsessed crowd; in unison, they attack the black man in charge. Supercargo's massive size mirrors that of the authority within their own community, represented by school officials like Bledsoe, that has left the vets shocked upon their return to the United States. These men find themselves oppressed by every aspect of the segregated society that awaited them, unchanged in the South, including the expectation of their own African American community. The vets beat Supercargo, kick him while he's down, baptize him in a shower of beer, and leave him unconscious on the bar all in order to protest the black authority that he represents. Indeed, he stands in as a proxy for the authority that has failed to keep them in order.

The unnamed former doctor, also one of the vets, who helps treat Norton at the Golden Day, voices the distress that the other veterans demonstrate with their violent and chaotic actions. As the doctor treats Norton upstairs, the men below lose control and whirl "like maniacs" (85). According to the narrator, "The excitement seemed to have tilted some of the more delicately balanced ones too far. Some made hostile speeches at the top of their voices against the hospital, the state and the universe" (85). The chaos that leads to these speeches seems to mirror what will come for the narrator as he too begins to experiment with oratory as a form of crowd control; however, as the vets demonstrate, speeches sometimes fail to restrain groups that have already lost control. The music in the scene adds a sense of urgency and cadence to the vets' actions. They move without consciousness; their rebellion is automatic. The narrator feels confused by the madness—the chaos triggers his anxiety because he has no control. At this moment, the lack of order assaults the narrator's belief in authority and power; yet he does not give in to the anxious feelings that the scene evokes. Instead, he quickly focuses on his retreat

from the situation. The doctor in the upstairs room tries to warn the narrator against blindly believing in the power of authority, but the warnings, which are quite at odds with the narrator's expectations, go unheard.

The shell-shocked former doctor is the first to label the narrator invisible; his medical training makes him particularly capable of providing a diagnosis. Indeed, the shock that the doctor experiences does not seem to stem from any war trauma, but instead from his own near lynching in the United States. "These hands so lovingly trained to master a scalpel yearn to caress a trigger," he explains. "I returned to save life and I was refused…Ten men in masks drove me out from the city at midnight and beat me with whips for saving a human life" (93). What is key here is that the doctor explains his own trauma. He went to France with the Army Medical Corps and remained there after the Armistice to study and practice. He had stayed in France long enough "to forget some fundamentals which I never should have forgotten" (91). Here, the term "fundamentals" refers to how to survive as a black man in the segregated South. Put differently, the freedom that the doctor experiences in France leads him to believe that he would be treated with dignity in the United States; but upon his return, he faces insurmountable obstacles. He cannot accept his predicament, so he falls out of society with the other veterans at the Golden Day.

The doctor tells Norton his story in the presence of the narrator in order to warn the young man about the pitfalls associated with the class aspirations. However, the narrator chooses not to listen. Instead, he dismisses the doctor's prognosis as delusional. Nevertheless, the doctor speaks to Norton with clarity, which makes the narrator feel a "fearful satisfaction" and, at the same time, fills him with anxiety (93). The doctor questions Norton's sincerity and critiques the narrator's blind devotion to the school and Norton's values. The doctor not only

pinpoints Norton's disease, but also offers a diagnosis for the narrator: "Behold! a walking zombie! Already he's learned to repress not only his emotions but humanity. He's invisible, a walking personification of the Negative" (94). The doctor understands that the narrator believes in the school and that the young man has already learned how to suppress his feelings. Indeed, the narrator does not allow himself to feel beyond his instinctual reactions to stress, and the doctor detects this problem that will persist throughout the narrator's journey to his final underground hibernation. Thus ending the college section, the invisible man witnesses both the highs and lows of class potential and the social limbo that the black veterans represent.

The Renter's Eviction: Speechmaking to Avoid Crowd Violence

Following his move to New York, the narrator comes into contact with the crowd outside an old couple's eviction just after he realizes that he has the ability to choose how to live his own life. Therefore, he has figured out that he has some agency, which he uses to try to control the unruly crowd. After eating a warm yam on the street in the middle of a cold winter day, he discovers the freedom to be himself as long as he remains true to his cultural heritage. If as Randal Doane argues, "the yam represents (the invisible man's) southern heritage, the raw material of nature from which he draws to shape his identity," than the act of eating the yam resembles Eve's decision to eat the forbidden fruit that provides insight and knowledge.[31] As it did for Eve, the consumption of the forbidden also leads to pain. After eating the yams, the narrator soon discovers the harsh reality of the North during the eviction; he finds himself outside of Eden, so to speak. Indeed, eating the yam provides him with a sense of ease he rarely exhibits; he thinks: "I no longer felt ashamed of the things I had always loved" (266). He realizes that he had never allowed himself to have a choice; he always followed someone else's rules. In the moments before he encounters the eviction crowd, he realizes that he actually has

the ability to choose: “I had never formed a personal attitude toward so much. I had accepted the attitudes and it had made life seem simple” (267). The narrator’s realization influences his reaction to the eviction—it empowers him to communicate with the crowd.

The eviction of the old couple disturbs the narrator’s newfound sense of freedom, which results in his decision not only to join the crowd, but also to rally the group. He notices the people gathering to watch an elderly black couple being forced out of their home, and he does not like what he sees: “I couldn’t believe it. Something, a sense of foreboding, filled me, a quick sense of uncleanliness” (267). His affective responses vary as he witnesses the eviction; he feels surprised and then a sense of injustice. These affects are partly evoked by the eviction and partly engendered by the agitated crowd. He acts on his feelings and, in turn, the crowd provokes him: “Something had been working fiercely inside me, and for a moment I had forgotten the rest of the crowd. Now I recognized a self-consciousness about them, as though they, we, were ashamed to witness the eviction” (270). Although the narrator happens across the eviction with a new awareness of his own agency, he quickly loses himself to the crowd. The crowd controls the narrator here. He no longer facilitates his movement; instead he moves with the collective. The narrator refers to himself as part of the crowd, a joined body witnessing the eviction of the elderly couple. Like the narrator, the members of the crowd express curiosity about the items scattered along the ground, discarded in the snow. These items also evoke affective responses.

The items that the protagonist notices on the street cause him to feel “strange memories awakening” because these objects represent various aspects of the African American experience. They embody the history, the hope, and the dreams of a people (271). He sees a set of knocking bones, a straightening comb, an Ethiopian flag, a tintype of Abraham Lincoln, a newspaper reporting Garvey’s deportation, free papers—all through the lens of his membership within the

collective, a largely African American crowd in Harlem. Each object carries meaning. For instance, the knocking bones, which are described as "crudely carved and polished" bones "used in black-face minstrels," suggest a theatrical history, or a kind of performance related to the narrator's own speechmaking. In this light, the positioning of these knocking bones here points to the narrator's own complicated history of performance, and his prior urges to act based on the desires of others. All the other items in the snow, like the knocking bones, share a similarly important position within African American history, politics, and culture; they suggest a shared community and culture that the narrator recognizes as his own. At the same time, the invisible man feels anxiety triggered by the realization that he shares something in common with the dispossessed couple.

The narrator's impromptu, emotional and urgent speech before the eviction crowd begins with the rhetoric of citizenship; he is careful to quell the incipient violence. He does this because he fears the potential consequences, but he also seeks control of the crowd and, as a result, himself. With his speech, as John Callahan explains, "Invisible Man and his audience reverse call-and-response. Although he fears their point of view, he adapts and changes his pitch. He must, if he wishes to keep on talking—and words are essential to a leader's identity."[32] The narrator physically moves through the crowd as he speaks, rises above the crowd, and talks "rapidly without thought," but with "clashing emotions" (275). And these emotions lead him to speak about American citizenship and universal human rights. He reminds the crowd, "We're a law-abiding people and a slow-to-anger-people" (275). These words, the rhetoric that the narrator applies here, sound reminiscent of Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Exposition Speech and his own speech during the Battle Royal scene. He is trying to avoid violence; it is the

potential violence that frightens him. His emphasis on the "slow to anger" phrase seems designed not only to placate the crowd, but also to reassure the facilitators of the eviction.

The narrator tries to appease the crowd by mirroring the speech he has previously heard from Blind Barbee during his time at the college. From this vantage point, it would seem that the Barbee speech acts as an oratory model for the narrator. It demonstrates the particular nature of the narrator's speechmaking: he appropriates aspects of other speeches that he has heard, read, and witnessed. Put differently, he improvises, like a jazz musician, with a variety of borrowed materials. He does not begin with his own words, but with the image of Booker T. Washington that Barbee uses. As Gene Jarrett argues, "part of the Invisible Man's conundrum, then, is to figure out his place in political history—precisely, whether he will be 'inside history,' a reincarnation of Washington but with a new focus on class, or 'outside of history,' a legend or tale."[33] Evoking Washington's ideals, the narrator urges the crowd witnessing the eviction to wait before they act: "Let's follow a leader, let's organize. *Organize*. We need someone like that wise leader, you read about him, down in Alabama. He was strong enough to choose to do the wise thing in spite of what he felt himself" (276). Although the narrator would like to leader the crowd on his own terms, he refers instead here to Booker T. Washington and his ability to neglect his own emotions in order to achieve the greater good. Indeed, John Wright is correct when he notes, "*Invisible Man* probes the character of leadership strategies as well as the relationships between the leaders and the led."[34]

While the narrator speaks, the crowd heckles him in a kind of call-and-response that complicates the narrator's position in the group. Put differently, the call-and-response technique creates a messy atmosphere where the leadership position becomes fluid and blurry. According to John Callahan, "As it evolves in black oral tradition, the call-and-response pattern registers the

changing relationship between the individual musician or storyteller and the community."[35] While the narrator attempts to assert his leadership role, the crowd also, almost automatically, controls the narrator's reactions, words, and movements. The audience does not easily respond to the narrator's suggestions, partly because the narrator tentatively tries to gauge the crowd's receptiveness to his message as he speaks. He does not seem to have a prepared message. Indeed, his improvised speech moves fluidly with the crowd; his only intention is to control the crowd and prevent violence. And in controlling the crowd, by rising up in front of the audience, the narrator achieves a sense of power that makes him feel satisfied and successful. As a result, the narrator's attempt to control the crowd works in tandem with the crowd's reaction to the narrator. According to Callahan, "Invisible Man's use of call-and-response is contingent, and the effect varies according to the different contexts of his spoken and written words."[36]

The protagonist exits the stage once his leadership position fades or becomes untenable. Once the members of the Brotherhood arrive, the narrator no longer possesses the voice of authority. He loses his position as leader; therefore, he must leave rather than become merely a member of the group. The labeling of those gathered outside the tenement comes from those outside the black community when the officer orders his fellow officer to "send in a riot call!" (283). The response from one of the white men from the Brotherhood is to ask, "What riot?" And the officer expresses his legal authority: "If I say there's a riot, there's a riot" (283). This discussion leads to the narrator's escape from the situation; he retreats from the unruly crowd. His anxiety is expressed when he remarks to himself, "It became too much for me. The whole thing had gotten out of hand. What had I said to bring on all this? I edged to the back of the crowd on the steps and backed into the hallway" (284). His departure suggests that he does not

have the ability to sustain a leadership role; instead, he seeks out momentary power and then he retreats.

The Harlem Arena Rally Speech: Division and Leadership

The protagonist's Harlem rally speech illustrates his desire to fulfill the Brotherhood's political ideals while still performing a leadership role within the African American community. A clear division exists between himself and the community during his free flowing speech; and prior to the event, he seems more preoccupied with himself and his public image than with preparing his presentation. Before leaving for the rally, the narrator comes across a journalistic account of his participation in the renter's eviction. Commuters in the subway are reading an article titled "Violent Protest Over Harlem Eviction," and the narrator experiences a sense of disappointment when he learns that he has been identified simply as an unknown rabble-rouser "who disappeared in the excitement" (331). He wants to be a leader, separate from the crowd, but in control. The narrator's place on stage at the Harlem arena significantly differs from the position he held on the street in front of the crowd during the eviction. On the stage, the narrator is clearly divided from the people, though he tries, with his carefully selected words, to connect with the crowd.

As he takes the stage during the rally, it is the spotlight that separates the narrator from the crowd. The narrator's position in the light signifies his leadership role; he is culled from the group and, as a result, he takes on a higher social class. He acknowledges his lack of experience as an orator—he has, up to this point, only given his graduation speech and stood before the crowd during the eviction. On this stage, during the rally, he takes on a leadership role and speaks with authority. He applies a call-and-response technique once again to lead the crowd,

though he cannot see the crowd. Randal Doane likens the narrator's speech to a celebration of racial identity: "he riffs with pleasure in a call-and-response dialogue with the Harlem audience."[37] The separation between the narrator and the crowd happens because the lights are shining in his eyes, blinding him while simultaneously metaphorically lifting him above the crowd, and he describes the separation as "a semi-transparent curtain had dropped between us, but through which they could see me—for they were applauding—without themselves being seen" (341). The description of the crowd's invisibility here mirrors Du Bois's description of the veil in *The Souls of Black Folk*; only in this case the crowd seems enshrouded in a group veil, rather than the individual African American who feels the need to conceal an identity that is complex and personal.[38] The crowd becomes invisible to the narrator because he fails to see the individuals in the group.

He misses the opportunity to facilitate a connection with the individuals in his audience because he focuses on controlling the crowd as a collective body. Throughout the narrator's speech, he claims that he and the crowd are one, but all the while he is conscious of his separation from the audience, which causes his anxiety. Although he sees himself as a leader, he also wants the crowd to acknowledge his leadership position. In order to establish a connection with the audience, he begins his speech by referring to himself as part of the crowd: "They call us the 'common people.' But I've been sitting here listening and looking and trying to understand what's so *common* about us" (342). Here, the use of the word "common" denotes a class position, and the idea that the narrator and the crowd share the status of "uncommon" people suggests that they share an elevated class status. Moreover, the narrator seems to see himself as one of the crowd because he believes, mistakenly, that the crowd has enough agency to move itself beyond oppression. He asks, "Do you know what makes us so uncommon? *We*

let them do it" (342). Indeed, the verb "let" suggests that the people in the crowd have a choice, but the narrator's logic is flawed because he does not realize that the kind of mobility he experiences throughout the narrative is not common at all. He moves through each scene in the novel as a single man, without obligation. In a city full of opportunity, he has the ability to move from one subject position to the next. Alternatively, the working-class people in the crowd do not share his mobility, but he remains oblivious to that fact. Indeed, when the narrator is blinded by the light and unable to see the crowd, he is also equally unable to understand fully the crowd's position within society.

Perhaps the most significant insight into the protagonist's affective response to the crowd comes when he emphatically declares his feelings in the middle of his speech. He repeats the phrase "I feel" four times before he explains to the crowd that his strange, unexpected sentience has made him become more human:

> I feel strong, I feel able to get things done! I feel that I can see sharp and clear and far down the dim corridor of history and in it I can hear the footsteps of militant fraternity! No, wait, let me confess…I feel the urge to affirm my feelings…I feel that here, after a long and desperate and uncommonly blind journey, I have come home…Home! With your eyes upon me I feel that I've found my true family! My true people! My true country! I am a new citizen of the country of your vision, a native of your fraternal land. I feel that here tonight, in this old arena, the new is being born and the vital old revived. In each of you, in me, in us all. (346)

The narrator throws around words like "me" in combination with "you" to make the collective "us;" yet he never truly joins the crowd. His proclamation of his humanity juxtaposed with the notion of militant fraternity suggests that there is an "us" versus "them" paradigm that the

narrator does not know how to solve. Indeed, he never truly defines "us" and "them." Brother Jack monitors the speech, whispering to narrator to be careful as he prepares to share his feelings. Brother Jack's comments influence the narrator's position; he modifies his message to the following: "WE ARE THE TRUE PATRIOTS! THE CITIZENS OF TOMORROW'S WORLD! WE'LL BE DISPOSSESSED NO MORE" (346). Capitalized for emphasis, the passage forces the question: How might one become a citizen of the world? The idea of a fraternal community points directly to the Brotherhood, and it is the Brotherhood that makes the narrator feel alive, more human. The mere presence of an audience gives the narrator a power that energizes him, but the power to speak in front of the community is directly controlled by the Brotherhood; moreover, the protagonist does not have any real power in that organization.

It is important to consider how the members of the Brotherhood interpret the crowd's reaction to the protagonist's speech because they feel that the crowd has become a mob, or a communal body without control. Brother Jack expresses his approval of the speech and enthusiasm for the crowd's openness to be "told what to do" (348). Unfortunately for the narrator, others in the Brotherhood disagree, and backstage, away from the audience, the Brotherhood has a less than fraternal meeting to discuss the narrator's speech and what its members have interpreted as the crowd's unsatisfactory reaction. One of the brothers points out that the audience is acting like a "mob," and Brother Jack responds, "Sure, it's acting like a mob…Is it a mob *against* us, or is it a mob *for* us…Perhaps you're right, perhaps it is a mob; but if it is, then it seems to be a mob that's simply boiling over to come along with us" (350). For Brother Jack, whether or not the crowd has become a mob is of no matter as long as the collective supports the organization's agenda. Disagreeing with Brother Jack, others call for a

more controlled, scientific approach to communicating with the audience; they also feel that the narrator must receive a specific type of science-based training.

The scientific approach, as opposed to the emotional approach that the narrator embodies, represents a more rational way to convey an ideology and control a collective body.[39] Just as the crowd must be constrained with a scientific approach, so too must the narrator. As a result of his outpouring of feelings on the dais, the Brotherhood decides, in a move that serves to illustrate their power, to remove the narrator from the community that he wishes to lead. Instead, he must learn how to utilize science before emotion. The Brotherhood encourages him to block out emotion, occlude all sentience, and to leave behind his personal confessions. He must forget, or ignore, that he feels "more human" as he stands before the audience. Brother Jack sarcastically informs the narrator: "*Training*. All is not lost. There's hope that our wild but effective speaker may be tamed" (351). It is the narrator's very emotions that require taming if he is to become a successful organizer and, in doing so, lead the people, in the name of the Brotherhood. By training the narrator through a scientific method or, more simply put, the rational based methods prescribed by the Brotherhood's ideology, the narrator loses any sense of "home" or a place to express his own voice and act on his intuition. He becomes like Clifton's dolls, nothing more than a puppet.

The Harlem Riot: Failing to Find the Words

The narrator's ill-fated attempt at speechmaking in the final Harlem riot scene limns his position at the margins of the unruly crowd. Ras—the narrator's nemesis and a radical Harlem leader likely inspired by Marcus Garvey—confronts the narrator with a litany of allegations. He is eager to sway the crowd's emotions, turn the group against the narrator. Here, again the

protagonist desires a place at the crowd's head; yet he is unsure how to secure that position. The collective community is running wild; they have just burned down a tenement. As Harlem burns, the crowd functions without a leader; even the police randomly fire their guns without specific targets. Thus it is no surprise that the notion of authority becomes problematic as each leadership figure turns on the other—the police fire at the narrator; the narrator attacks Ras; Ras attacks the narrator; and the police attack Ras. All this fighting causes insurmountable chaos. In fact, when the narrator sustains a flesh wound due to an officer's stray bullet, his position in the crowd seems compromised by this injury. He is unable to take his place as a leader and instead becomes an unreliable narrator. The wounded protagonist falls into the crowd just as he arrives at the riot scene; the surrounding black adopt him as a member of their group rather than a leader. They inspect his abrasion and diagnose it as nothing more than a flesh wound: "'Damn! He's got a hole in his head!' a voice said. A light flashed in my face, came close. I felt a hard hand upon my skull and moved away. 'Hell, it's just a nick,' a voice said." (536). The medicine they offer is liquor. At this point, the narrator's drunkenness renders him unreliable; his vision is compromised by his intoxication. His ability to control the crowd is numbed. He unwillingly becomes part of the working-class crowd.

The narrator's connection with the people in Harlem initially allows him to abandon the Brotherhood and become part of the crowd; however, it is unclear how much his wound and weakness have caused him to make these decisions. He explains, "I felt no need to lead or leave them; was glad to follow; was gripped by a need to see where and to what they would lead" (542). It is only when the narrator joins the rioting crowd that he experiences a final fall that leads to his underground hibernation, outside of society. When he joins the group as they burn a tenement in protest, he literally becomes surrounded by fire; it is as if he has descended into a

kind of purgatory. As a response to the violence, he thinks: "It didn't occur to me to interfere, or to question…They had a plan" (546). He takes a back seat to the crowd's leadership and watches, until he becomes a participant. After an initial sense of hesitation, the narrator feels excited by the fire: "And now I was seized with a fierce sense of exaltation. They've done it, I thought. They organized it and carried it through alone; the decision their own and their own action. Capable of their own action" (548). Ngai's conceptualization of affect leading to inaction is significant here, because even as the narrator seems to be a participant in starting the fire, he is really just an observer. He gives up his desire to lead; his attempts have been unsuccessful. He wants the crowd to act peacefully, but he cannot achieve this due to his inability to control the group with his speechmaking. As a result, he disavows his own agency and chooses not to act.

Although Ras positions the narrator as a target for the crowd, his own inability to lead the group successfully causes his public demise, which alludes to the notion that no real leaders exist within Harlem. As Ras urges the crowd to hang the protagonist, the narrator unsuccessfully struggles to summon the words that might save him: "Even as I spoke I knew it was no good. I had no words and no eloquence, and when Ras thundered, 'Hang him!' I stood there facing them, and it seemed unreal. I faced them knowing that the madman in a foreign costume was real and yet unreal" (558). The narrator's words are "no good" because he cannot control an unruly crowd. The crowd triggers a sense of class anxiety and, therefore, an incontrovertible fear, that destroys his charisma. He fails to control the chaotic group as it riots against oppression and systematic racism that has left the working-class black community on the margins of society. The crowd's impending threat to hang the narrator recalls the former doctor, a shell-shocked vet from the Golden Day, who was threatened with lynching when all he wanted to do was save

lives. Here Ellison links this potential lynching by blacks to lynching by white racist mobs. The prospect of being lynched also inhibits the narrator's ability to fulfill his leadership potential, and he feels culpable because he fails to control the crowd. Nevertheless, his words do not come as he struggles to save himself or, more simply put, to redeem himself in the crowd's eyes:

> If only I could turn around and drop my arms and say, "Look, men, give me a break, we're all black folks together…Nobody cares." Though now I knew *we* cared, they at last cared enough to act—so I thought. If only I could say, "Look, they've played a trick on us, the same old trick with new variations—let's stop running and respect and love one another." (560)

There is, at best, an example here of the narrator's use of "if only" to signify a lost opportunity. He cannot convince these Harlem citizens that they are all the same, a kind of family, and that they have been tricked by their community leaders. Perhaps he cannot make this argument intelligible because all along he has resisted this kind of racial group solidarity, and he has inadvertently participated in the crowd's subjection by advocating for the Brotherhood's agenda.

For the narrator, all his hard work seems to amount to chaos. He realizes that he has been a pawn in the Brotherhood's plan to start a riot all along: "The committee had planned it. And I had helped, had been a tool. A tool just at the very moment I had thought myself free. By pretending to agree I *had* indeed agreed, had made myself responsible for that huddled form lighted by flame and gunfire in the street" (553). The images of shooting, fire, and death are all reminiscent of the war that the Golden Day veterans survived. In fact, the riots of 1935 and 1943 frame the interwar period. Although the United States fought abroad during these wars, a different kind of fight still remained for the residents of Harlem, victims of a society that would confine them within tenement housing, expose their children to disease, and withhold

opportunities for economic growth. For the narrator, when he exits the crowd, he intends to face the Brotherhood. He wants revenge, but he never gets it. Instead, he ends up in a hole where he hibernates, contemplating some kind of redress and waiting for the right moment to resurface.

In the text's final moments, the narrator experiences a kind of social death when he falls through the uncovered manhole into a pile of coal and out of society. Surrounded by blackness—the dark of night and the coal—he feels a sense of paralysis and embraces his position on society's periphery. All along he had searched for an identity above the black crowd, only to find himself beneath the crowd, in an environment imbued by the very blackness that he has tried to escape: "Here it was as though the riot was gone and I felt the tug of sleep, seemed to move out upon black water. It's a kind of death without hanging, I thought, a death alive" (566). In this context, the "death alive" functions as a metaphorical death beneath the city, his senses diminished; he lays buried in darkness. Nevertheless, he does seem to function in the darkness—he burns the items in his briefcase just as the Harlem crowd attacked objects along the streets. Again, here he finds himself near a fire—he exists within a continued state of purgatory, a liminal space outside of society. From this vantage point, I argue that instead of a physical death, the narrator experiences something akin to what Orlando Patterson has termed "social death." Patterson developed the term specifically to describe the lack of social relationships blacks experienced during slavery; they existed outside of society: "If the slave no longer belonged to a community, if he had no social existence outside of his master, then what was he? The initial response in almost all slaveholding societies was to define the slave as a socially dead person."[40] The narrator's fall into the dark symbolizes this kind of social death—he does not want to exist within the crowd, symbolized by the rioters; yet he has failed to rise above the crowd. As a result, he falls outside of society.

The narrator's decision to burn the items in the briefcase, items that he has tirelessly carried with him, signifies his submission to the fact that he cannot function within normative social constraints and that he will no longer hold a leadership position within the crowd. All the items that he had been carefully saving, many officials documents that symbolize his progress, are burned for survival—they provide light and warmth. The narrator becomes overwhelmed, and he can do nothing but remain in darkness. He collapses "face forward and lay there beyond the point of exhaustion, too tired to close my eyes. It was a state neither of dreaming nor of waking, but somewhere in between, in which I was caught like Trueblood's jaybird that yellow jackets had paralyzed in every part but his eyes" (568). Within the dark hole, away from society, the narrator experiences a suspended agency, similar to what Ngai describes in *Ugly Feeling*. Indeed, Ellison seems to be also representing, through the chaotic crowd aesthetic, art's impotence. Ngai observes, "Art thus comes to interrogate the problematically limited agency of art foregrounded in the aesthetics generated by ugly feelings, and in a fashion, I will argue, unparalleled by other cultural practices" (36). Ellison creates a character whose own ugly feelings about society lead to a state of suspended action. Indeed, the narrator's suspended action mirrors Ellison's own vexed feelings about the power of art—it is impotent, and must reside underground.

During his paralysis, the narrator grapples with his complex feelings toward those leaders with whom he has come into contact over the years. Before he sets out to write, he must come to terms with his own misdirected respect and eventual disappointment. According to Valerie Smith, "the fictional protagonist uses his literary talent to subvert his subordinate relation to figures of authority, to expand the overly restrictive conceptions of identity that others impose upon him."[41] Through his dreams, he subconsciously grapples with the authority figures he

cannot confront during his waking hours. He dreams about all the leaders he has known: Emerson, Bledsoe, Norton, the superintendent, and Ras. Ellison himself has commented on the protagonist's problematic trust in the leaders who ultimately failed him when he wrote: "The major flaw in the hero's character is his unquestioning willingness to do what is required of him by others as a way to success."[42] In the narrator's dream, the leaders mock him, and in a strange image, suspend his severed testicles from a bridge. In this context, the narrator's male body parts represent a lost, failed, and potentially destroyed future. He explains to the leaders, as he watches his seed drip away, that he is free from his illusions about them. For the narrator, his own end represents the end of the history that the leaders made. In a sense, by destroying their faithful follower, the leaders have no one left to lead, inspire, or train to become future leaders. Gene Jarrett argues, "The Invisible Man reaches the conclusion that when one is outside history, myth has succeeded in controlling one's political self-definition or one's place in political progress." Here the narrator's future invariably becomes the present and the past remains forever a history that nobody will remember.[43]

The narrator's decision to remain underground demonstrates a desire to escape society and its expectations. In fact, the narrator never did want to conform to the confines of the social, instead he wanted to control the crowd that ignites his class anxieties and make people conform to his own desires. According to Callahan, "Invisible Man misses the subtle connections between speech and action, performer and audience. In the world, he fails at eloquence and political leadership because he is out of touch."[44] From his underground space, the narrator remains isolated, expresses his disenchantment with society, and highlights his reasons for existing in a perpetual state of suspended agency: "I believed in hard work and progress and action, but now, after first being 'for' society and then 'against' it, I assign myself no rank or any

limit, and such an attitude is very much against the trend of the times" (576). This explains the narrator's journey through society, always trying to discover his role, where he fits in, and desperate to achieve an upper-class status. For the narrator, to assign himself "no rank or any limit" suggests that he would rather fall outside of society than below his own expectations. He always rejected the role that the traditional authorities would have him play. In a society that would only group him within his race despite his class and education, he felt like an outcast. To learn that the Brotherhood used him as a tool to control the black crowd causes the narrator to lose himself in the underground**.** He rejects the public sphere, the space where the crowd operates:

> I lived a public life and attempted to function under the assumption that the world was solid and all the relationships therein. Now I know men are different and that all life is divided and that only in division is their true health. Hence again I have stayed in my hole, because up above there's an increasing passion to make men conform to a pattern. (576)

Indeed, the gendered pattern that the narrator refers to here is one of racial grouping, and the expectations that black men will always exist beneath white men despite class and status. For the narrator, this realization causes overwhelming anxiety; it is an anxiety largely linked to his failed class aspirations.

The protagonist's decision to focus on print as a vehicle for articulating his feelings and, as a result, for eventually returning to society marks an important transition in the novel. He switches his strategy from attempting to control the crowd with his oratory skills to moving his audience with the written word. He dismisses the public sphere as unproductive, and he turns instead to the private sphere. "So why do I write, torturing myself to put it down? Because in

spite of myself I've learned some things," he says. "Without the possibility of action, all knowledge comes to one labeled 'file and forget,' and I can neither file nor forget" (579). For the protagonist, existing outside of society is equivalent to defeat. And defeat is something that the narrator will not accept, because it would mean forever existing in a state of limbo. Somehow, the act of telling his story seems to offer possible redemption for the narrator. Telling would be a way to act; it would mean an end to his suspended agency. Writing would allow the narrator to leave his underground existence. Nevertheless, Ellison offers an ambiguous conclusion; it is unclear whether the narrator ever successfully tells his story. His potential freedom remains illusory. The very act of participating in print culture, without the promise to publish or disseminate his work, means that he chooses to operate outside of the public sphere. His decision to act is really a decision to remain inactive.

Some thirty years after *Invisible Man* was published, Ellison wrote, "While fiction is but a form of symbolic action, a mere game of 'as if,' therein lies its true function and its potential for effecting change."[45] Print culture seems to be an answer to the narrator's problem. Nevertheless, it also remains at the heart of the narrator's failure because through print culture the audience becomes disconnected. Without a live audience, there is no longer a call-and-response, only the call. Perhaps this is why Ellison concludes his narrative in such an ambiguous way. If, as Claudia Tate notes, "Doubt lurks, as we face the possibility that the young protagonist may not be successful in securing the necessary knowledge for staging his escape," then the narrator's fate resides within a cloud of uncertainty.[46] Indeed, the protagonist never fully escapes his underground cave during the course of the narrative; thus he remains forever in a state of purgatory in the reader's imagination, only to exist within the pages of Ellison's novel.

[1] Ellison, Ralph. "All of Harlem was awake," August 1943." Reporting Civil Rights: Part One American Journalism 1941-1963. New York: The Library of America, 2003. (49)

[2] Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. 1952. New York: Vintage Books, 1995. (535)

[3] See Ed. Eric J. Sundquist. *Cultural Contexts for Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man: A Bedford Documentary Companion*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's: 1995. (226) Also see Greenberg, Cheryl Lynn. *Or Does It Explode?: Black Harlem in the Great Depression*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. (4)

[4] Ellison, Ralph. *Shadow and Act*. New York: Random House, 1964.

[5] Ibid., 49.

[6] Wright, John S. "The Conscious Hero and the Rites of Man." Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: A Casebook. Ed. John F. Callahan. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. (221-252) 231. See discussion of the cause of the riot in *Invisible Man.*

[7] Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005. (27) Although Ngai turns to Ellison's *Invisible Man* to demonstrate the affect she calls "animatedness," I am more interested in exploring how ugly feelings, like middle class anxieties are related to inaction. As she examines Clifton's doll, she argues: "While the scene of Clifton's doll provided my first example of how the racialized body might produce this surplus animatedness, or a "lifelike movement" exceeding the control and intention of its would-be manipulators, the redoubling of animation in this scene is explicitly figured as violent."

[8] Crowder, Ralph. "'Don't Buy Where You Can't Work': An Investigation of the Political Forces and Social Conflict Within the Harlem Boycott of 1934." *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*. 15:2 (1991) 7-44.

[9] See Lupo, Lindsey. *Flak-Catchers: One Hundred Years of Riot Commission Politics in America*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011.

[10] See Sundquist, Eric. *Cultural Contexts for Ralph Ellison's* Invisible Man. New York: Bedford Books, 1995. (220)

[11] Historical accounts vary regarding what exactly occurred on March 19, 1935, when Lino Rivera attempted to steal from the Kress's Store. See Greenberg, Cheryl Lynn. *Or Does It Explode? Black Harlem in the Great Depression*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. Also see Lupo, Lindsey. *Flak-Catchers: One Hundred Years of Riot Commission Politics in America*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011.

[12] See Greenberg, Cheryl Lynn. *Or Does It Explode? Black Harlem in the Great Depression*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

[13] See Greenberg (4) and Sundquist (220).

[14] See Sundquist (221) for a reprint of Claude McKay's *Harlem Runs Wild*.

[15] *The New York Amsterdam News* (1922-1938); April 6, 1935. Article 2: No Title: Race Problem at Howard University. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Amsterdam News pg. 9. Although less well known than Powell and McKay, these other writers equally deserve their place within the annals of African American history. Thompson, later Patterson, was a high profile female spokesperson for the Communist Party USA, the former wife of writer Wallace Thurman and the secretary and longtime friend of Langston Hughes. Brown was a Harvard educated professional baseball player and journalist.

[16] Lupo, Lindsey. *Flak-Catchers: One Hundred Years of Riot Commission Politics in America*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011. (69)

[17] "Mayor's Committee Under Fire." *New York Amsterdam News (1922-1938);* Mar 30, 1935; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: New York Amsterdam News, Pg. 1. Also, Fusion was the name of the Republican Party Ticket, which included Mayor LaGuardia.

[18] Ferguson, Blanche E. *Countee Cullen and The Negro Renaissance*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966. (151)

[19] Perry, Margaret. *A Bio-Bibliography of Countée P. Cullen 1903-1946*. Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1971. (16)

[20] Lupo, Lindsey. *Flak-Catchers: One Hundred Years of Riot Commission Politics in America*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011. (71-77)

[21] Ferguson, Blanche E. *Countee Cullen and The Negro Renaissance*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966. (152)

[22] Lupo, Lindsey. *Flak-Catchers: One Hundred Years of Riot Commission Politics in America*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011. (79)

[23] Lupo, Lindsey. *Flak-Catchers: One Hundred Years of Riot Commission Politics in America*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011. (78-79)

[24] Crowder, Ralph. "'Don't Buy Where You Can't Work': An Investigation of the Political Forces and Social Conflict Within the Harlem Boycott of 1934." *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*. 15:2 (1991) 7-44.

[25] Jones, William. "Europe Mecca for Tourists: Jones Sees Many Americans Abroad." *Afro-American (1893-1988);* Aug. 1, 1936; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Baltimore Afro-

American. (6)

[26] Greenberg, Cheryl Lynn. *Or Does It Explode? Black Harlem in the Great Depression*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. (211)

[27] Ellison, Ralph "All of Harlem was awake"; August 1943." Reporting Civil Rights: Part One American Journalism 1941-1963. New York: The Library of America, 2003. (49-51)

[28] Smith, Beverly A. "Ann Petry's *In Darkness and Confusion* and the Harlem Riot of 1943." *Women and Criminal Justice*. 12:4 (2001) 1-20. (14)

[29] Baker, Houston A. "To Move without Moving: An Analysis of Creativity and Commerce in Ralph Ellison's Trueblood Episode." *PMLA*. 98:5 (1983) 828-845. (841)

[30] Ibid., 840.

[31] Doane, Randal. "Ralph Ellison's Sociological Imagination." *The Sociological Quarterly*. 45:1 (2004) 161-184. (168)

[32] Callahan, John F. *In the African-American Grain*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988. (162)

[33] Jarrett, Gene Andrew. *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature*. New York: New York University Press, 2011. (177)

[34] Wright, John S. "The Conscious Hero and the Rites of Man." Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: A Casebook. Ed. John F. Callahan. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. (221-252) 228.

[35] Callahan, John F. *In the African-American Grain*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988. (16)

[36] Callahan, John F. *In the African-American Grain*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988. (177)

[37] Doane, Randal. "Ralph Ellison's Sociological Imagination." *The Sociological Quarterly*. 45:1 (2004) 161-184. (169)

[38] Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. Ed. Henry Louis Gates and Terri Hume Oliver. New York: Norton & Co., 1999.

[39] We see this debate over the effectiveness of "feelings" versus "science" surface again in Colson Whitehead's *The Intuitionist*. See Chapter 3.

[40] Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982. (38)

[41] Smith, Valerie. "The Meaning of Narration in *Invisible Man*." Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: A Casebook. Ed. John F. Callahan. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. (189-220) 191.

[42] Callahan, John F. Ed. *Ralph Ellison's* Invisible Man*: A Casebook*. From "The Art of Fiction: An Interview" (Paris Review, Spring 1995) (42)

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2. THE TURBULENT SIXTIES: Class Divisions and Leadership Gaps in African American Fiction

"In settings where society is in flux or breaking down, the crowd adds a political dimension we tend to ignore."
Nicolaus Mills[1]

Easy Rawlins watches the 1965 Watts Riot unfold on television, surrounded by his family. Although no stranger to violence, Walter Mosley's protagonist in *Little Scarlet* remains safely inside, away from the looting and vandalism. "It had been like that for the past five days," Easy says, "me holding myself in check while South Los Angeles went up in the flames of a race riot."[2] Outside his home looters express discontent with a myriad of social ills, including Los Angeles's inadequate public services, insufficient affordable housing stock, and innumerable acts of unredressed inequalities. Rather than venture into the crowd, Mosley's detective chooses to protect his family and their comfortable middle-class lifestyle—a move that highlights the centrality of class divisions in the novel. In this chapter, I explore protagonists' reactions to unruly crowds in African American fiction set during the 1960s; the characteristics of black crowd violence shift during this decade from being mainly ignited by local events to becoming more diverse and widespread in the wake of technological innovations like television. In fact, these acts of collective disturbances are not always triggered by a particular act of abuse, but instead often erupt from broader political frustrations.

Each of the novels that I explore in this chapter depict black violent crowds within the context of re-imagined or actual events. First, I partner John A. Williams's *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light* (1969) with Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1969). I argue that the middle-class protagonists in these novels are consumed with an anxiety triggered by their own stifling obsessions with the black community's divided leadership strategies, particularly the

dual, conflicting peaceful and violent approaches to community empowerment, and the demise of central black leadership figures during the 1960s. In fact, for these protagonists, previously established leadership figures have problematically embodied the class divide within the black community. Where Martin Luther King, Jr. might be connected with a middle-class black perspective, Malcolm X attracted a more working-class following. In a sense, these figures themselves functioned to perpetuate the vary class divisions that troubles the protagonists in this chapter. These concerns differ from Ellison's protagonist who initially explores and embraces traditional leadership strategies only to eventually be disappointed by their ineffectiveness. Later in this chapter, I consider Walter Mosley's *Little Scarlet* (2004) beside Chester Himes's *Blind Man with a Pistol* (1969) to argue that African American detective writers have depicted scenes of black crowd violence in the 1960s in order to illuminate and critique problematic traditional black leadership strategies, particularly the type of authoritative great man leadership that Erica Edwards identifies in *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*. I use affect theories articulated by Sianne Ngai in *Ugly Feelings* and Lauren Berlant in *Cruel Optimism* to suggest that the detectives in these novels experience palpable negative feelings that are entangled with their own anxieties about class divisions and a lack of established leadership within the black community.

The actions performed by the violent black crowd in these novels force a merger between the private sphere, inhabited by the middle class protagonists, with the public sphere, which is the domain of the black working-class crowd. The protagonists grapple with their negative affective responses to public violence, and, as a result, struggle to determine an appropriate reaction. The portrayals of such negative feelings fuel questions like: In Greenlee's *The Spoke Who Sat at the Door*, why does the protagonist, Dan Freeman, covertly organize an insurgency,

but chooses to witness it from a distance? What makes Williams's protagonist, Eugene Browning set the stage for a massive racial conflict? Browning plans to hire an assassin to murder a police officer who had recently killed a sixteen-year-old African American boy. At the beginning of the novel, Browning appears to be willing to give up his class privilege—he is a professor—in order to make changes in the black community; nevertheless, Browning does not fully anticipate the uncontrolled chaotic outcome of his machinations. When social order breaks down in Harlem, why is it that Himes's main characters in *Blind Man with a Pistol*, Grave Digger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson, choose to mainly act as witnesses, rather than intervene? The inability of these characters to perform their authoritative roles in the wake of crisis demonstrates how Himes employs negative, minor affects such as those limned by Ngai. Indeed, the detectives would rather solve the novel's three gruesome murders than delve into their assigned task—to figure out who is behind the numerous, violent crowd disturbances plaguing Harlem. In *Little Scarlet*, Mosley's protagonist, Easy Rawlins, acts as a witness to the violence that threatens the very thing he holds most dear—his family's security. Why does Mosley's novel depict 1965 Watts when it was published in 2005, thirteen years after the collective violence of 1992 Los Angeles? The purpose of these inquiries is to exemplify how protagonists in African American fiction are overcome by what Ngai calls "minor, negative, ugly feelings" in the aftermath of witnessing black violent crowds. Like Ngai's work, my project adopts a complicated understanding of the anxious feelings that it investigates. Such feelings are linked to the protagonists' inability to process and come to terms with images of crowd violence.

At their core, these authors' works demonstrate a preoccupation with the lack of a central, unanimously recognized, and untainted leadership strategy, and along with it, an unmovable figurehead, in the black community during the later part of The Sixties. These narratives attempt

to examine and, where possible, render the potential role of the middle class black community in filling the leadership gap manifested by these highly visible and publicly grieved deaths. The years immediately following the passage of the Civil Rights of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 gave way to tremendous anxieties about how the new promises of citizenship benefits would be fulfilled. The urgent, continuous, and destructive public displays of black crowd violence, made highly visible in part due to an ongoing media presence, were perpetuated in urban areas, many in cities where these authors choose to situate their novels such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. These crowds, sparked by police brutality or political assassination—in the case of the 1968 riots—highlighted the failure of various Civil Rights legislations to yield urgently needed improvements in impoverished urban areas, which became increasingly more crowded with the mass migration of blacks from largely segregated southern states to the North in search of a better life. For the black migrants, who might also be referred to more appropriately as displaced persons, fleeing the terror of a Jim Crow economy and the quotidian threat of terrorization and lynching, the cities offered hope, but disappointingly often produced nothing more than further obstacles and oppression.

Historical Background

"The looting, arson, plunder, and pillage which have occurred are not part of a civil rights protest," President Lyndon B. Johnson claimed during a national address on July 27, 1967.[3] The next day, the Johnson administration created the Kerner Commission to address the increasing outbreaks of urban violence and "probe into the soul of America."[4] By the end of the summer of 1967, The Kerner Commission, headed by Illinois Governor Otto Kerner, reported that 164 civil disorders had occurred in 128 different American cities.[5] The 1960s certainly marked the rise of

the Civil Rights Movement in the United States with the passage of legislation to secure and sustain the privileges of black citizenship, yet according to Lindsey Lupo, "the riots of the late 1960s appeared to be in response to the successes and limits of the civil rights movement as the more militant wings of the movement began to fight for not integration, but black nationalism."[6] The increasing unrest, especially in urban areas, was at least partly caused by a division among black leadership and the eventual assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. Nevertheless, the riots had largely ceased by 1969 when most of the African American authors that I will discuss in the chapter published their novels.[7]

Williams's *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light*, and Himes's *Blind Man with a Pistol* re-imagine violent outbreaks that occurred in 1960s Harlem. Like Ellison's depiction of the Harlem riots during the Interwar period, these novels do not indicate exactly which year the violent events in their work occurred. Nevertheless, the turbulent community relations in Harlem provided ample possibilities for material that might have inspired these authors, including a violent outbreak in 1964. On July 18, 1964, thousands of Harlem residents started rioting after a rally sponsored by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) turned into a march and later a demonstration that quickly shifted out of control in front of Harlem's West 123d street police station.[8] The crowd had gathered to protest the death of James Powell, a 15-year-old African American, earlier that week by the white New York police Lieutenant Thomas Gilligan in the city's Yorkville neighborhood. According to *The New York Times*, police fired their guns into the air to try to control the crowd and at least 30 people were arrested as the rioting lasted through the night with rioters breaking windows and looting stores.[9] Unruly black crowds in urban areas throughout the United States in the sixties mirrored the violent black crowds that flooded

Harlem's streets that night. In fact, the 1964 riot has been cited as the event that triggered additional riots across the country during the summer of 1964.

Only a year later, in 1965, Los Angeles would experience the Watts Riot, which Mosley re-imagines in *Little Scarlet.* A police interaction ignited the events that began on August 11, 1965, when Highway Patrol Officers pulled over Marquette Frye, an African American man, whom they suspected to be intoxicated, and they subsequently arrest him after he failed to pass a sobriety test. The fact that the arrest was made within Frye's own neighborhood made all the difference—neighbors gathered to witness the event, and matters escalated when Frye's mother, Rena, showed up to the scene. Marquette, his stepbrother, and mother were all arrested. The crowd became increasingly upset, and when an officer grabbed a young woman who appeared to be pregnant, the crowd erupted and police fled the scene.[10] "Before the week was over, $40 million in damage had occurred, 34 people were dead and over a thousand had been arrested."[11]

As a result of the violence, Governor Edmund "Pat" Brown established the 1965 Governor's Commission of Los Angeles Riots, also known as the McCone Commission. The commissions report, which focused mainly on detailing the events, shifted blame from the black community's claims of repeated police brutality to the black leaders, "who were portrayed as convincing normally law-abiding black citizens to utilize illegal means in challenging the system."[12] In it's final report, the commission concluded:

> No amount of money, no amount of effort, no amount of training will raise the disadvantage Negro to the position he seeks and should have within this community—a position of equality—unless he himself shoulders a full share of the responsibility for his own well being. The efforts of the Negro leaders, and

> there are many able and dedicated ones among us, should be directed toward urging and exhorting their followers to this end.[13]

As to be expected, civil rights groups, like the California Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, quickly voiced their critiques of the report. Ultimately, the Watts community would see some improvements such as preschool compensatory education for public assistance children, libraries for schools in disadvantaged areas, increased recruiting of minority police officers, and funding for a new hospital. However, many of the gains in the aftermath of the Watts violence would be diminished by the 1980s, and rioters would fill the streets of Los Angeles in 1992 with many of the same complaints made by those who participated in the 1965 looting and violence.

Another relevant and often-cited government report, released in 1965, on race relations was authored by Daniel Patrick Moynihan.[14] Popularly called the Moynihan Report, the official title of the document, created for the US Department of Labor's Office of Policy Planning and Research, is "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." Highly criticized due to its tendency to place blame on the victim, the report initially seems interested in resolving the black community's struggle with problems of poverty and inequality in the sixties, yet a substantial proportion of the report is skewed towards the indictment the black family structure. Moynihan's report argues that, "there is considerable evidence that the Negro community is in fact dividing between a stable middle-class group that is steadily growing stronger and more successful, and an increasingly disorganized and disadvantaged lower-class group." However, his assertions seem to condemn the entire community for its inability to uplift itself, and he suggests that a mother-centered family structure emerged from the institutional breakdown of the black family under slavery. He even goes so far as to offer a quotation from the prominent

African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier: “Frazier makes clear that at the time of emancipation Negro women were already ‘accustomed to playing the dominant role in family and marriage relations’ and that this role persisted in the decades of rural life that followed.” Later pointing to a particular section of Frazier’s *The Negro Family* (1939), “In the City of Destruction,” which explores the effect of migration on black families who move to urban areas.

Moynihan treats the African American community as a monolith. He reasons that because middle class black children often grow up with poorer neighbors, they are “constantly exposed to the pathology of the disturbed group and constantly in danger of being drawn into it. It is for this reason that the propositions put forth in this study may be thought of as having a more or less general application.” Such a statement, which includes problematic language like “pathology” and “disturbed group,” denies the humanity of those the report presumes to study. By the reports conclusion, one expects to receive a long list of proposed recommendations, but none are offered. The reader is told that, “the object of this study has been to define a problem, rather than propose solutions to it.” The report concludes with the governments commitment to target poverty elimination and the suggestion that improving the black family structure might help lead in such a desirable direction.

By 1968, public violent disturbances had become a regular part of the American landscape. The death of Martin Luther King, Jr., the African American leader who advocated for peaceful resistance, triggered a massive array of chaotic crowd violence in various urban communities throughout the nation, including New York, Washington D.C., and Chicago—the main settings of Sam Greenlee’s novel. The Chicago Riot of 1968 was the longest and most severe; it began on April 5 and lasted until April 7. President Johnson ordered 5,000 Federal troops after Lieutenant Governor Samuel Shapiro “told him they were needed to combat an

'insurrection;' it was the first time, despite the its long riot history, that the city requested federal troops."[15] By the conclusion of the violence, at least 9 people had been killed and thousands were arrested. The newspaper reported that the public information officer for the 33rd Division of the Illinois Nation Guard, Joseph Vecchio, said, "the spread of the fire and disorder had reached a state of rebellion requiring the aid of Federal troops."[16] While the ongoing looting, burning, and rooftop sniping were contributed to bands of black "youths," some black owned stores were left untouched because they were tagged with the label "soul brother."[17]

Black Intellectual Responses to Urban Violence

Black intellectuals voiced numerous reactions to the outbreak of community violence in the 1960s. Some of the most memorable voices include those of William H. Grier and Price Cobbs in their psychological text *Black Rage*, as well as the scathing critique of the black middle class that E. Franklin Frazier offered in *Black Bourgeoisie*. One particular affect that seems to come up most in scholarly discussions of violent crowds, particularly riots, is that of rage, and one of the most significant texts that explores rage in the African American community is *Black Rage*. The two Black psychiatrists, Grier and Cobbs, open their psychological study with a single, thought-provoking question: "Who's Angry?" Their answer: all African Americans are angry. Fuelled by the endless flow of riots pervading African American neighborhoods throughout the 1960s, Grier and Cobbs set out to uncover and expose the various conditions that plague the psyches of "typical" African American citizens.[18] They piece together a study that sheds light on the roadblocks that African Americans face from early childhood through adulthood, adding a particular emphasis on the individual's struggle to achieve proper, socially determined adult gender identities.

Early in their study, Grier and Cobbs create a link between the diverse, racial inequalities reported by their patients and the collective rage, violence, and destruction associated with riots. In order to showcase a singular black American voice, these scholars provide case studies to demonstrate how individual anxiety, racial oppression, phobias, and perceived personal lack add up to a collective African American experience that can be simply described as black rage. By demonstrating the impact on the black collective memory of a longstanding, racial animosity weaved into this country's history and by placing the blame for individual pathology on the remnants of slavery, the authors argue that the evasive sense of isolation felt by their black patients, and in turn, an isolation that they associate with the general black population "began with slavery and with a rupture of continuity and an annihilation of the past."[19] *Black Rage* ends on a solemn note, forecasting some future change: "No matter what repressive measures are involved against the blacks, they will never swallow their rage and go back to blind hopelessness."[20] Himes's novel echoes this contemplation on blindness.

Just as *Black Rage* reflects the feelings of many African Americans in the 1960s, *Black Bourgeoisie* (1957), by the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, offers a scathing critique of the black middle class that observes a division in the community leading up to the 1960s. In his seminal book, Frazier traces class divisions among African Americans back to slavery, and he maintains that slaves who worked in close proximity to their owners developed cultural skills that gave them a boost in the Reconstruction economy. For Frazier, class divisions have contributed to the fracturing of the African American community, and he concludes his study with a harsh judgment of the black middle class: "[T]he black bourgeoisie suffers from 'nothingness' because when Negroes attain middle-class status, their lives generally lose both content and significance."[21] Frazier insists that the individual desire to amass fortune and elite status blinds

the middle-class subject to the needs of less fortunate African Americans. His condemnation of the black middle class reflects the kind of class divisions depicted in fiction that I examine. Although Frazier makes an exception for some middle-class intellectuals, he emphasizes the obliviousness of the black bourgeoisie to the problems of the broader African American community. Unlike Frazier's vision of the socially segregated middle class, the protagonists depicted by Williams, Green, Himes, and Mosley struggle over where to assign their allegiances; they do not automatically prioritize individual development over community uplift. Instead, the black violent crowd produces complex, often negative, feelings in these protagonists that complicate their middle-class privilege.

John A. Williams and the Black Intellectual's Burden

Much of the critical response to John A. Williams's *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light* was published in the two decades after the novel's publication. In 1975, Jerry Bryant claimed that "John A. Williams may not be an incarnation of the 'black writer' of the 1960s, but he stands pretty much at the center of the black fiction of that decade."[22] For Bryant, who preferred Williams's *The Man Who Cried I Am*, because it "charts the currents of a man's awareness rather than rationalizes correctness of a particular line of action," Williams's overall oeuvre was not more successful because he expended "his talents more on politics than on art."[23] In 1971, Charles Peavy also linked Williams's *Sons of Darkness*, with other popular political novels of the day, when he claimed, "This new mood of the more militant black leadership was understandable reflected in much of the black fiction written during the last three years of the 1960s, notably, in J. Denis Jackson's *The Black Commandos*, John A. Williams' *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light*, and Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*."[24] By 2002, Kalí

Tal revisited the novel in attempt to establish a sub-genre that he called Black Militant Near-Future Fiction. Tal placed Williams's novel within this newfound subgenre by arguing that, "Betrayal is, without a doubt, one of the major themes in the novel. It is, in Williams's estimation, part of contemporary black militant culture…Political and personal betrayals abound in *Sons of Darkness*."[25] Moving away from a focus on the black militancy, Eric Sundquist later turned his attention to the novel's depiction of the relationship between Blacks and Jews in the 1960s when he wrote: "Williams was dismissive of his novel, and not entirely without reason. The plot is contrived and the action sensational, but his anatomy of pro- and anti-Zionist ideologies is nuanced, astute, and more than a little prophetic."[26] What all these scholars have in common is a belief that *Sons of Darkness* functions as a political novel concerned with the possibility of building interracial relations between individuals during a time when relationships between racial groups in the United States were clearly stagnant at best.

The aim of this exploration of Williams's work is not to confirm the above notion that *Sons of Darkness* should remain restricted within discussions of 1960s politics, but rather to suggest that the novel operates beyond the confines of the decade that largely defined America's internal racial conflict, and, in doing so, it joins a group of novels by African American writers, discussed in my project, who are interested in using images of crowd violence to explore how both race and class complicate individual identities in the United States. Williams's protagonist, Eugene Browning, is a middle-class political science professor and civil rights activist, who, despite his many achievements, is burdened by the belief that he has never made a significant contribution to the African American community. Fed up with what he considers to be his own political impotence, Browning does the unthinkable, he arranges for the assassination of a police officer who has killed an unarmed African American teenager. Browning predicts that the

revenge killing will encourage poor African Americans to move away from the random acts of crowd violence regularly performed in urban areas to a more targeted form of violence where "an eye for an eye" controls the target of a community's rage. In doing so, the more targeted violence would potentially deter future acts of racial violence against blacks. Indeed, Williams clearly situates his novel at the beginning of what his characters predict will be another long hot summer in order to set the stage for this narrative about one man's internal struggle with his own middle-class anxieties.

What is particularly relevant to my argument is the protagonist's decision to perform an act by not acting at all. Partly provoked by his own anxieties to protect his class privilege, Browning does not actually pull the trigger that kills the police officer. Instead, he hires someone else, an Israeli assassin, to perform the act. A primary component of Ngai's argument is insightful here; she contends that negative affects render a subject unable to act. By focusing on Browning's anxieties, or more broadly put, his "ugly feelings" as Ngai calls them, one recognizes that the protagonist's affective response to the restrictive political realities that African Americans faced in the 1960s influences his decision to hire an assassin rather than compromise his own middle-class privilege by directly acting himself. His inability to perform the act of violence is manifested by his desire to protect his class position, his family, and his role as a prestigious professor. Although he conceives of the act of retribution that ultimately prompts a kind of race war between white police and the black communities spread throughout New York City, Browning removes himself from the crowd violence that comes at the novel's conclusion to the substantially more protected middle-class safe haven of Sag Harbor.

In *Sons of Darkness,* Williams offers a critique of black middle-class values, the slow progress of nonviolence strategies, and the divisions within the black community all from the

prospective of his protagonist. When Browning, on leave from his university to work for the Institute for Racial Justice—a fictional civil rights organization similar to the NAACP, travels through the United States to various middle-class African Americans communities to raise money for work, he makes the hasty decision to use a portion of the money to hire the assassin to murder a white police officer, Carrigan, in retribution for killing an unarmed black teenager only days earlier. From the novel's first pages, Williams offers his reader a glimpse of a certain kind of black middle-class impotence through the portrayal of this well-educated, financially secure, and somewhat socially isolated character. The reader gets an intimate glimpse into Browning's internal thought process, especially his moments of insecurity and doubt when he contemplates such sentiments aloud to his friend Pete Vigianni, "I'm getting older and I haven't made any waves, I haven't made anything better" (21). Browning seeks out Vigianni, his former landlord, because he has connections to the mafia, which Browning needs to access in order to initiate his revenge plot. Trained as a political science professor, at a time when the numbers of African Americans in academia were only beginning to increase with the incipient ethnic studies programs at universities across the United States, Browning's thoughts constantly turn to his own inability to influence political change.

What makes Browning consider himself ineffective as a member of the black elite is that he has not fostered any change through his work as a professor or civil rights activist; his inability to act weighs heavy on his conscience. Without a strong, central black leader to guide hopeful black professionals like Browning, these middle-class black Americans are forced to consider how they might act on an individual scale to make a difference in society. From Browning's perspective, the African American community needs to move away from the chaotic trend of performing inner city riots after every racial slight, and instead, focus more on the

concepts of “an eye for an eye.” Why destroy one’s own community and focus on destroying property, while those culpable escape any sort of persecution? This question comes up in many of the novels discussed in this chapter; the authors make the point that riots are not effective means to bring about change. Williams’s character considers an alternative. The notion of “an eye for an eye” is derived from Judaism, and it is one of many references to Judaism that Williams makes in his novel.

In an effort to do what feels right, Browning struggles with his moral consciousness. Indeed, the very title of Williams’s novel is clearly derived from the prophecy of a war between the sons of light—the morally righteous—against the evil, sons of darkness found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, another reference to Judaism. The novel’s epigraph reads as follows:

> “After they have withdrawn from the slain towards the encampment, they shall all together sing the hymn of return. In the morning they shall launder their garments, wash themselves of the blood of the guilty cadavers, and return to the place where they had stood, where they had arrayed the line before the falling of the enemy’s slain. COLUMN XIV SECTION XXI *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness.*”[27]

The epigraph depicts a war that foreshadows the climactic battle in Williams’s novel; where blacks and white police clash in an epic episode of violence. Sundquist makes the point that “in quoting from the War Scroll in an epigraph to his novel, Williams ignores its prediction that God will intervene on the side of the Sons of Light.”[28] As Williams’s title suggests, Browning is not concerned with creating a division between whites and blacks, but rather his fight is a moral conflict concerned with righting the wrongs of his day, including but not limited to racial inequality. Browning joins forces with other white men to succeed in his revenge plot, at the

same time, he also grapples with what he considers other moral dilemmas of his day, including the relationship between himself and his wife, who is having an adulterous affair, as well as the division of the rich—particular the black middle class—and the poor. Browning's middle-class anxieties surface throughout the novel as he considers his ineffective role in attempting to improve social inequalities, yet these affects reach their peak when Browning's action of personal resistance ignites a race riot. Unable to relinquish his class privilege, Browning retreats to the safety of his rented summer home in Sag Habor to protect his family and maintain his class status.

Williams critiques the black middle class by portraying them on extreme spectrums, either too afraid to lose their class privilege or unrealistically militant in their strategy to gain equality. During Browning's fundraising trip across the United States, he comes into contact with a diverse group of African American elites, mostly men, each with their own ideas about how they should function, both politically and privately, within society. From Lincoln W. Braithwaite II, a corrupt Southern businessman, to Dr. Millard Jessup, a behind-closed-doors militant doctor in Los Angeles's elite Baldwin Hills community, to Gary Drake, a self-compromising entertainer in Las Vegas, the men Browning meets during his fundraising trip live very different lives according to their own moral codes.

Browning's travels situate him in the novel as an observer, sent to witness and critique the lifestyle choices of the middle-class black men that he encounters. In order to juxtapose Braithwaite's politics with a more leftist perspective, Williams has Browning meet up with his former graduate school friend Herb Dixon, a sociology professor and civil rights activist, whom Braithwaite asks Browning to try to control. Browning does this by later sending Dixon a newspaper clipping of Carrigan's murder and telling him, "The whole idea of mass action is out

now, I think. It's something else, like this; hit and run. Hitting the cat who's in the news" (156). Clearly, Browning judges others, while, at the same time, he searches for a form of justice that coexist with his own middle-class values. In reaction to militants like Jessup, Browning thought: "the militants were like people who could not stand stitches, and so ripped them out, to their own detriment and everyone else's" (72). Although Drake—the last donor on Browning's fundraising tour—works as a successful entertainer, his relationship with his largely white audience is strained at best. In order to make money to give to Browning, Drake runs back and forth on stage urging the audience to hit his black body with crumbled up dollar bills. Drake sees a sad sense of humor in this interaction when he tells Browning, "These people are too much. They *had* to go for it; it was like running out in the South in the Twenties hollering 'Lynch me.' What they feel has got to come out; they want it to come out. I'm just glad they didn't have rocks or hand grenades" (89). Like the other black elites that Browning visits, Drake performs a role within a unique social space that affords him the comforts of his middle-class status. Left without a central African American leadership strategy to coordinate and guide these disparate individuals, each man, like Browning, is forced onto his own path toward establishing a political identity, whether it involves nonviolence and a more militant approach. Each of these men holds firm to the notion of citizenship, and the privileges that come with citizenship. Nevertheless, each man has a different method to achieve such privileges, especially when one's class status does not guarantee citizenship benefits for all in a largely segregated society.

Although Browning functions as a witness and judge of other members of the black middle class, Williams also showcases Browning's interior musings, specifically his obsessive anxieties, to more broadly critique the ongoing instability of race relations in the United States. Williams begins *Sons of Darkness* with Browning's first waking thoughts—aesthetic judgments

about the items in his bedroom. What I find particularly intriguing about Williams's opening is the protagonist contrasting ideas about the different artwork that he owns; he has a set of Van Gogh prints, which functionally represent a European aesthetic from a particular time, along with an original painting from a Nigerian artist of the city Ibadan, which sits on the edge of the savannah. The two Van Gogh prints—Postman Roulin and the drawbridge at Arles—are both meant to represent quotidian, though somewhat political, aspects of life in Arles, where Van Gogh experienced what was perhaps one of the most prolific periods in his career, as well as, extensive contemplations on life as displayed through his well-received sunflower paintings and two mental breakdowns that led to his often referenced hospitalizations.[29] According to Kurt Rahmlow, Van Gogh "depicts (Joseph) Roulin in official attire, his cap conspicuously proclaiming his affiliation, his hands uncomfortably idle and clearly displayed. He is the very image of the neighborhood mailman—the familiar, uniformed representative of the postal service who visits each door on a daily basis, passing out letters and packages," despite the fact that Van Gogh knew that his friend Joseph Roulin was actually handled mail at the railway station rather than deliver letters himself.[30]

The contrast between European and African art highlights Browning's conflicting interior dialogue strained by his own largely European influenced middle-class values and his identity as an African American. Indeed, this might be read as a nod to DuBoisian double consciousness. Browning openly questions: "Why was it that Ibadan didn't have the same appeal as Arles?" His interests in art initially establish him as an intellectual, well-educated man before the reader is even made aware that he is a professor, which comes in the next paragraph. But what also surfaces here is a significant temporal reference; Browning recalls "he had once met a couple who told of driving around Arles in search of the drawbridge, only to discover that it had been

destroyed in 1935 because it was so old" (4). Browning's recollection points Williams's readers directly to 1935, which is significant because the according to other sources the bridge was actually destroyed in 1930. Browning situates the destruction of the bridge, a significant metaphorical reference to bridging social and racial division, right at the time of the Harlem Riot of 1935, which many people consider to be the first modern race riot. It was the beginning of a trend that Browning considers outdated.

The importance of interracial relationships, particularly in terms of political action, is promoted through the strong presence of white male characters who demonstrate sympathy for the political struggle of African Americans throughout *Sons of Darkness* including Peter Vigianni; Peter's uncle, Italian mafia boss called The Don, who Browning knows as Mantini; Itzhak Hod, the Israeli assassin; and Woody Chance, Browning's daughter's boyfriend. Prior to 1935, riots were largely performed by white men to either intimate blacks or as part of labor strikes. The Harlem riot was the first instance of black violent crowds destroying property on a large scale. Calihman argues that, "Williams's novels compulsively revisit the history of fascism and of World War II. This past begins for Williams in the year 1935."[31] Calihman also concedes that: "this period was also a great turning point because, for Williams, the antifascist struggle of the mid- to late 1930s embodied the last best home for American cultural democracy."[32] I want to suggest that not only is Williams interested in international conflicts, the role of the United States' prized democracy, and how such democracy operates at home, but also what happens when democratic principles fail to protect a significant part of the citizenry, particularly African Americans. More specifically, what happens when the black community is repeatedly victimizes without a remedy. These ideas also surface in Greenlee's novel. Williams's 1935 reference operates on both a micro and a macro scale—the author wants to showcase the problems that

African Americans face within the broader context of international relations; hence, he has created a protagonist who is both a civil rights activist and a political science professor.

The outbreak of violence in New York provides Browning with an opportunity to join the ranks of the working-class black community, yet he does just the opposite. Throughout the novel, Browning seems drawn to the Hamptons, more specifically, Sag Habor, where his family has rented a summer home in an area about three hours by car outside of New York City traditionally favored by middle-class African American families. The waterfront community functions within the text as a liminal space, or better put, a contact zone where Browning and his family enjoy largely uninterrupted class privilege. It also offers a space where his daughter's relationship with her white boyfriend is not threatened. Even before the final violent clashes between the police and black community begin, Browning already plans to retreat to Sag Harbor. In an almost Bartleby like manner, which Ngai refers to as the ultimate example of the modern worker who would prefer not to work due to an inability to act, Browning tells his boss, "Bill, I have got to get away for a few days. Now, let me tell you just how it is before you answer. I'm taking off, whether it means the job or not because I don't really care about it any more" (257).[33] Williams's protagonist, who begins the novel caring too much, ends up not caring at all. He, like Melville's Bartleby, represents the disenchanted worker; he feels that the civil rights organization that he has been working for is too much a part of the system that he had wanted to change. He thinks, "If you're working inside the system then you're not working at all" (258). Unlike Bartleby, however, Browning constructs another plan for his future, but it is only a vague uncharted plan by the book's conclusion. He wants to return to academia because, as he explains, teaching is all he knows.

In Browning's mind, his retreat from the city promises to be a kind of prelapsarian Eden—a space where he might free himself of the class anxieties that plague his existence, yet he finds something more akin to a paradise lost. As Browning leaves the city, he conjures up an idealistic scene, "he longed to feel the ocean on his shoulders, eat corn cooked in its shucks, littlenecks filled with butter, and to drink cold beer," instead he faces a harsher reality when he arrives to discover his wife's infidelity (261). Her actions mirror his own numerous extramarital affairs, some of which took place during his fundraising trip. Indeed, the perfect family that he has compartmentalized from his public, political life has fallen apart in his absence. With both his daughters away at the movies when he arrives in Sag Harbor, he decides to surprise his wife on her return with—what he believes to be a romantic gesture—leaving her diaphragm on her pillow; she will find it even if he falls asleep. Instead, he discovers an empty diaphragm case: "He studies it for a moment and then hurled it as hard as he could against a wall. The effort drained him; the effort, the diaphragm, his secrets, and he fell on the bed, nude, and drifted into a troubled sleep" (264). In the novel's final moments, the couple's acknowledgement of their mutual betrayal and their suspicious resolution to do better in the future, is meant to highlight the insidious problems at work within their middle-class cocoon—the sentiment forwarded here is that nobody is perfect; money cannot buy happiness. Nevertheless, Williams chooses to conclude his novel on this somewhat positive note.

With violence raging miles away in New York City between the black working class and off duty white police officers, Browning remains anxiously unable to act and concentrates instead on his private, domestic problems while he monitors the violence from afar. He listens to the news reports of clashes on his radio, from a safe distance: "Gangs of white men in Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant and in over fifty cities. Negro death toll reported at 15; 62 critically

wounded. The attacks were thought to have been for the purpose of avenging the deaths of white policemen in recent weeks" (269). Browning reflects on the violence, thinking that, "the simple, selective violent act, calculated to deliver a message, had become magnified. All the black populace he had been trying to save from slaughter looked like it was being slaughtered after all" (269). This suggests that there is no easy solution to the complicated racial divisions that plagued the United States. Later, Browning hears that "an apparently well-disciplined group of snipers, reported to be black, have thrown the Crenshaw shopping area into panic," a scenario he believes to be facilitated by the militant doctor, Jessup (272). Although clearly interested in tracking the ongoing news, Browning and his wife fail to react in any meaningful way, instead they "were like two patients in a sanitarium; both lay on couches and gazed listlessly through the tree branches and leaves to the calm blue sea" (273). When Browning's daughter's white boyfriend, Woody Chance, arrives to warn the family that a group of white men from another part of the Hamptons are threatening to shoot up the black neighborhoods, he clearly demonstrates his commitment to the Brownings. Chance—his name suggests a character who is willing to act or take a chance—also supplies Browning with weapons to protect the family: two handguns, an automatic and a revolver, and two boxes of ammunition. Browning expresses his appreciation, and then puts the weapons into the closet where they remain—much like his own inability to act in the face of violence. Rather than seriously prepare for any kind of fight, Browning spends his time listening to reports of violence, including the destruction of bridges and tunnels orchestrated by the young black militant, Greene, from his remote porch: "listening to scattered reports and trying, with an uncooperative mind, to sort them out again." Still anxious, he remains unable to act by the end of the novel. Instead, he ends up retreating to his cozy marital bed with his wife, where he reiterates the verbal promise that "it's going to be better" (279).

A Divided Identity in Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat By the Door*

In an obituary following Sam Greenlee's death in 2014, the *New York Times* reported that the writer had said that his purpose in making a film based on his novel, *The Spook Who Sat By the Door* (1969), was never to create a revolutionary's handbook, as some critics had argued when the film came out in 1973, but "to explore what he considered a fantasy of many young black men at the time: turning the tables on the white establishment by using its power against it."[34] Nevertheless, critics like Marilyn Yaquinto, have continued to embrace the film's revolutionary quality arguing that it "remains a relevant political critique as well as a primer on how to plan and execute a revolt, with African Americans comprising the revolutionary vanguard, given their sustained oppression in US history."[35] While only a handful of scholars have ventured to write about Greenlee's novel, the film remains at the center of academic and popular discussion. In 2012, the film was named to the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress as one of the country's 'culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant films."[36] In fact, the film has received a larger critical response than the novel. It is no wonder that the author had problems publishing the novel in the United States; he had to publish it in the UK and it was not released in the United States until after the film mysteriously disappeared from theaters only a week after its debut.[37]

While the mystery of the film's disappearance from theaters helped elevate it to cult status, the novel can and should be easily located within a discussion of several other African American novels published in the late sixties and early seventies interested in exploring black identity in the post Civil Rights era. Those few scholars who have written about Greenlee's novel often place it in dialogue with other texts from the same period, particularly Williams's *Sons of Darkness* and Himes's *Blind Man with a Pistol*. These novels pinpointed a specific

aesthetic circulating in African American culture at the time—one concerned with exploring and defining African American collective identity and the future. Like Yaquinto's reading of Greenlee's film, Charles Peavy argues that the novel is "a handbook on how to be a successful revolutionary by beating the system at its own game."[38] Meanwhile, Mark Bould prefers to label Greenlee's novel as a work of black science fiction, a genre in which he also includes Williams's *Sons of Darkness*. According to Bould, Greenlee's dual identity as a subservient African American minority in a less than integrated workplace and a middle class playboy "threaten a carnivaleque inversion, which finally occurs when, under the nom de guerre of Uncle Tom, he announces the revolution."[39] Exploring whether Greenlee's novel should be categorized as a science fiction novel or a protest novel is not my interest here, instead, I consider how the protagonist's complicated, intentionally constructed, and often shifting middle-class identity ignites an internal conflict when he witnesses, and, even at times, works to incite violent black crowds.

Although critics widely agree that Greenlee's protagonist is a radical, black militant figure, he cultivates a middle-class lifestyle throughout the novel that is ultimately difficult to shed. Perhaps the protagonist's complicated identity mirrors the writer's own biographical experience as a member of a privileged class. Greenlee told the *Washington Post* in 1973 that his experiences "were identical to those of Freeman in the CIA. Everything in that book is an actual quote. If it wasn't said to me, I overheard it."[40] Like Freeman, Greenlee grew up in Chicago. He received a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1952, served as an Army officer and studied international relations at the University of Chicago.[41] He went on to become one of the first African Americans to work for the United States Information Agency from 1957 to 1965, where he was stationed at US

embassies in various cities around the world including Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Indonesia and Greece.[42] After years of working abroad, the author and poet Greenlee decided to retire and write his spy novel, *The Spook Who Sat By the Door* (1969).

Unlike the popular James Bond series created by Ian Fleming in the 1950s about a British secret agent who repeatedly saves the world, Greenlee's protagonist, Dan Freeman, an African American born in poverty who works his way up into the middle class, would become a double spy working part time for the US government and the rest of his time planning a nationwide African American insurgency that would operate in urban slums throughout the country. Freeman resigns from his government position after he watches police brutalizes a group of Civil Rights protesters on the television news—he acts as a witness of crowd violence from a safe distance. As a result, he returns to Chicago to work for a nonprofit community foundation that provides him with the cover he needs to secretly recruit and train inner-city gang members to eventually become insurgents in his plan for a nationwide war against inequality and oppression. With this mind, however, Freeman, like Fleming's Bond, enjoys the finer things of life and grapples with a lingering desire to protect his middle-class privilege. As Bould notes, Greenlee's novel, "which excoriates the black middle classes for their actively-pursued accommodation with white bourgeois power structures, lingers, like Ian Fleming or William Gibson, over the many wonderful commodities Freeman must possess to make his cover effective, which he himself relishes."[43] Indeed, Greenlee asserted in an interview that he made sure Freeman "dressed the way I dressed, he listened to the same kind of music, ate the same kind of food."[44] From this vantage point, Greenlee wanted his protagonist to possess middle-class affects, yet at the same time, Freeman struggles with what he often calls his own "mask."

The notion of the mask surfaces several times throughout Greenlee's novel in order to demonstrate the protagonist's complicated, dual identity. He believes that he is playing a role as a member of the black middle-class, in order to hide his true militant identity, and he must don a mask to conceal his authentic self. Consider for example, the reference to this kind of masking at the moment when Freeman informs the board of the Chicago nonprofit that he works for, which is composed largely of white men, about his plan to make contact with his old neighborhood gang, the Cobras:

> He watched them look though the folder from behind his Grecian mask, a black Prometheus among the gods, who had stolen the secret of fire from Olympus by the Potomac and was teaching its use to his people. Not the fire next time, he thought, but the fire right now. How long before they chained him, to let the black and white vultures tear at his liver? (91)

Not only does Greenlee evoke James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* (1963), which considers race relations in the early sixties with a particular emphasis on youth culture, but he also seems to directly refer to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). According to Fanon, "The black man possesses two dimensions: one with his fellow Blacks, the other with the Whites. A black man behaves differently with a white man than he does with another black man."[45] In this case, Freeman's mask surfaces when he presents one façade to the board, while planning to actually use the young Cobra gang members as the soldiers for his planned insurgency. Generally, Fanon contends that black men, when confronted with a colonizer's culture, must shed his own identity and don the accoutrements of that other culture in order to be considered civilized or even human. He is particularly concerned with the transformation of educated, middle-class black man who must return home; this is exactly the scenario Greenlee imagines in

his novel as he portrays a protagonist who struggles with his middle-class identity. Like Fanon's subjects, Greenlee's protagonist does not develop his militant, dualistic interior dialogue until after he comes into contact with white students in college during an incident of crowd violence that haunts his memory and ignites his militancy.

Freeman's "mask" functions much like Du Bois's notion of double-consciousness because is a vital part of his cover, but also a dual element of his identity as both an American and a person of color, which he cannot entirely control or manipulate. Du Bois describes double consciousness as, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro."[46] Greenlee repeatedly refers to Freeman's mask, especially at the pivotal moment when the protagonist must update the nonprofit board about the ongoing riots that have erupted in the urban community. Before he meets with his supervisor, he checks "his mask in the mirror for slippage;" when confronted with the fact that the board might close the foundation due to the rioting, he thumbs "through his masks and chose(s) one of smiling confidence; and finally, after the meeting concludes, he watches the board members "from behind his mask, betraying nothing, smiling, saying the right things automatically" (180, 182, 186). In these situations, Freeman's mask becomes a complex, problematic element of his persona, one that he ultimately has trouble untangling from his notion of his authentic self, one free of middle-class values and attachment to the privileges that come with his class status.

As the riots erupt throughout Chicago's urban areas and Greenlee's protagonist begins to put his plans for insurgency into play, he struggles with the anxiety provoked by the notion that he must also forfeit the privileges of his middle-class cover. From the safety of his own

apartment, Freeman takes stock of the luxury that his lifestyle affords and he realizes that he actually enjoys his possessions and privileges. At that point, Freeman's cover was "more secure than ever" (188). Greenlee adorns Freeman's apartment with several signifiers of a sophisticated, sixties era middle-class lifestyle including Freeman's carefully cultivated music collection, his well-stocked bar, and even a Saarinen womb chair. With all this in mind, Freeman struggles with the desire to maintain his privilege: "I drive a beautiful piece of machinery, drink good whiskey, wear good clothes and have more chick than I can really handle. It would only take a little lying to myself to think I was really into something; tell myself I'd earned it all in the best Horatio Alger tradition" (189-190). This is only one of many moments when Freeman demonstrates and reflects upon his middle-class lifestyle with pride. Earlier in the novel, he enjoys a secret, middle-class New York apartment while he is working at the CIA, he regularly enjoys gourmet food, and, again like James Bond, his favorite drink is a Martini. These elements of his cover essentially are not necessary for him to maintain the outward appearance of a middle-class social worker, yet he embraces these materialisms and proclivities in both public and private spaces.

Freeman embodies both his cover and his own militant image of himself. Nevertheless, at some point, it seems that he has lost track of himself in his desperate desire to craft an identity outside of his middle-class values. Freeman fears his cover will overcome his true self, which Greenlee describes when he writes: "Freeman had been playing roles for whites and finally for everyone. How long before the edges of his cover and those of his personality would blur, merge, and he could no longer tell where one began and the other ended?" (109) In a sense, Freeman becomes his cover, and his plan becomes difficult for him to carry out, "He had never thought that he would enjoy what he would do and now that the time had arrived, he knew he

would not enjoy it at all, but that would not change things any" (187). It is the rioting, ignited by a police shooting a young teenager, that forces Freeman's hand and makes him come to terms with his true identity as a conflicted, liberal member of the middle class entangled in a war that he cannot control.

In many ways, Greenlee positions Freeman's long-term plan for insurgency as a general critique of the chaotic, unplanned riots that spread through US urban areas in the sixties. He juxtaposes the rioters' desperate attempts to grab material goods, with a Freeman's ability to maintain control of his environment. Freeman's position as a prominent social worker gives him access to the urban streets without police harassment as the riot ensues, which allows him unobstructed views of the rioters. Freeman witnesses the rioters from a safe distance, careful not to get involved:

> A small boy struggled down the street with a small Japanese portable television set. A man went by with a stack of six hats on his head, several toes draped around his neck and a case of bonded bourbon in his arms. A large fat woman waddled down the street with two large hams in each arm. Too slow, she was intercepted and clubbed down by a cop. Three boys in their teens fought savagely with two cops. (165)

Greenlee's portrayal of the riot scene—complete with a women waddling down the street with two hams in each arm—largely mirrors the image of the rioters found in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*; Ellison's rioters grab goods from looted stores without a plan. In a sense, Greenlee's intention is to demonstrate how the rioters should be distinguished from Freeman's young, well-trained insurgents. Greenlee's point is that there is a difference between riots and what he calls "war." For Greenlee, war necessitates strategy, while riots, much like Himes's

critique in *Blind Man With a Pistol*, are merely a waste of energy that leave the urban community in disarray. Freeman knows, according to Yaquinto, that, "spontaneous but unorganized riots give the police an excuse to crack down on the community, and excuses the political authorities from addressing the underlying grievances behind such rebellions."[47]

As a rational, educated member of the black middle class, Freeman has the ability to intellectually critique the ongoing riots and the inequalities that he witnesses in his community, yet, ultimately, he is unable to function outside of his middle-class cover. It is his very cover, particularly his connections to his closest companions—Joy, a middle-class former girlfriend whom he met in college, and Pete Dawson, a childhood friend who become a police sergeant in charge of Chicago's plainclothes section of the riot-control task force—that lead to his demise. Together, these two middle-class characters facilitate Freeman's inevitable death surrounded by his middle-class possessions. Joy tips off the police to Freeman's plan, and Dawson shoots Freeman when he realizes that Joy's tip is accurate. At the novel's conclusion, the wounded Freeman waits, alone, in his apartment, unsure whether he will make it through the night, but satisfied that he has set his plan in motion. Essentially, Freeman cannot exist without his middle-class cover, and he must remain outside, distant, and separate from the crowd that functions within the public sphere.

Black Detectives, Leadership Gaps, and The Sixties

The protagonists in Himes's *Blind Man with a Pistol* and Walter Mosley's *Little Scarlet* grapple with their affective responses to public violence, and, as a result, struggle to act when forced to contend with the milieu of the black violent crowd. I am interested in the way genre functions in these narratives; the very nature of detective fiction evokes noir-inspired characters

who challenge traditional notions of the hero. As Agustín Reyes-Torres argues, "The reappropriation of the detective discourse along with the articulation of the term black and its meaning is what Himes and Mosely endeavor to develop in their series through the figures of their black heroes."[48] In these novels, the protagonists experience negative reactions to witnessing crowd violence—rather than act heroically, they remain behind the scenes, at times unable to act at all. Again, Reyes-Torres explains that these detective writers not only refute the concept of blackness, but they "also argue for seeing black people as individual subjects with diversity within the racial group" (61). Indeed, these African American detective novelists are concerned with the individual's role within the group; they depict protagonists concerned with their place in society.

Contemplating Violence in Chester Himes's Harlem

When critics consider Chester Himes's *Blind Man with a Pistol*, they tend to focus on Harlem, rather than the two NYPD officers, Grave Digger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson, that Himes centers at the heart of his detective fiction. Himes wrote a handful of Harlem-based, hardboiled novels, the last being the unfinished *Plan B*, which was published posthumously in 1993, that featured these two rough, though sympathetic characters. Focusing on the functional spaces that direct the action in Himes's *Blind Man,* Jeremy MacFarlane argues that "the socially-produced environment reflected in *Blind Man with a Pistol* is the Harlem ghetto of the late 1960s…It's been largely stripped of its economic bases and essentially left in a state of collapse."[49] Meanwhile, Bryan Mukandi tunes into the sort of dangerous milieu that transforms Himes' fictitious Harlem to appear "real in that it reflects the absurdity of the situation in which Harlemites found themselves. It is an accurate, albeit fictitious rendering of a violent state of

affairs."[50] Reportedly produced in order to ease a financial need, *Blind Man* as well as the author's other Harlem detective novels were, according to Mukandi, "written initially for a French audience."[51] Nevertheless, these novels have since become as significant part of African America's literary heritage; in fact, select works from Himes' detective series live on in our contemporary imagination through films like *A Rage in Harlem*.

The critical focus on Harlem in *Blind Man* may be, in part, due to the novel's experimental, structurally complicated approach. Written in the late 1960s, Himes embraces a disconnected, disjointed, and surreal narrative to expose the numerous, quotidian crimes that Coffin Ed and Gravedigger Jones struggle to solve. Himes offers the primary point of view through these characters, yet in a move that "establishes disorienting shifts in perspective by which race and criminality might be understood," Himes excludes them from the first four chapters.[52] According to Thomas Heise, these shifts foreground "an epistemological crisis that mirrors the text's narrational 'problems.'"[53] In reality, the mystery of a crime generally lingers without resolution, but in the world of the crime novel a writer generally sets out, in Sherlock Holmes fashion, to solve one particular crime within each story. That does not happen in *Blind Man*. By noting that the novel is broken into 22 chapter and six interludes, Heise argues that Himes' fiction "is a patchwork of inter-locking but only tangentially related encounters between the police and the 'black underclass.'"[54] Indeed, such meanderings, might just point to Himes's desire at the end of the 1960s, to portray the complicated identity of African Americans living in urban communities at the close of the Civil Rights Movement, particular with the deaths of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X.

Agustín Reyes-Torres has suggested that Himes, along with Mosley, is interested in portraying the black individual within the collective. Reyes Torres argues that "there is no doubt

that both Chester Himes and Walter Mosley follow the hard-boiled conventions set by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler to create the profile of their black investigators…they subvert such conventions."[55] Indeed, I want to suggest that their hard-boiled identities, specifically identities associated with a traditional noir skepticism, provide a direct link to Berlant's cruel optimism. Without established leaders, the black community portrayed in Himes's novel is left for grabs to anyone with a bullhorn and a message. As Berlant tells us, "affect's saturation of form can communicate the conditions under which a historical moment appears as a visceral moment, assessing the way a thing that is happening finds its genre, which is the same as finding its event."[56] Indeed, *Blind Man*, as a detective novel, considers what happens when chaos becomes the new political norm; it is literally a mystery for the detectives to solve.

Although critics point to the three murders that occur in *Blind Man* as its central crimes that must be solved, I argue instead that Coffin Ed and Grave Digger struggle with another, nearly impossible to solve case—the question of who exactly is behind the Harlem riots that occur throughout the novel. In fact, this ongoing question paralyzes the detectives; it creates negative, anxious feelings, that as Ngai explains, prevent agency. The three crimes that are central in the novel include the murder of a white off-Broadway producer by a male prostitute dressed as a Black Muslim, the multiple killings of a group related to a very old black man's desire to purchase a concoction that will make him virile again for his young white fiancée, and, finally, the stabbing death of a man who is possibly connected to the first crime. Although these murders seem to be at the heart of the novel, I want to suggest that the impetus behind collective violence in Harlem is Himes's main concern. The detectives' supervisor insists that they focus on finding the source of the riots, all the while, they would prefer to delve deeper into the murder cases. Solving the mystery behind the riots is the last assignment these detectives want to do. In

fact, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger experience a sense of impotence, inaction, and frustration—just as Ngai would predict—as they are made to witness the riots without using force to get answers to their questions. Himes situates these images of collective violence at the center of his fiction to examine larger social questions circulating around the novel's publication date such as urban renewal, poverty, the black family, drugs in urban communities, and inequality.

Coffin Ed and Grave Digger Jones experience the Harlem riots throughout *Blind Man* as witnesses, clueless to their true cause and suspicious of their effectiveness. In Himes's novel, there is no one single Harlem riot, but many violent disturbances, some bigger than others, that culminate in the final event triggered by the eponymous blind man who randomly shoots a pistol into a crowd and, as a result, is shot by police. In the novel's final scene, the old, blind black man's death causes a riot that makes no sense, particularly to the detectives. When his supervisor says "Can't you men stop that riot?" and then goes on to question who started the riot, Grave Digger says, "A blind man with a pistol." And his boss says, "That don't make any sense."[57] The sensation of sight is meant to trigger an affective response in a body, yet blindness blocks sight. Indeed, Himes's evocation of sight mirror Ellison's meditation on the visual in *Invisible Man*. Returning to Ngai's concept of affect, I argue that Coffin Ed and Grave Digger Jones experience a kind of middle-class anxiety when they encounter a riot, or violent crowd, rendering them unable to act. With such names, they seem to almost embody state violence, but they are distinguishable from other officials in the novel. Their inability to act is particularly tied to their repeated desire to avoid their assignment—to figure out who started the riots. Indeed, perhaps the graves that they are digging here are their own precisely because they are unable to act.

For the two protagonists, competing loyalties between their police department ties and their commitments to the community surface when they witness the chaotic Nat Turner Day riot

at the novel's center. On this day, named for the slave who led what was perhaps the biggest, most well-known slave rebellion in United States history, three disparate groups set out to march through the streets of Harlem and end up in a clash that quickly transitions into what the novel calls a riot. In a sense, Edwards's discussion of the satirical nature of portraits of black leadership in fiction is helpful to understanding this scene; what Himes depicts is the total ineffectiveness of gendered, charismatic leadership in the sixties. It is this sort of impotence that leads to public disturbance. Edwards tells us that "by the end of World War I, when charisma had taken root as a cultural force in black political life, African American literature began to register discontent with charismatic leadership as a privileged paradigm for black self-determination."[58] The violence that occurs between these three groups functions to demonstrate the detectives' own mixed loyalties as well the black community's lack of a singular, central leadership figure. Each group represents a different leadership strategy and philosophy circulating at the time Himes published the novel: brotherhood, black power, and religion. Himes describes the scene with a hint of absurdity—a style, which overshadows much of his later work:

> It was all really funny, in a grotesque way. The lynched Black Jesus who looked like a runaway slave. The slick-looking young man with his foreign white woman, riding in a car built for war service, preaching brotherhood. And last, but not least, these bug Black Power people, looking strong and dangerous as religious fanatics, making black thunder and preaching Black Power. (101)

The leaders of these groups are represented as possessing a desire for self-aggrandizement, or, in the case of the rotating Black Power leaders, these men control the crowd without any pure commitment to a cause. Himes employs humor, which Edwards would likely identify as a form

of satire, to describe these groups in order to ridicule their function within Harlem, and the wider black community. For Himes, these leaders are guilty of causing the riots, which his two protagonists are assigned to investigate.

The simultaneous failure of these three marches, and their swift transformation into a single riot, marks Himes's critique of the lack of political unity in Harlem and the larger black community during the late sixties, as well as his belief that leadership failures essentially resulted in the riots, rebellions, and violent disturbances that continuously plagued African American urban centers. His characters, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, react to the failed marches, first as frustrated witnesses, then as temporary participants in the crowd violence—similar to Paul Beatty's protagonists in *White Boy Shuffle*—yet, they ultimately retreat without making any commitment to the crowd's diverse, varied and conflicting politics. For these detectives, the united black and white citizens who made up the brotherhood group were not targets; instead, they focused their limited physical efforts against "the leather-coated troopers, the silent clerics, and a number of other Black Power sluggers" (105). In keeping with their established character profiles, Himes's protagonists are most concerned with protecting victims and using their power as police officers, including using brutal force, to solve crime.

The question of who is behind the multiple riots in Harlem surfaces several times throughout Himes's novel; again, it is a question that triggers the protagonists' anxieties and causes them to question their own roles within the community. In an interlude following the novel's Nat Turner Day riot, the lieutenant asks the detectives whether they have figured out who is behind the riots, and the detectives sarcastically blame the deceased President Abraham Lincoln. By using the interlude, a section that performs in a discordant manner as a liminal space within the novel, yet separate from the novel's plot, Himes demonstrates how urban

disturbances cannot be easily explained because they are tied to a long history of oppression in the country. Coffin Ed sarcastically blames the violence on Abraham Lincoln, "He hadn't ought to have freed us if he didn't want to make provisions to feed us." Here Himes points to the continuous cycle of poverty, neglect, and social disjunction that has tainted the African American experience (135). Indeed, Coffin Ed's reference to Lincoln gestures towards the kind of cruel optimism that Berlant articulates; she explains that "because optimism is ambitious, at any moment it might feel like anything, including nothing: dread, anxiety, hunger, curiosity, the whole gamut from the sly neutrality of browsing the aisles to excitement at the prospect of 'the change that's gonna come'" (2). For these detectives, a change never comes.

Although the detectives have their comfortable class status, their community continues to crumble around them. The continuous cycle of poverty that leads to collective violence is emphasized later in the text in a conversation between the detectives and their superior, which demonstrates the stress and anxiety that witnessing the riots places on these men:

> "All right, all right! I take it you know who started the riot."
>
> "Some folks call him by one name, some another," Coffin Ed said.
>
> "Some call him lack of respect for law and order, some lack of opportunity, some the teachings of the Bible, some the sins of their fathers," Grave Digger expounded. "Some call him ignorance, some poverty, some rebellion. Me and Ed look at him with compassion. We're victims."
>
> "Victims of what?" Anderson asked foolishly.
>
> "Victims of your skin," Coffin Ed shouted brutally, his own patchwork of grafted black skin twitching with passion.
>
> Anderson's skin turned blood red. (154)

What interests me here is Himes's depiction of the twitching black body; Coffin Ed's body twitches with passion. It is a passion that causes an affective response in his supervisor. The detectives become increasingly agitated as their white supervisor pushes them to figure out who is behind the riots. Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle provide a helpful definition of the body in relation to affective response; it is an idea influenced by Spinoza. They explain that "For Spinoza a body does not simply refer to the flesh and bones of the individual human body. Rather, a body is a dynamic ensemble of relations that is defined by its affective capacity: the power to be affected and the power to affect."[59] In Himes's novel, the protagonists are portrayed as black bodies that experience passions and disappointments, but they are also impacted by other bodies around them—these bodies include the collective body of the crowd, the bodies of the murder victims, the bodies of the ineffective leaders, and finally, the body of their supervisor, who wants them to find out who is behind the crowd violence. Although these multiple bodies trigger a negative emotional response for the protagonists, these negative feelings block action. Initially, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are hesitant to even consider their assignment, perhaps because they always understand that the answer is too complicated and the case will never be solved. Nevertheless, as novel progresses, these characters are forced to confront the mystery of the riots, and the answers they contemplate only highlight the insecurity, inequalities, and disabilities that they face as minorities on the police force. These answers lead the detectives to discover that they, like Harlem's other residents, are victims, and their role as police officers aligns them with a complicated, oppressive institution. In the face of collective violence, these detectives fail to act in any effective way; they cannot solve the mystery behind the crowd.

The private conversations about the rioters, particularly regarding the younger generation of looters, that occur between the Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, demonstrate that these African

American detectives from an older generation are just as disillusioned, clueless, and dumbfounded by the ongoing rioting as their white superiors. Their inability to figure out the mystery, to solve the crime, and move on to a new case, triggers anxiety and frustration. For these men, the young people are part of a "space age" generation—they are different and difficult to figure out. In their private conversations, the detectives admit the frivolous nature of their assignment to find out who is behind the riots, and their meditations shift towards the younger generation as an enigma associated with the mystery of the riots:

> What made them riot and taunt the white police on one hand and compose poetry and dreams complex enough to throw a Harvard intellectual on the other? All of it couldn't be blamed on broken homes, lack of opportunities, inequalities, poverty, discrimination—or genius either. Most were from the slums that didn't breed genius and dreams, but then some were from good middle-class families that didn't suffer so severely from all the inequalities. And the good and the bad and the smart and the squares alike were part of some kind of racial ferment: all of them members of the opposition. And there wasn't any damn need of talking about find the one man responsible: there wasn't any one man responsible. (169-170)

The answer for these men is that there is no answer. The new generation is complicated, and these young people, with nothing to lose, unlike the financially secure detectives, are part of the complex situation that confronts the urban community and shakes it to the core. Himes carefully points out that class remains a complicated component of the rioting. The riots function beyond class divisions; these events frighten Himes's middle class protagonists and threaten their class security.

Himes bookmarks his novel with dual references to violent crowd disturbances in Harlem to suggest that the riots themselves function as the story's central mystery that will remain unsolved. Indeed, *Blind Man* is Himes's public, literary contemplation on the chaotic urban acts of crowd violence that plagued the country in the late sixties. The novel's epigraph makes Himes's own political position clear: "And then I thought of some of our loudmouthed leaders urging our vulnerable soul brothers on to getting themselves killed, and thought further that all unorganized violence is like a blind man with a pistol." When critics suggest that Himes's later crime fiction lacked the status of the political novel that was given to his earlier works like *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, they need only look to this epigraph to see that Himes remained consistent in his efforts to produce politically significant fiction later in his career.[60] In fact, he employs genre to reach a wider audience, yet still uses his protagonists to portray his own anxieties about political unrest, lack of leadership, and an unclear future for African American communities.

Re-imagining Violence in Walter Mosley's *Little Scarlet*

In *Little Scarlet*, the protagonist acts as a witness to the violence that threatens the very thing he holds most dear—his family's security. In examining this novel, which was published in 2005, it is interesting to consider why Mosley focuses on 1965 Watts. Why not situate this novel in 1992 rather than 1965? Perhaps, Mosley's work is concerned not only with depicting the 1965 riots, but also in rendering the social ills that plagued a single community over three decades. In *Little Scarlet*, Mosley's protagonist struggles to reconcile his complex identities as both a member of the collective African American community, represented by the rioters in this novel, and a privileged member of the black middle class. I argue here that Mosley returns to Watts in the aftermath of 1992 in order to illustrate the inequalities and divisions that triggered

the outbreak of violence in a vulnerable community. In order to better assess the role of the protagonist's middle-class anxieties in this novel, I turn to affect theory as articulated by Ngai, as well as postmemory, first conceptualized by Marianne Hirsch and later by Arlene Keizer within the context of African American cultural production.

Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* is useful because it offers a valuable framework to examine how minor feelings, particularly negative feelings associated with suspended agency, might be used to interpret African American fiction. While Ngai finds that negative affects trigger a subject's inability to act within society, I argue that as Mosley's protagonist witnesses the collective violence in his community and its aftermath, he begins to grapple with ugly feelings—specifically middle-class anxieties—provoked by a perceived disconnect from the collective African American community represented by the rioters in the novel, as well as, the potential threat that the riots pose to his family's comfortable class status. Ultimately, the narrator's obligatory participation in the Little Scarlet murder case reduces his agency, causes him to act as a witness, and leads to class anxiety related to his family's security.

In *Little Scarlet*, Easy Rawlins finds himself emotionally embroiled in the murder case of a red-headed black women named Nola Payne, also known as Little Scarlet. Although the riot and its aftermath initially trigger Easy's middle-class anxieties, it is the threat of another bout of violence in a city already filled with dying embers and ash that influences Easy's decision to take on the murder case. "They asked me to help them solve Nola's murder before the newspapers got hold of it," Easy says, "because they want to keep a lid on Watts."[61] In reality, the 1965 Watt Riots began on August 11 and lasted for six days. A crowd of bystanders became agitated as they witnessed a California Highway Patrolman arrest a young African American motorist from the neighborhood—he was suspected of driving while intoxicated. The crowd was outraged

when Frye's mother arrived on the scene, argued with police and was also arrested. In Mosley's novel, police detectives need Easy's help to solve Little Scarlet's murder, in order to avoid a fresh bout of violence because the young woman was killed sometime after she helped a white motorist who was pulled from his car and beaten in the street. The police tell Easy that they believe the community would riot again, if they suspect that the man killed Little Scarlet. Easy takes on the case to avoid another riot.

The motorist, who Easy later discovers is named Peter Rhone, evokes memories not of the 1965 Watts Riot, but of the beating of Reginald Denny, a construction truck driver who was pulled from his vehicle during the six-day long 1992 riot, triggered by the acquittals of the officers who beat the motorist Rodney King. Thus, while Mosley's narrative takes place in Watts, here we see a connect with the 1992 event that should alert us to the fact that Mosley is filtering his concerns about 1992 by creating a narrative that takes place in 1965. This suggests the presence of a kind of postmemory where a recent traumatic event is interpreted by reference to a similar, former event. As it turns out, Easy discovers that Rhone had been Little Scarlet's co-worker, the two were romantically involved, and he had ventured into Watts in order to rescue her. He was not the killer. In her article, "The Modern in the Postmodern," Daylanne English argues that Easy embodies "the memory and past of a particular community."[62] While I agree that memory, in a general sense, is clearly at work, I want to consider how the concept of African American postmemory is also useful.

In her article "The Generation of Postmemory," Hirsch outlines the concept of postmemory as a way for a new generation to interpret traumatic events within the scope of past violence. She describes postmemory as: "the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before,

experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up."[63] For Hirsch, postmemory involves a sort of haunting of younger generations by the traumatic memories experienced by older generations. In this way, the younger generation relates any contemporary traumas within the context of past memories only told, but never experienced. Hirsch employs postmemory to discuss the relationship between memory and photography within the historical context of Holocaust studies, but she insists that her analysis relies on and is "relevant to, numerous other contexts of traumatic transfer that can be understood as postmemory."[64] My intention is to make a connection between the crowd violence that Mosley depicts in *Little Scarlet* and African American postmemory. Although Robert Christgau, in his article "A Darker Shade of Noir," informs us that Mosley was 13-years-old when "he watched his father fight the urge to go out and join Negroes trashing Watts's crude joke of an infrastructure," many of Mosley's readers would not have experienced Watts first-hand.[65] Therefore, contemporary notion of riots, especially within the Los Angeles community, would have been relayed in history books, media images, through family stories, and cultural narratives. In this light, I want to posit that Mosley filters the experience of collective trauma from the 1992 event through the scope of this Watts narrative.

Arlene Keizer has already established a link between African American literature and postmemory. "Haunted by the history of slavery and its legacies to the present," Keizer turned to Marianne Hirsch's definition of postmemory to explore the relationship between black subjecthood and depictions of slavery. In *Black Subjects*, Keizer maintains that while cultural memory is critical in the process of self-creation, "its function is complicated by the forms that accompany and succeed it, namely, postmemory and history."[66] In her later work, Keizer turns to Hirsch's notion of postmemory in order to analyze a series of literary texts by African

American women writers in conjunction with Kara Walker's art concerned with the sexual abuses experienced by women slaves.[67] This is relevant to Mosley's novel because at the heart of Easy's investigation is Little Scarlet's aunt, Geneva Landry, herself a victim of sexual abuse. It is significant to note that Mosley's detective novels are concerned with retelling historical events in African American history—Geneva embodies one such past moment. As Reyes-Torres explains, "Mosley portrays an Easy Rawlins whose life is continuously influenced by the historical context in which every novel in the series is set."[68] In *Little Scarlet,* Easy first meets Landry while she is tangled in a straight-jacket at a sanatorium, which is reminiscent of the all white, sterile emergency ward in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Police admit the troubled, depressed, and lonely Landry into the hospital in order to keep her niece's murder quiet. Landry blames herself for her niece's murder and repeatedly says: "She didn't know about white men. I never told her and now she's dead."[69] Later, Easy discovers that Geneva had been the victim of repeated sexual abuse by a white plantation owner that her father, a Pecan farmer, worked for in the south. In Geneva's case, she does not pass on the memory of her trauma to her niece; in fact, she does not tell anyone in her family. Only under the influence of hospital medication does Landry share her story with a nurse who passes it on to Easy. Although Geneva does not share her story with Little Scarlet, Mosley's novel exposes the narrative of abuse in order to render the complicated relationships, and secrets, that exist within communities. By the novel's conclusion, Geneva dies in the hospital from an allergy to antibiotics, the very medicine meant to save her from an infection that she picks up in the hospital. With her death, her memories also die.

Mosley's text evokes African American postmemory because it encourages the recollection of Watts in the aftermath of 1992. In this novel, Easy's middle-class anxieties are juxtaposed against the narratives of complex relationships in order to complicate traditional

notions of family and community; these anxieties should be read against Ngai's articulation of negative affective response. Such negativity leads to inaction—here the detective has trouble asserting his agency. Easy himself has a makeshift family composed of an adopted Mexican child and a Guyanese live-at-home-girlfriend. With family at the center of the protagonist's concerns, Mosley's novel juxtaposes its protagonist's middle-class anxieties with issues of relationships and family within the context of community violence. Mosley depicts several troubled relationships including the one between Little Scarlet and the married Peter Rhone, Geneva Landry's story of abuse, and, finally, the complex relationship between the actual killer and his mother.

By the stories conclusion, it becomes clear that an African American homeless man, Harold Ostenberg, killed Little Scarlet. Geneva Landry's niece turns out to be only one of Harold's many victims. As a serial killer, Harold seeks out a particular type of victim—black women who seem to be in relationships with white men. His original grievance stems from his troubled relationship with his mother, a light-skinned black woman who passes for white, but rejects him, her darker skinned son, because he threatens her privileged lifestyle. Instead of embracing her son, she passes him off as her housekeeper's son and, by the time he turns 12-years-old, he runs away to live in the streets. What is interesting here is that just before Easy meets with Harold's mother, Jocelyn Ostenberg, he is reading Claude McKay's *Banjo*, a novel that explores the complexities of African Diaspora. McKay's novel offers an image of community that Mosley juxtaposes with collective violence to complicate notions of race-based group identity. When Jocelyn asks Easy who his son has killed, Easy thinks: "*You*. The word came into my mind but I didn't say it…I believed that Harold Ostenberg had roamed around the streets looking for a place to put his rage. He found women who had betrayed him as his mother

had. He killed them and stole their memories" (256). Harold, the collector of other people's memories, does kill his own mother, but the women who helped raise him, his mother's maid, Honey May, in turn, kills Harold. Honey May kills the killer with a white power made of sleeping pills mixed into a glass of water. It is this liquid—a drink that resembles mother's milk—that finally kills Harold.

Mosley concludes his narrative with commentary on the complexity, and sometimes toxicity, of family, kinship, and collective identity. Daylanne English tells us that, "Mosley's novels work as literary-political statements…enacting a complex process of literary anachronism that describes and inscribes present-day injustice and discontent."[70] Easy's family means everything to him; fear for their security triggers his class anxieties. Nevertheless, Mosley situates this novel within the midst of an act of collective, public trauma to complicate notions of community, highlight the class divisions that cause separation within such communities, and illuminate the continuity of the problems that render communities dysfunctional, unable to move on from past traumas. The traumas triggered by crowd violence and those that prompted crowd violence in the first place, continued to plague twentieth-century African American communities long after the 1960s. Although urban centers witnessed a brief respite from overwhelming crowd violence in the 1970s and 1980s, Los Angeles again became the site of public crowd violence in 1992. Just as Mosley questioned why the problems of the past resurfaced years later, contemporary authors develop characters that choose to grapple with the violence in their communities on a more personal, individualized level. In the next chapter, I consider how the post-1992 depictions of crowd violence in African American literature are largely concerned with how the individual internalizes the easily witnessed crowd violence that invades their communities. While writers in The Sixties were focused on the question of finding long-term

leadership strategies on the community level, later African American writers shift their attention to explore how individual protagonists might fill vacant leadership roles on a smaller, more intimate level.

[1] Mills, Nicolaus. *The Crowd in American Literature.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986. 6.

[2] Mosley, Walter. *Little Scarlet*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2004. 5.

[3] Lupo, Lindsey. *Flak-Catchers: One Hundred Years of Riot Commission Politics in America* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 124.

[4] Johnson, Donald. "Kerner Pledges Through Study of Urban Rioting." *New York Times* (1923-Current file): 1. Jul 29 1967. *ProQuest*. Web. 14 Mar. 2016.

[5] Lupo, *Flak-Catchers: One Hundred Years of Riot Commission Politics in America*, 123.

[6]Ibid., 124. Here Lupo cites Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1982), 206.

[7]Ibid., 124.

[8] Montgomery, Paul and Francis Clines. "Thousands Riot in Harlem; Scores are Hurt." *New York Times*. (1923-Current file): 1. Jul 19 1964. *ProQuest*. Web. 14 Mar. 2016.

[9] Ibid., 1.

[10]Lupo, *Flak-Catchers: One Hundred Years of Riot Commission Politics in America*, 94.

[11]Ibid., 94.

[12]Ibid., 107.

[13]Ibid., 111.

[14] Moynihan Report posted at www.blackpast.org/primary/moynihan-report-1965.

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[16] Ibid., 63.

[17] Ibid., 63.

[18] Grier, William and Price Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 4.

[19]Ibid., 28.

[20] Ibid., 213.

[21] Frazier, E. Franklin. *Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class*. London: The Free Press, 1957. 238.

[22] Bryant, Jerry H. “John A. Williams: The Political Use of the Novel.” *Critique* 16:3 (1975) 81-100, 81.

[23] Ibid., 82, 84.

[24] Peavy, Charles. The Black Revolutionary Novel: 1899-1969
Studies in the Novel 3:2 (summer 1971) 180-189.

[25] Tal, Kalí. “That Just Kills Me”: Black Militant Near-Future Fiction. *Social Text* 71, 20:2 (Summer 2002) 65-91. (86)

[26] Sundquist, Eric J. “Black and Jews: From Afro-Zionism to Anti-Zionism.” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2005) 52:9.

[27] Ibid., Williams uses the above passage as his epigraph.

[28] Sundquist, Eric J. “Black and Jews: From Afro-Zionism to Anti-Zionism.” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2005) 52:9.

[29] See J. Ryan Napier’s “Putting the ‘Pain’ in Painting: A Conceptualization and Consideration of Serious Art.” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*. 48:1 (2014) 45-53. Also note that the formal name of the drawbridge painting is *Langlois Bridge at Arles.*

[30] Rahmlow, Kurt. “Co-opting the Cooperative: Vincent van Gogh’s ‘Studio of the South’ and Nineteenth-Century Utopian Socialism.” *Utopian Studies* 23:1 (2012)102. See article for more details on van Gogh’s plan for an artists’ cooperative in Arles.

[31] Calihman, Matthew. “Black Power beyond Black Nationalism: John A. Williams, cultural Pluralism, and the Popular Front.” *MELUS*, 34:1, 139-162. (140-141)

[32] Ibid, 141.

[33] Williams, John A. *Sons of Darkness, Sons of Light*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1969. (257)

[34] Vitello, Paul. “Sam Greenlee, Writer, Producer, Government Agent, Dies at 83.” *The New York Times* May 30, 2014. Online: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/31/books/sam-greenlee-author-producer-and-ex-government-agent-dies-at-83.html?_r=0

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[36] Schudel, Matt. "Sam Greelee, whose movie 'The Spook Who Sat by the Door' became a cult classic, dies." *Washington Post.* May 20, 2014.
Online: www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/sam-greenlee-whose-movie-the-spook-who-sat-by-the-door-became-a-cult-classic-dies/2014/05/20/3d157e6c-e034-11e3-810f-764fe508b82d_story.html

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Online: www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/sam-greenlee-whose-movie-the-spook-who-sat-by-the-door-became-a-cult-classic-dies/2014/05/20/3d157e6c-e034-11e3-810f-764fe508b82d_story.html

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Online: http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jun/02/sam-greenlee. Also, see Vitello, Paul. "Sam Greenlee, Writer, Producer, Government Agent, Dies at 83." *The New York Times* May 30, 2014. Online: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/31/books/sam-greenlee-author-producer-and-ex-government-agent-dies-at-83.html?_r=0

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[44] Yaquinto, Marilyn. "Cinema as Political Activism: Contemporary Meanings in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*." *Black Camera*. 6:4 (2014) 5-33. (29) From: Michael T. Martin, interview with Sam Greenlee, Indiana University Bloomington, March 22, 2011, 2 (unpublished transcript).

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[47] Yaquinto, Marilyn. "Cinema as Political Activism: Contemporary Meanings in *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*." *Black Camera*. 6:4 (2014) 5-33. (17)
[48] Reyes-Torres, Agustín. "Coffin Ed Johnson, Grave Diggers Jones, and Easy Rawlins: Black Skins and Black Psyches." *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 28:1 (2010), 51-60. 52.

[49] MacFarlane, Jeremy. "'Enough to make a Body Riot': Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Chester Himes, and the Process of Socio-Spatial Negotiation." *Interdisciplinary Humanities* 31:2 (2014) 5-16. 10

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[51] Ibid., 529.

[52] Heise, Thomas. "Harlem is Burning: Urban Rioting and 'The Black Underclass' in Chester Himes's 'Blind Man with a Pistol.'" *African American Review* 41:3 (2007) 487-506. 493.

[53] Ibid., 493.

[54] Ibid., 493.

[55] Reyes-Torres, Agustín. 51. Reyes-Torres explains that Himes and Mosley have created protagonists that function as hard-boiled detectives who embody the following characteristics: "they are streetwise, acquainted with nightlife of the city, tough, smart, extremely observant, and analyze people quickly."

[56] Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism.* Durham: Duke UP, 2011. 16. It is worth noting that Berlant relies on Alain Badiou's work with the term "event." She explains: "A situation is a state of things in which *something* that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life. It is a state of animated and animating suspension that forces itself on consciousness, that produces a sense of the emergence of something in the present that may become an event. This definition of situation resonates with the concept's appearance in Alain Badiou's work with the 'event.'" 5.

[57] Himes, Chester. *Blind Man with a Pistol*. New York: Vintage Books, 1969. 191.

[58] Edwards, 12.

[59] Thompson, Marie and Ian Biddle, Eds. *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013. 4.

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[61] Ibid., 128.

[62] English, Daylanne. "The Modern in the Postmodern: Walter Mosley, Barbara Neely, and the Politics of Contemporary African-American Detective Fiction." *American Literary History* 18:4 (2006) 772-796, 783.

[63] Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory," *On Writing With Photography*, Ed. Karen Beckman and Liliane Weissberg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 205.

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[66] Keizer, Arlene. *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004. 165

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[68] Reyes-Torres, 54.

[69] Mosley, Walter. *Little Scarlet*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2004, 28.

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3. A WOMAN'S WORK: Crowds and Ordinary Affects in Bebe Moore Campbell's *Brothers and Sisters* and Paula Woods's *Inner City Blues*

At the center of Bebe Moore Campbell's *Brothers and Sisters*, set nearly five months after the 1992 crowd violence in Los Angeles, resides Esther Jackson—a successful black woman banker who struggles to balance her sometimes conflicting desires for personal success and community uplift. The aftermath of violence haunts this character, lingers in her imagination, and influences her everyday affects. As a successful, mid-level manager at downtown branch of the aptly named Angel City Bank, Jackson refuses to identify with the largely working-class crowd. Nevertheless, she feels irritated anytime she is subtly reminded of the event that was triggered by the acquittal of the police who were filmed beating the black motorist Rodney King. One such example surfaces in the novel's opening scene, here Jackson overacts when one of the tellers whom she supervises makes a miscalculation. The mistake occurs just as three white Los Angeles policemen are harassing a couple of young black teenagers outside the bank. As Jackson watches the police with the boys, she thinks: "*Better not touch them!"* In this scene, "the words roared through her body," and she feels "a quickening in her chest."[1] The quickening in her chest is an affective response to the violence; it is a feeling that she cannot explain. It is something akin to the way the body reacts to a particular piece of music.

In the introduction, I discussed how Ngai's articulation of minor negative affects provides a useful tool to analyze African American novels that depict crowd violence. Here, in this chapter, I partner Ngai's discussion of affective response with Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* to consider how negative affects, particularly irritation, function in two novels written by African American women following the 1992 violence in Los Angeles—Campbell's *Brothers*

and Sisters and Paula Woods's *Inner City Blues*. Ordinary affects are both intimate and public feelings, according to Stewart who explains that, "ordinary affects are varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences."[2] I argue that irritation, rather than outright anger, causes the black female protagonists in these novels to experience a sense of delayed agency after witnessing the crowd. My intention here is not to deny that these characters feel any sense of rage, but rather to demonstrate that along side that rage exists another kind of less intense feeling, and that feeling is a quotidian sense of irritation that lingers in their everyday lives. For Stewart, "ordinary affects are an animate circuit that conducts force and maps connections, routes, and disjunctures. They are a kind of contact zone."[3] From this vantage point, the question surfaces whether it is possible for a character to experience both minor and major negative affective responses to the same stimuli, and the answer is that it is indeed possible. For the protagonists, Esther Jackson and Charolette Justice, images of crowd violence and the reminders of that violence, trigger both minor anxieties and feelings of rage. Yet it is quotidian minor irritations that restrict, confine, and stifle their actions, limit their connections with community, and finally, temporarily blind them to leadership opportunities outside the scope of her class aspirations.

Campbell and Woods are two of the few African American women novelists who have depicted the black violent crowd. For this reason alone, novels by these authors merit wider critical attention. Their rendering of the modern female protagonists' responses to collective violence in the black community conjures a myriad of women's issues like the struggle to overcome the workplace glass ceiling, the desire to find an equally successful African American mate, and the pressure to live up to a particular mainstream body image. In limning these

intersectional concerns, Campbell and Woods attempt to locate a nexus between the political, social, and personal in the time of crisis. For these characters, the workplace represents the space where their leadership potential is the greatest, and by the conclusion of these novels the characters are able to achieve career advancement while also taking on leadership roles in their communities through their work. Indeed, these authors highlight the problematic great man leadership strategies that Erica Edwards tackles, as I discussed earlier in the introduction. I want to suggest that Campbell and Woods grapple with how to remedy the outcomes—like crowd violence—that result from such troubled leadership models.[4]

When I use the term community, I do not mean to overlook the complex divisions that exist within a collective, cultural group. Instead, my goal is to highlight the diversity within the community and demonstrate that these female protagonists grapple with the multiplicity of their sometimes diverging communities. The varied notion of community surfaces often in these novels. In fact, Campbell renders numerous points of views beyond her protagonist's thoughts to complicate her narrative and demonstrate the various different ways supposedly connected individuals experience a single event. According to the *New York Times,* "While many saw the Los Angeles riots as the curtain falling on the myth of racial unity, Campbell, an emerging novelist, saw them as an opportunity to write about race and gender."[5] *Brothers and Sisters* was popular among readers for its depiction of Los Angeles in the aftermath of the collective racial violence that struck the city in April 1992 following the beating of the motorist Rodney King and the subsequent acquittal of the police who were captured on video during the incident. That recording has since made it into African American popular cultural productions like Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing*.[6] Critics have more often turned to Campbell's other books *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* and *Singing in the Comeback Choir*, rather than grapple with *Brothers and Sisters*,

which depicts a lucid, complex interiority that is rich with affective responses. Although it has not received as large of a critical response as Campbell's work, Woods's novel is also set during the 1992 looting depicted in Lee's film. Here, my intention is to argue that these two female-authored novels are worth a more detailed critical examination because their subject matter—one woman's attempt to come to terms with black crowd violence in her community—continues to be relevant today, particularly with the intersection of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the recent 25-year anniversary of the Los Angeles violence.[7]

A re-evaluation of these novels allows us to consider several key questions: Why do images of collective racial violence intrigue African American authors? What function does the representation of a black violent crowd accomplish within the text? Should our focus on novels with violent crowd images be exclusively on the group or should our critical lens shift elsewhere? What happens when we redirect our attention to the protagonist's reaction to such violence? How do we interpret the everyday affects that linger long after the violence has subsided? Indeed, these questions are meant to suggest that a character's affective response to collective black violence sheds light on the meaning of a text. The novels by Woods and Campbell function as prime examples of how affect theories—or more simply put, a focus on a body's response to outside stimuli and the subsequent feelings—might be applied to the study of African American fiction. Such theories provide literary critics with useful tools to illuminate a protagonist's bodily reaction to witnessing crowds.[8]

Considering Campbell's Esther Jackson

From the safety that the bank affords, behind its steel cages, Jackson peers out at the police as they question the boys on the street and reveals an affective response that she cannot

articulate. The bank's steel bars function as a metaphor for the protagonist's caged-up feelings. Her position as witness frustrates the middle-class character: "Esther felt her chest tighten as her mind replayed the infamous video and she envisioned the circle of white men in uniform, their batons swinging viciously against the black man cowering on the ground at their feet" (14). This chest tightening, as I highlighted earlier, reflects Jackson's uncontrollable reaction to the perceived injustice happening before her eyes and the visual memory of Rodney King's beating. The feeling in her body expresses her middle-class anxieties as she considers how she cannot do anything in response to the violence on the street because any action on her part might jeopardize her position within the bank and her relationship with her colleagues. Of the bank where Jackson works, a review of the novel in the *New York Times* notes that "here men and women, some black, some white pursue their lives and careers in an atmosphere fraught with tension."[9] Jackson labels her feelings in this scene as a type of rage when she thinks: "When she heard the not guilty verdict in April and saw those four grinning white faces on her television screen, she'd wanted to smash them and anyone who looked like them. And now here it was September, and she still felt so overcome with rage that she couldn't breathe" (15). Not only does she feel the tightening in her chest, but she is also unable to breathe. She simultaneously experiences an expressed rage limned by her angry thoughts and the more minor, feeling of irritation, directed toward herself because she is unable to act.

The protagonist's restrained breath is another form of bodily anxiety associated with her sense of irritation. Esther cannot breathe because she feels the uncontrollable affective response that keeps her almost paralyzed. This lack of action is exactly what Ngai talks about when she considers how affective response limits a character's ability to act. Demonstrating a lack of self-control in the face of collective injustice, Campbell's protagonist experiences undesired bodily

affects as she recalls the incident that led to the 1992 violence. Just the memory of the recorded Rodney King's beating ignites feelings of discomfort and anxiety for the protagonist. The events leading up to the Los Angeles crowd violence in 1992 began a year earlier with the March 3, 1991 on-tape beating of the motorist Rodney King and the subsequent acquittal of four white police officers that "spawned the worst riot of the twentieth century," according to Lindsey Lupo.[10] What made the Los Angeles event different from others in the past was the increased media coverage leading up to the violence. In fact, the taped physical abuse inflicted by the officers on King was widely shown by television news, which largely influenced public opinion even before the trial commenced. In Los Angeles, the violence was composed of more than one large riot; it was a series of violent crowd uprisings of various sizes that occurred over a week. "In comparison to the other major riots of the 20th century, the 1992 Los Angeles riot was by far the worst in terms of injury and destruction. There were over 500 fires set, 2,383 injuries, 52 deaths, and almost $1 billion in damages."[11] Campbell middle class protagonist exists away from the violence; she considers it from a distance. In a sense, the image of the crowd, or the memory of that image, in *Brothers and Sisters* conjures the protagonist's desire to make connections with other African Americans that are absent in her life and facilitates the need to contemplate other relationships more broadly.

After Campbell's death from complications of brain cancer when she was 56, Magalit Fox in the *New York Times* wrote that "along with writers like Terry McMillan, Ms. Campbell was part of the first wave of black novelists who made the lives of upwardly mobile black people a routine subject for popular fiction."[12] With the 2016 publication of Osizwe Harwell's book, *This Woman's Work: The Writing and Activism of Bebe Moore Campbell*, now is clearly an ideal time to shift our critical lens toward Campbell's often overlooked *Brothers and* Sisters. It

provides new insights into Campbell's thoughts about race and community. Campbell's own political evolution, as documented by Harwell, perhaps shines light on her protagonist's internal struggles and negative affective responses, which Ngai suggests lead to her inability to act. For Jackson, the answer to the problems that plague her growth as an individual, both within the private and the public spheres, exists within the context of black leadership. Rather than turn away from the potential leadership opportunities that the crowd symbolizes, Jackson ultimately locates a path toward embracing the leadership needs of the community—she shifts career objectives from working in a large commercial bank to a smaller black-owned bank. She also attempts to meld with the wider African American community by abandoning barriers that would relegate her to a specific class, effectively slipping into a position that engenders a diverse range of relationships.

The title of Campbell's novel, *Brothers and* Sisters, alludes to the murky entanglement of culture and kinship. It immediately indicates the author's intention to construct a narrative that considers relationships between African American men and women. In this way, the title evokes a sense of the African American church, where black women and men traditionally address each other as "sister" and "brother." Shifting away from the church and into the street, the familial address became a popular greeting among African Americans in the Sixties and beyond. The characters in *Brothers and Sisters,* are all part of the same community in Los Angeles. It is a community that struggles to come to terms with the fungible equality that Civil Rights bestowed upon the city's black residents, and it is still plagued with the troubled inequality that caused the 1965 Watts Riots. Despite the end of segregation, it is a community that continues to relegate most of its black residents to a particular geographic area. In this area, Campbell's characters struggle to find a sense of community and individual growth. By embracing the African

American community, Campbell eventually offers a possible solution to negative affective responses to the black violent crowd.

Beyond the bank, Jackson's ordinary affects emerge in her everyday life. For example, she visits Diamond Donuts several times. The fictional business, vandalized during the April 1992 uprising in Los Angeles, functions in the novel as the manufacturer of a sweetness made sour by the community's troubled racial climate, which in the novel is signified by another scent—the burning of a city. Campbell begins her novel with an epigraph about the Los Angeles's fire season that conjures a similar reference to the sense of smell: "the flames of April came out of season."[13] While the smell of smoke triggers negative sensations for the African American female protagonist, which are linked to memories of looting, burning, and the vandalizing of businesses, her affective responses to the bakery's sweetness unpredictably shift, much like her moods throughout the novel, from wonder, to mild irritation, to shame, and finally to a troubled contentment. Here, Jackson struggles with the politics of ordinary affects, which Stewart explains "can be anything from the split second when police decided to shoot someone because he's black and standing in a dark doorway and has something in his hand, to a moment when someone falls in love with someone else who's just come into view."[14] These two experiences are different, but Stewart suggests that "the politics of any surge depends on where it might go. What happens. How it plays itself out and in whose hands."[15] At times when Jackson ventures to Diamond Donuts, where the "boarded up window" serves as a reminder of the city's recent violence, she is greeted by the "sweet doughy scent of freshly baked goods," made hungry by "the sweet, yeasty scent of baked goods" or "assailed by the sweet, yeasty odor."[16] If as Teresa Brennan suggests, affects might be triggered by scent, than Diamond Donuts exists as a liminal space where the protagonist's consumption of sweet scents coincides with her gradual

discovery, acceptance, and eventually embrace of community reconciliation after crisis.[17] It is here in this space that she feels the everyday, ordinary affects that surface in the novel.

In *Brothers and Sisters*, Campbell draws a parallel between the Korean woman, Hyun, who runs the counter at Diamond Donuts and Jackson's neighbors, an interracial couple (a black man and white woman) with a mixed-race daughter, by juxtaposing her interactions with each. Ultimately, Jackson must shift her identification of these newcomers to the neighborhood from outsiders to fellow community members. The couple's move to Jackson's neighborhood in the aftermath of the 1992 uprising triggers unexplained irritations that the protagonist grapples with throughout the novel, until she finally is able to establish a friendship with the family. The connection that is solidified by the novel's conclusion symbolizes Jackson's delayed, yet complete acceptance of the interracial couple and their mixed-race child. Jackson first meets the white mother, Carol Linton, and her daughter, Sarah, as she is making her way to the donut shop. Jackson's thoughts criticize the child's hair, labelling Sarah as a "wild-haired child," before shifting to observe the mother, Carol, as being "not pretty" and "overweight." Although Jackson outwardly welcomes the woman to the neighborhood, she thinks "if a brother has to pick a white girl, he could at least get someone who looks halfway decent, instead of some homely heifer no white man wants" (95). From this vantage point, Jackson's negative feelings are easily identified on the page and only increase when the black husband, Harold, opens the door and calls out to Carol with a term of endearment, "honey." Jackson's internal voice explodes with judgment categorizing the couple as "homely nerds" as she experiences a bodily reaction: "The anger that rose up inside her went to her head immediately, and she could feel her temples throbbing. Why do they bother me so much? She wondered" (95). What I want to note here is that Jackson's anger, although it seems to be a major affective response, immediately shifts into a mild,

negative feeling that quickly passes once she makes her way to the donut shop where she bumps into her former love interest, a successful black man named Mitchell Harris. Harris embodies all the symbols of upward mobility that Jackson desires in a partner—he wears Gucci loafers and drives an expensive Jaguar. Jackson's encounter with Harris seems to erase her negative feelings, shifting her attention elsewhere, and replacing feeling of discomfort with new ruminations concerning her desire to maintain her class privilege through a relationship with Harris.

Campbell positions Diamond Donuts as a location where negativity melts into self-discovery and recovery. It functions as a necessary space that allows the protagonist to move past her personal limitations, expectations and illusions to a place where she is able to embrace her community as it is, without a lingering sense of disappointment. At a key moment in the novel, Jackson visits the donut shop to find an angry black woman confronting Hyun about the March 1991 Latasha Harlins fatal shooting; in a moment of problematic racial essentialism the enraged woman shouts, "Y'all killed that girl" (393). Jackson attempts here to evoke one of the multiple events that occurred in Los Angeles after the Rodney King beating. When confronted with the image of the angry woman, Jackson cannot act. The negative feeling that Jackson registers 'in her bones" when faced with the woman's anger leaves the protagonist motionless. Her inner feelings only trigger a desire to turn away; she looks out into the distance and watches "the red glow of the sky. From where she was standing, it was hard to tell if the sun was setting or if there were fires in the distance." Here Jackson merges the image of the potential fires in the distance with the "sweet air" in the bakery that "mixed with the smell of coffee and doughnuts" (393). Once again, Jackson's neighbors are connected to the bakery. She thinks about the angry woman in the bakery while she watches the couple from her kitchen window play scrabble with their daughter between them. Jackson "could still hear the words the woman spoke in the

doughnut shop" as she simultaneously reflects on the child, Sarah, with her "wild Bride of Frankenstein hair spiraling upward." Clearly, Jackson has to work out her prejudice before she can move on.

The donut shop makes a final appearance towards the novel's conclusion, when Jackson's intimacy with her neighbors, the Lintons, seems to be solidified. Once angered by the mere image of her interracial neighbors, the protagonist becomes intimate with them; she babysits their daughter—in a sense she becomes a part of the family when she functions as a temporary caretaker. From this vantage point, Jackson transforms into something like a *sister* to the couple; she is like family. While babysitting, Jackson takes the young Sarah to the bakery, where, for the first time, she actually purchases a donut; the purchase marks the commodification and consumption of the sweet. Although Jackson also buys her regular muffins for herself, the purchase of the donut for Sarah shows a desire to nurture the girl with the pleasant feelings that the sweetness evokes for the protagonist, the sweetness that has generally eluded the protagonist is now easily gifted to the girl.

Before moving on to interrogate the role of other African American characters in triggering Jackson's affective response to the aftermath of the Los Angeles violence, it is worth dwelling a bit longer here on Campbell's depiction of Jackson's personal history and inner dialogue. These experiences, particularly early memories, mark Jackson as a member of an upward-bound, middle-class family that strives to function within a particular, prescribed social milieu—hers is a world, with her parents and brother, that is located far from that of the violent crowd. In flashbacks to her childhood, Jackson recalls how her parents' decision to send her to a private white school initiated a divide between herself and the larger African American community. This division caused her great emotional stress that haunts her adult interactions. It

was her parents' intention to push Jackson into the upper-class black community through education; however, she rejected the break from her community and poorer friends. When her neighborhood friends began to tease her for going to the mostly-white private school, her mother explained that Jackson's education would eventually transform her into someone important while her peers in the neighborhood would remain nobodies. The protagonist experiences ambiguous feelings toward her mother's sentiments: "The thought that black people could be divided into those who would be important and those who would not hadn't occurred to Esther before. She wanted to be somebody, but she didn't want to be set apart" (94). From the beginning of her story, Jackson struggles to remain connected with the African American community, while also striving to achieve success within the broader society. In her early days, she finds that the solution to fitting in with her neighborhood friends is to blame her parents for forcing her and her brother to go to the elite school; she does not take ownership for the division that exists between herself and her peers. When she expresses how much she hates the school, "that confession had the effect of magic and traveled throughout the neighborhood in record speed, and only hours later, the same children who had kicked their asses were ringing their doorbell, asking if they could come out and play" (94). Those children no longer reject her and her brother for their proper English and different school, but instead pity them. Campbell depicts Jackson's desire to remain connected to the larger African American community to demonstrate that she still holds onto the desire to forge alliances with her black co-workers at the bank; the protagonist's core values include merging with her community on a level that occludes class barriers.

Jackson's two black co-workers at the Angel City National Bank are recruited by Jackson and her superiors in the aftermath of the riot as a way to demonstrate a commitment to diversity; yet she sometimes feels conflicted by their presence. Campbell gives her readers these

characters' points of view in order to complicate Jackson's perspective for the reader. Jackson's sense of conflict is manifested in her continued ruminations about her interactions with these characters; she feels mostly irritation when she deals with them. First, Humphrey Boone, a successful African American man, is brought in as a senior banker—he becomes Jackson's boss. She does not like that Boone's position weakens her own chances for promotion. Boone himself is skeptical about the bank president's initial attempt to recruit him from another successful mainstream bank, Campbell gives provides Boone's point of view: "This wouldn't be the first meeting he'd had since April 29, and it probably would be exactly like the other's he'd gone on: a colossal waste of time, another White Man's Post-Riot Guilt Trip" (136). Other banks were recruiting Boone in the aftermath of the violence. In fact, Boone's ego steadily inflated in the days following the riot: "Ever since the riot, every major bank in Los Angeles had called him in for a 'spook by the door' position. But when it came to salary, responsibility, and perks, none of them were offering anything to tempt him" (137). The aftermath of the riot worked in his favor, as it also did with the young diversity recruit, LaKeesha, whom Jackson must mentor.

Jackson's relationship with LaKeesha enables the protagonist to address her anxieties about leaving the black community behind in her pursuit for success because LaKeesha represents the woman Jackson could have become without her class benefits. From this standpoint, it becomes clear that LaKeesha also functions as a reminder of Jackson's class privilege; therefore, her presence at the bank evokes negative feelings, particularly minor irritations, for Jackson. The protagonist mentors LaKeesha with the intention to help an African American woman less fortunate than her in the aftermath of the violence that plagues a community that they share. Indeed, LaKeesha's probationary period at the bank is smooth partly due to Jackson's support: "Angel City had been good to LaKeesha. Her six-month performance

review had been excellent, and Esther had told her that she could look forward to becoming a service rep within a year or so" (336). Despite Jackson's desire to move LaKeesha upward through the bank's hierarchy, the young woman strongly feels the difference between herself and her mentor. Her feelings of insecurity climax as she attends a baby shower for a co-worker at Jackson's home, here Campbell provides LaKeesha's point of view: "Everything around her was bright and clean and nice. She could save her entire life and she would never own a home as nice as Esther's" (337). LaKeesha's realization that she and the protagonist come from very different backgrounds and are seemingly on very different trajectories sparks an anxiety in the younger woman that causes her to leave the party and return to the shabby home that she shares with her family to hide in her room and cry. The crying might provide some relief for LaKeesha, but it does not ease the problem of inequality that separates these two characters. LaKeesha's decision to leave Jackson's party marks her own acknowledgement that she works within a system that she cannot master. For LaKeesha, Esther's support is all she has to lean on, and her own potential for self-uplift is limited.

Jackson decides to hire LaKeesha during the beginning of the civil trial of the police who beat Rodney King. Her thoughts after interviewing LaKeesha demonstrate her desire to bring another African American woman into her work space in the aftermath of the violence, while at the same time acknowledging the hardships that hold others back from a successful path. Also, hiring LaKeesha would mean that "she wouldn't be the only one anymore. For a split second she felt the joy of that explosion detonating inside her. And in that moment she realized that she'd made her decision to hire LaKeesha as soon as she'd met the sister" (211). For Jackson, this new addition to the bank represents the power that the protagonist has within the workplace, and it also demonstrates how her own childhood traumas impact her decision-making capabilities.

Here, she begins to imagine her role as a leader in the black community through mentoring younger black women. Being the only woman of color at the bank mirrors Jackson's experience as the only black child in her private school. The burden of being a minority weighs on Jackson, and the reminder of the 1992 violence as the civil trial begins causes her to recall the isolation that she felt in her youth. It also forces her to grapple with her continued separation from the larger African American community.

Additional minor interactions throughout the novel cause Campbell's Jackson to experience class-related anxieties. These quotidian interactions are tinged with negative ordinary affects. For example, Jackson cringes when her housekeeper, Lupe, greets her with a somewhat formal title of "Missy Esta." For Jackson, whose first name is Esther, employing someone to clean her house only reminds her of how her own grandmother once worked in a similar position: "It was on the tip of her tongue to remind her housekeeper not to call her Missy, but she knew that the woman was uncomfortable with such informality" (31). When Esther gives Lupe a bag of old clothes, she considers the embarrassment that she experienced as a child when she wore old hand me downs given to her grandmother; these feelings remind her of her former class status and trigger discomfort.

In her attempt to depict the city's political climate, Campbell places Jackson in situations where references to the Los Angeles violence surface in casual conversations. My intention here is to demonstrate that Campbell forces her protagonist to confront the memories of the collective violence on a regular basis in order to demonstrate the extent to which Jackson must contemplate her role within society. It also illuminates Jackson's separation from the larger African American community. Moreover, the mere mentioning of the violence triggers anxieties for Jackson as well as the other up-and-coming black people with whom she associates. For

example, when Esther's friend encourages her to go on a double date with a successful black man from Watts, the dinner discussion weaves into a brief recollection of how the 1992 violence is simply a repeat of the Watts Riot in the 1960s:

> "I guess last April must have been like déjà vu for you?"
>
> "You mean the riots?"
>
> "The rebellion," Felton said, bending his head away from Vanessa and toward Rodney. "It was a rebellion, man."
>
> "Whatever. The end result was the same. It tore up the neighborhood." He turned back to Esther. "Yeah, it was déjà vu. And I hate to sound pessimistic, but the same thing is going to happen to South Central that happened to Watts."
>
> "What's that?"
>
> "Nothing, that's what. A lot of promises and then nothing." (37)

These characters cannot agree on whether the violence should be referred to as a "riot" or a "rebellion"; rather than consider the implications of the terms, they choose instead to change the subject. In the scene above, the conversation abruptly ends when the character who is coincidently named Rodney, like the motorist who was beaten by the police, decides to change the subject. He says, "I don't feel like talking about this tonight. Makes me too mad. Felton tells me you work in a bank, What do you do?" (37). It is significant that the characters' affective response to the memory of the violence is strong enough to make them feel the need to avoid the topic. Even more significant is that the subject is quickly shifted to one of economic mobility and identity. Rodney, who has just met Esther, wants to talk about her work as a bank manager. For these upwardly mobile, middle-class characters, the focus on individual class privilege functions as a more comfortable topic than the social mobility of the entire African American

community in Los Angeles. Likewise, their discussion about how nothing will change in the aftermath of the collective violence seems to free them from any responsibility for their deteriorating communities. Still, Campbell's characters do not all exist at the same class level. When Jackson discovers that her date is a bus driver, her interest in him dissolves. The interaction between her and Rodney sets the stage in the novel for Jackson to begin to grapple with how her own self-imposed class restrictions limit her social circle; she does not want to date anyone who makes less than she does. Her often repeated, and revealing, motto is "no romance without finance" (39).

Jackson's class status, including her search for a suitable mate, is tied to her bodily reactions to memories of the 1992 violence—these memories evoke minor irritations. The image of black bodies clashing with each other, looting and damaging community businesses, all function as reminders that Jackson comes from a troubled environment that somehow limits how easily she can rest on her class privilege. Upward mobility begins as a central value in this character's life. Once she achieves a higher class status; her ongoing focus on mobility becomes a source of her discomfort. As she feels the affects associated with the 1992 crowd violence, her own troubled relationship status remains at the forefront of her ruminations. She wants to marry a man who has the same financial success that she does; yet throughout the novel, her female friends all encourage her to find love without considering her partner's economic status. This advice to lower her expectations only irritates Jackson, which reveals her middle-class anxieties related to class mobility. The protagonist had previously dated the successful doctor Mitchell Harris for five years and temporarily decided to detach herself when it became clear that he would not commit. What this intermittent relationship demonstrates in the novel is that the protagonist visualizes a wealthy future, and her interests revolve around an improved economic

status that does not place her within the confines of the crowd that she witnesses as a result of the Rodney King verdict. She functions outside the crowd; her concerns are not with the community, but with her individual economic growth. Although her failed relationship with the doctor leaves her with feelings of irritation, it also gives her a clear idea of what she wants: "Whoever she did hook up with had to have as much going for him as she did, and that meant having two degrees, owning a home, having money in the back and future plans."[18] Campbell's protagonist is clearly materialistic; yet she does not identify her desires for a successful mate as a sign of her own shortcoming. Instead, she feels that the only way to overcome social inequality is through the development of individual wealth. She does this by focusing on her career, and the workplace is where she attempts to foster relationships with her co-workers even when these interactions cause everyday irritations.

By the conclusion of Campbell's novel, the author renders the protagonist as an individual capable of connecting with her community only after she overcomes the minor, negative feelings that plague her. Campbell's depiction of Jackson shifts to reveal the tricky entanglement of feelings and action. Once Jackson lets go of her adherence to the social expectations that she has adopted, she moves into a new direction that is more tied to community building. From this vantage point, Campbell's work gestures toward the ability of the individual to overcome the residuals of collective violence by redefining success to include community uplift. Campbell's Jackson returns to the community when she transfers to a black-owned bank, chooses to date a working-class black man rather than reject him for his inability to live up to her class-based standards, and finally orders a donut for the mixed-race neighbor's child from the donut shop. It is this little indulgence of purchasing a sweet donut that signifies the character's final transformation. Through the purchase of the sweet for the innocent child who represents the

future as well as a more harmonious relationship between races, Jackson finds relief from her restrictive, often experience-limiting, negative feelings.

Paula Woods's *Inner City Blues*

Woods begins her novel with the middle class protagonist, Charlotte Justice, a Yale-educated African American woman who joins the Los Angeles police force after her baby and husband, a professor, are killed in a drive-by shooting. Justice joined the Los Angeles police force, in part, to find the person who killed her husband and baby 14 years before the 1992 crowd violence erupts—the event of collective violence which ignites the novel. From the beginning, Justice views her career as a police woman within the scope of community leadership. In the midst of the chaotic street violence, Justice is torn between her devotion to the police force and a desire to protect the black community. When the reader is introduced to Justice, it is revealed that she survived her years on the police force "with little more than a few bruises, a shoulder prone to dislocation, and a couple of badly torn fingernails."[19] Woods places an emphasis on the idea of survival for her character who "survived (her) first assignment as a gang detective" and "survived stun guns and choke holds; Afro puffs and Jheri curls; floods, fires, and medflies; the '84 Olympics and the Whittier quake" (11). What is significant here is that the protagonist's focus on perseverance is intertwined with her desire to control her everyday irritations. She struggles to keep her negative feelings at bay throughout the novel; in fact, Justice's inability to acknowledge how she feels is just as important to understanding the character as her actual affective responses to the crowd violence in Los Angeles. Although the protagonist's injured body survives the trauma of collective violence, the presence of the crowd

sparked by the Rodney King verdict challenges the protagonist's ability to maintain the control of her feelings.

Although Woods' novel was given much acclaim when it was published, it has not received the scholarly attention that it deserves. Woods's portrayal of her protagonist's struggle to come to terms with her own past traumas during the 1992 crisis in Los Angeles makes this text particularly valuable to a project like this one that is concerned with images of crowd violence in the black community and the affective responses of individual characters to such historically inspired events. According to an article in the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, "The first Charlotte Justice mystery, *Inner City Blues*, was on the *Los Angeles Times* bestseller list for three weeks and was also named by the newspaper as one of the Best Books of 1999. The book received the Macavity Award for Best First Mystery, was named the Best First Novel by the Black Caucus of the American Library Association and was nominated for the Edgar and Anthony awards for best first mystery novel."[20] Woods has also been a book reviewer for the Los Angeles Times. For Woods, her fiction, particularly *Inner City Blues*, demonstrates the complicated connection between ongoing community relations, individual responsibility, and the need for policy interventions. Her characters, especially Justice, seek closure to past wounds in the midst of the 1992 crisis. The protagonist focuses more on the past than on the present or future as she stumbles through the broken glass and debris left behind by looters.

Inner City Blues considers both the physical and the psychological impact of community violence on the individual. The title itself suggests a focus on interiority; it looks not only at the city, but the inner city. The protagonist's struggle to maintain a sense of control in order to survive only limits her ability to heal on the emotional level. Like Campbell's Esther Jackson, Charlotte Justice experiences minor irritations ignited by her class privilege that prevent her from

taking action, particularly those associated with the gendered nature of her work. As a female police officers, she often experiences verbal abuse from her male co-workers. The irritations that she experiences might be overshadowed by stronger feelings like rage and grief, if only the protagonist would allow herself to feel. Nevertheless, Justice maintains a mantra that a doctor gives her during a follow-up examination after she injures her shoulder while she is on duty during the riot; if she wants to return to work, the doctor tells her:

> *See how you feel.* That's what Dr. Mostafavi had said as I left his office earlier that afternoon. 'What you've been through in the last few days is like being in a war,' the orthopedic surgeon had told me. 'Your three days on the street put you through more physical and emotional trauma than most people will ever experience. You're only human, Detective Justice, not some kind of crime-fighting robot. Use the shoulder injury as an excuse to catch up on your paperwork, and than see how you feel about jumping back in with both feet. (130).

Before Justice considers taking action throughout the novel, she returns to the doctor's advice to consider her feelings. Often she ignores how she feels by numbing her pain with medication and alcohol; she does not want to feel. What is also significant about the above passage is Mostafavi's suggestion that Justice's experiences during the 1992 violence in Los Angeles are akin to fighting a war; he suggests that somehow she has suffered a soldier's post-traumatic stress as a result of the violence. Her physical injury provides an excuse for the protagonist to delay action. When she considers the doctor's advice, she ignores her feelings and she allows herself to be pushed forward by the events in the case she is investigating: the murder of man who killed her husband and daughter years earlier. Keeping her rage at bay, the protagonist is

mainly motivated by minor irritations caused by the desire to form a relationship with a suitable partner and the inequalities that she and other police women face in a mostly male profession.

The body plays a significant role in the Woods's novel with both Justice and her nemesis, Robert 'Cinque' Lewis, possessing key physical disabilities—Justice has a reoccurring dislocated shoulder and Lewis has a missing arm. Woods crafts a fictional Los Angeles where these two first interact in the late 1970s. Lewis, a radical in a group that resembles the Black Panthers, begins to dabble in drugs, while Justice's husband, a college criminology professor, writes a book about the gang violence that begins to surface in the community. Lewis kills Justice's husband and baby when the professor's book project threatens to reveal too much about Lewis's drug enterprise; as a result, Justice decides to be a police officer. In a sense, Justice's injury symbolizes the problems of the African American Los Angeles community that was tested during the riots—it was like an arm bent but not broken. Like Justice, Los Angeles's black community continued in the aftermath of Watts. Woods's novel, which takes place during the 1992 violence, questions whether its protagonist and the community will be able to move on from past injuries. Among these injuries is the city's Watts Riots; Justice recalls that her father was barbecuing near their swimming pool when "we saw the fires burning in Watts that first August evening in 1965" (77). In a sense, the novel leaves open the question of whether the black community in Los Angeles has the ability to bounce back after 1992 by emphasizing the potential for individual healing rather than a more holistic, group based solution.

From the novel's beginning, Woods considers the role of individual healing as an approach to community wounds. Justice's position as an officer also gives her a sense of security and leadership potential that she might not have had otherwise as a woman in a violent urban community; she has a gun and she threatens to use it. The inequalities that she and other

police women face cause Justice to experience minor irritation that cause her to delay action; instead, she often becomes a witness to these inequalities. For example, when a male officer harasses the protagonist, she threatens him with action, but does not take any. She says, "I know you're tired. So am I. But if you don't get off my bra strap right now, I'm going to aim this gun at Mister Willy there and change that Waco twang to a West Hollywood falsetto. So why don't you save the drama for your mama before somebody gets hurt?" (18). The protagonist's threats seem real, but the intensity of the situation is deflated when the officers, who are on a bus in the middle of the looting during the Los Angeles 1992 events, witness an agitated, suspicious black man trying to get into his luxury car. The man, whom the officers mistake for a car thief, happens to be the same doctor, Lance Mitchell, who had previously treated Justice's shoulder. After briefly delaying any action because she is stuck ruminating on the above conflict, Justice finds herself in a rush to protect the man as her white co-workers target him as a criminal. Her minor irritations with her abuse of male co-workers cause her delayed reaction. She also reflects on the Rodney King beating that triggered the rioting as she considers her difficult situation on the street: "Since Rodney King, black men from all walks of life had risen up to complain about their treatment at the hands of the LAPD. It had caused the Department a lot of embarrassment. We didn't need to go through it again, especially now. I had to do something to stop this" (21). From this perspective, Justice has taken on the role of intermediary between the African American community and the police, but she delays taking action and, as a result, she injures her shoulder. For some reason, she feels that it is her responsibility to protect not only Dr. Mitchell, but also to maintain some semblance of peace where possible. Although Justice fails to bring ease the tension in this particular situation when violence breaks out all around the officers and Dr. Mitchell, she protects Mitchell from the chaos that surrounds the group as the other officers

fight off the crowd. In doing so, she reinjures her arm, when another officer twists it as she tries to pull the doctor to safety.

As a result of the injury that Justice suffers during her attempt to protect Dr. Mitchell, she ends up at the hospital emergency room to get medical care for her arm. The treatment comes from her friend Dr. Aubrey Scott, who also becomes her love interest in the novel. The doctor becomes the healing that Justice needs to move on from the tragic deaths of her family. Indeed, not only does Justice seem to be a wounded character, but her pain seems to mirror that of the community that she wants to protect. In a way, the protagonist functions as a metaphor for a city in crisis, particularly at a time when it is most vulnerable to attack. And like the city that she watches over, she also suffers from a past injustice that continues to haunt her—the murder of her husband and baby. The visit to the emergency room shakes up the protagonist's emotions, particularly when she witnesses an injured baby. At the sight of the bloodied, brown-skinned baby, the protagonist is "overwhelmed by the unwanted memory of jacaranda blossoms" (28). The moment in the hospital is particularly significant because it highlights Justice's affective response to the sight of the injured baby: she feels "a wave of nausea" consume her as she is "drawn back almost fourteen years to the sight of bluish-purple trumpets drifting down from the tree in front of [her] house, into the growing puddle of blood in which my husband, Keith, and six-month-old, Erica, had lain" (28). Her family members were killed in a drive-by shooting at a time in her life when she was just settling into the domestic bliss of middle-class black motherhood. The murder robbed her of her privilege and comfort. Although a life as a police offer allows Justice to move away from that day's darkness, some form of that pain lingers, and it manifests itself as a reoccurring physical pain in the protagonist's injured shoulder. From the moment that she remembers her tragedy, her mind shifts back to her painful shoulder injury.

The transition from physical injury to the psychological pain that she experiences at the sight of the father and child in the emergency room scene marks the fluidity of connection between the mind and the body in the novel. Justice explains how the emergency room scene shook her when she says, “The injured father’s cries for help for his baby in the ER reminded me of how I had screamed and cried over my family, laying in our driveway, until my neighbor gathered me up and took me away into the dark coolness of my house, into the dark days and months that followed” (28). In fact, the memory evoked by the ER experience suggests that the character continues to mourn for more than the physical loss of her family.

Indeed, not only does Woods’s protagonist choose to follow a career that will allow her to search for closure to her own injustices, but she also searches for closure on a spiritual level. She explains that the pain in her shoulder “brought a line of a psalm to mind, one I used to get on my knees and pray every night through most of my twenties: *Unto thee will I cry, O Lord my rock*” (28). Woods presents her protagonist in a complicated light here when she introduces the character’s religious beliefs. From this moment in the novel, Woods’s Justice can no longer be seen simply as a police officer with a chip on her shoulder. She becomes a fully developed, psychologically complicated figure with a complex personal life that moves her from wife to widow to soul searcher and finally to a single woman looking for love to fulfill the hole in her life left by past trauma. What is particularly significant is that she prayed to the “Lord” as her “rock” when she was in her twenties; yet she moved on from that period of her life. By the time she finds herself in the emergency room with her physical injury, she seems to no longer be crying on her knees every night. She has moved on; yet her body has not healed.

Woods introduces a second doctor in the novel, Aubrey Scott, who functions as the embodiment of the protagonist’s cure. As a medical professional, he has the potential to heal

Justice. From the moment that Scott is introduced, Justice's attraction to him is undeniable. She narrators their meeting in the following passage: "Despite the world coming apart at the seams outside, Aubrey Scott stood before me like he just stepped out of a GQ spread, all six feet *fine* of him, notwithstanding his grizzled face and less-than-fresh dark green surgical garb."[21] Later she recalls that Scott was literally the one that got away, when she says: "I was painfully aware of the road not taken" (30). Ironically, if Scott had not married Justice's rival in their early twenties while she was away at Yale getting an education, she would not have suffered her family tragedy. Strangely enough, Justice's wish to have married the doctor instead of her former husband suggests that a disconnect from her deceased spouse always existed. Perhaps she had married the wrong person; yet how could she continue to mourn for someone she really did not love? Additionally, Justice's college education at an elite university marks her as a privileged no matter her current career; her education provides her with career and social opinions that are not available to everyone else, especially her working-class neighbors. For example, she could fill a leadership role in her community beyond her work as a police officer, perhaps within government or not-for-profit work.

Although Woods's protagonist focuses largely on her physical injuries throughout the novel, she also experiences a sense of irritation from ordinary affects such as those described by Stewart that distracts her from her bigger problems—the criminal case that she is working to solve. Justice comes from a privileged, middle-class background: her father is a wealthy businessman, her mother a socialite, her brother a lawyer, and her sister is working on a Ph.D. in psychology. In fact, Justice herself is A.B.D. in a criminology Ph.D. program that she never completed. As a member of Los Angeles' elite African American community, Justice could easily create a life outside the dangerous world in which she chooses to live, but she insists on

doing the work that she thinks will eventually provide some closure to the traumas of her past. Over her mother's objection, she joined the Los Angeles police force. Justice is a victim of street violence; yet she chooses to focus on minor quotidian irritations. She gets upset when her brother Perris, a former member of the LAPD and now a lawyer, accuses her of covering up the police harassment of Dr. Mitchell. She needs to turn to self-calming techniques she picked up in a stress management class to ease the situation: "*Breathe in…stay calm…breathe out…stay focused*. Instead of letting the pain and anger flood your senses and leak out of your eyes, you relaxed until you could float above it, finding some corner of hurt you could cut away from the rest and objectively analyze" (37). Learning to control the body's affective responses to stress is key for the protagonist; her survival is based in part on her ability to manage her feelings. Indeed, the reference to these breathing techniques offers some explanation for Justice's general lack of intense affect early in the novel before she finds herself in the emergency room—she has been consciously working to control her affective response. In the hospital, the images that recall her trauma jeopardize her self-soothing practice. The one person who seems to possess the power to help Justice heal is the doctor, Aubrey Scott. Scott's occupation is significant because it suggests that Justice's salvation—or healing—resides in building a long-term relationship with Scott and returning to her middle-class privileges.

Later, when Justice discovers that Lewis has been killed, she suddenly "couldn't catch a breath, could barely nod my head" (40). For the protagonist, the news of the killer's own death causes her to lose control not only of her ability to focus her breathe, but even to breath at all. She is shocked at the news, and she can only think of the Biblical verse, Psalm 28, that she repeated in the aftermath of her trauma: "*Unto thee I will cry, O Lord my rock/Be not silent to me:/Lest, if thou be silent to me,/I become like them that go down into the pit*" (41). Lewis's

death reminds Justice of her past wounds, but it also reaffirms her ability to survive. Justice's ability to control her feelings has helped her avoid going "down into the pit" that the Psalm warns her to steer clear from. As she reflects on Lewis's death, she struggles to maintain control of her feelings, explaining that she "couldn't let my emotions get the upper hand of my intellect" despite the fact that her emotions already had the upper hand (44).

In order to find closure, Justice insists on viewing Lewis's dead body at the crime site; and when she does, she notices that he had an "expensive-looking plastic and metal prosthesis with a finely detailed hand that matched the victim's brown-paper-bag color precisely" (49). Again, the presence of a prosthesis suggests the potential for healing. Not only does Woods mark Lewis as a wealthy man with an expensive prosthesis, but she suggests that his color has something to do with his privileges. Such references to color are made throughout the text, with Justice herself, as well as her elite family members, being very light-skinned. Some of the characters are light enough to pass for white. The brown-paper-bag reference hints to a time in the early 1900s when light black elites segregated themselves based on the ability to pass the brown-paper-bag test, which would reveal whether one was light enough to socialize with other light-skinned blacks. Woods makes a reference to these sorts of social clubs; she aligns them with her mother's elite thinking, which only triggers the protagonist's irritations. She explains, "I learned from my mother's experiences that life in America was a game called Pigmentocracy, color a card you played" (82). As a result, Justice rebelled against her mother on many levels, including making the decision to marry her first husband, a man whose skin was darker than her own. The reference to the varying skin tones within the African American community suggests that Woods's work is particularly concerned with the body as a marker or signifier of privilege.

For some of the middle-class black characters in the novel, their light-colored bodies indicate privilege; yet their injuries also suggest disability.

Visual references are key for Woods. She sprinkles her novel with references to black art, particularly by women artists interested in family and community building; and the pieces in the novel evoke an affective response in Justice that produces memories of her own kinship connections. In her bedroom, the protagonist displays Betye Sarr's collage *Letters from Home/Wish You Were Here*. When she brings Dr. Scott, her new love interest, into her bedroom during a tour of her house, she reflects on how that the piece "had haunted her" from the moment that she saw it in the gallery: "it was as if the artist had made art from the scraps of my life" (166). As she looks at the collage, she mentions how an envelope at the top reminds her of letters she used to get from her aunt and uncles when she was a child; the old photograph resembles a picture of her father and his siblings taken in Arkansas; and a solitary woman in high heels at the bottom of the canvas "walking down a long rough road," reminds her of herself (166). Overall, she reflects that, "the blue collage spoke to me of southern roots and the disconnected loneliness that was peculiar to L.A." (166). Here, Woods's protagonist makes a particular critique of Los Angeles during the uprising. Her musing conjures up an image of the city juxtaposed with representations of family. The title of the piece, *Letter from Home/Wish You Were Here,* suggests that as the viewer, who happens to be Justice, views the piece she is meant to be outside the home space. Indeed, Justice's attraction to the piece suggests that she does not really consider her house, the place where her husband and child were killed, to be an actual home. The house that she lives in is merely the shelter where she goes at the end of the day. It is relevant that the room next door to her bedroom is a living shrine to her dead husband where she keeps his broken glasses and an old sweater; she is not able to part with these items in the

novel's conclusion. When she leaves these particular items at her husband's grave, it is a symbol that marks her readiness to move on with her life in a new relationship with Dr. Scott.

Justice's blooming relationship with Dr. Scott throughout the novel signals her desire to create community and family during the violence in 1992, and the other work of art that stands out in the novel also signifies the protagonist's concern with community building. Justice has a John Biggers lithograph of a painting called "Shotguns" (1987) that depicts a row of solemn women holding their homes in dark, work-roughened hands (218). She stares at the picture after her male supervisor visits her and makes an undesirable sexual advance; she is rescued by her older female neighbor. It is the older women in the novel who support Justice: her grandmother and her neighbor. Here Woods emphasizes the significance of female connection and support. It seems appropriate that another older woman is represented in connection with the art scene in the novel: Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "The Chicago Picasso" is printed on the program handed out at a community art show for an organization called TAGOUT, an anti-graffiti nonprofit at the center of Woods's mystery. The following lines from Brooks's poem are printed in the program: "Does man love Art? Man visits Art, but squirms/Art hurts. Art urges voyages/ and it is easier to stay at home,/the nice beer ready." The lines that Woods emphasizes illuminate the home spaces as a buffer between the individual and the community. It is key here that these words cause Justice to consider not only art and the identity of artists, but also her image of home and the potential for a future with Dr. Scott. Brooks's words evoke a skeptical response from the protagonist who thinks, "Picasso with a Krylon can was more like it" when she considers the young graffiti artists featured in the art show (154). Woods places the young taggers at the center of her crime novel because these teenagers represent the future; they are the inner city youth attempting to make something out of what some, like the protagonist, consider an illegitimate

talent. Justice's skepticism about the young artists' futures mirrors her doubts about her own ability to build a relationship with Dr. Scott as she considers that "the voyage Aubrey and I were about to undertake looked more like Mr. Toad's Wild Ride at Disneyland than anything resembling art" (154). These thoughts demonstrate the character's inability to acknowledge both the messiness of art by successful artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat and the messiness of life itself. Indeed, Justice's inability to see either the art in front of her or the potential in her current relationship is strongly influenced by her conscious decision to regulate her feelings and keep unwanted emotions in check.

Woods's references to African American cultural productions such as the works of Betye Sarr, John Biggers, and Gwendolyn Brooks evoke images of a collective community that exists beyond the Los Angeles city limits. What the works of Sarrs, Biggers and Brooks all have in common are references to home; they highlight the safety, protection and even the barrier from community that the private sphere offers. Nevertheless, the notion of home in the novel seems elusive for the protagonist. For Justice who is both physically and emotionally scarred, the home space is fraught with the memory of past trauma as well as the minor irritations associated with class divisions in the African American community that her childhood home represents. As Woods concludes her novel with her protagonist's decision to vacation away from Los Angeles, the notion of a broader African American community reveals itself. Charlotte Justice and Dr. Scott may be the products of a wounded, tainted, and ravaged Los Angeles, but their connections to African Americans exist outside the city's trauma. Although Woods's novel functions largely as a virtual tour of the city, its sites, and its history, the narrative shifts its lens from the city's microcosm to a more global prospective. In doing so, it creates a broader space for community.

[1]Campbell, Bebe Moore. *Brothers and Sisters*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1994. 14

[2] Stewart, Kathleen. Ordinary Affects. Durham: Duke UP, 2007. 2

[3] Ibid., 3.

[4] See Erica Edwards's *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. Also see Hazel Carby's *Race Men*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998.

[5] Chambers, Veronica. "Which Counts More, Gender or Race?: Two Novelist Meet in a Black and White Conversation." Moderated By Veronica Chambers. *New York Times* (1923-Current file); New York, N.Y. 25 Dec. 1994.

[6] Campbell makes a reference to Spike Lee's Do The Right Thing in *Brothers and Sisters*.

[7] Throughout this article, I refer to the 1992 event as the LA violence or uprising rather than a riot or rebellion.

[8] Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard UP, Cambridge. 2005. See Ngai's discussion of subject/object difference in *Ugly Feelings*.

[9] Graeber, Laurel. "New & Noteworthy Paperbacks." *New York Times* (1923-Current file); Sep 17, 1995; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times pg. BR40.

[10] Lupo, 163.

[11] Lupo, 164.

[12] Fox, Margalit. "Bebe Moore Campbell, Novelist of Black Lives, Dies at 56." *New York Times* (1923-Current file ProQuest Historical Newspapers) New York, N.Y. 28 Nov. 2006: A21.

[13] Campbell, Bebe Moore. *Brothers and Sisters*. See Epigraph.

[14] Stewart, 15.

[15] Ibid., 15.

[16] Campbell, Bebe Moore. *Brothers and Sisters*. See pages 27, 95, 392, 472.

[17] Brennan, Teresa. *The Transfer of Affect*. Cornell UP, Ithaca. 2004. 69-73. Here Brennan is specifically discussing how hormones impact the individual in the crowd.

[18] Campbell, *Brothers and Sisters*. 41.

[19] Woods, Paula L. *Inner City Blues*. Norton & Company, New York, 1999. 11.

[20] "Novelist Paula Woods to Speak at Santa Monica College." *Los Angeles Sentinel* (1934-2005); Los Angeles, Calif. [Los Angeles, Calif] 12 Feb 2004:A11.

[21] Ibid., 29.

4. LET THE JAZZ SEEP INTO YOUR PORES:
Witnessing Crowd Violence in 1992 Los Angeles While Listening to Eric Dolphy in Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle*

"Improvisation is located at a seemingly unbridgeable chasm between feeling and reflection, disarmament and preparation, speech and writing."

Fred Moten[1]

"Jazz is specific. It is what each musician feels as he plays."

Nat Hentoff[2]

Eric Dolphy's music functions as a soundtrack for the 1992 Los Angeles crisis depicted in Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* (2005). Beatty's protagonist, Gunnar Kaufman, watches as the violence and looting commence around him after news of the non-guilty verdict of the four police who were filmed beating Rodney King begins to circulate. Kaufman's friend, Nicholas Scoby, plays Dolphy's experimental jazz on his car radio to counter, or perhaps mirror, the discordant sounds on the street. In an unsuccessful attempt to calm Kaufman's increased sense of anxiety, Scoby delivers the imperative: "Feel, Gunnar, feel. Let the jazz seep into your pores," but Kaufman resists (130). He cannot feel the jazz; his body rejects the music performed by one of history's great jazz innovators whose career was most prominent in the early 1960s. Kaufman only notices the "stop-and-go shrieking" of "Dolphy's sonic turmoil" (130).

Kaufman is distracted by the African American men and women all around him. Beatty portrays these agitated Angelenos on the street as something akin to an experimental jazz ensemble as they raise their fists in the air, run their vehicles through stop signs, and violate traffic laws while honking their horns in protest. These bodies signify improvisation; their movements, as well as the sounds they make, are like notes of individual expression, or more

simply put, solos meant to express feeling. Each person on the street makes an independent contribution to the main event—the violence is an act of rebellion, an uprising against what they consider an outrageous injustice.

By deploying the sound of Dolphy's music in the novel, Beatty infuses his scene of collective violence with a jazz aesthetic that links Dolphy with the character Scoby. Turning to Anahid Kassabian's *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity*, I argue that Beatty deploys Dolphy's music to create what Kassabian calls distributed subjectivity—the term refers to a kind of collective identity created by the ubiquitous sounds that people encounter everyday, sometime without actively listening. These sounds can be heard on the car stereo, in a shopping mall or even in a grocery store. Kassabian explains that "distributed subjectivity suggests a vast field, rather than a group of subjects or an individual subject, on which various connections agglomerate temporarily and then dissolve again. This field is significantly constructed through and with music."[3] In other words, Scoby's decision to play Dolphy's music on his car stereo as the 1992 violence begins is meant to evoke an affective response from Kaufman that will perpetuate a certain kind of black masculine identity associated with both jazz music and the type of charismatic leadership.

Yet, Kaufman fails to feel the music, and, in failing to feel the music, he rejects the collective identity triggered by Dolphy's music. This collective identity, I argue, is an expression of what Nichole Rustin-Paschal calls jazzmasculinities. According to Rustin-Paschal, "in exploring how jazzmen describe their feelings about interacting with one another and about the music, we talk about jazzmasculinity and, by understanding that 'race is everywhere in music,' we talk about racialized jazzmasculinity and, in particular, the sway of black jazzmasculinity on politics, identity and culture."[4] Finally, turning to Sianne Ngai's articulation

of affect theory through her discussion of negative feelings, I contend that it is Kaufman's negative reaction to Dolphy's music that prevents him from participating in the form of identity associated with jazzmasculinities; he cannot feel the music, therefore, he rejects the collective black identity associated with the music.

Beatty's novel follows the protagonist Gunnar Kaufman from adolescence to manhood as he tries to locate his identity as a middle-class African American who spent the early years of his life in the mostly white Santa Monica community and later was forced to give up his childhood hobbies, like skateboarding, when he moved to the mostly black, fictional Hillside neighborhood in West Los Angeles. At the heart of the novel is a conflict between Kaufman and his struggle with his patrilineal heritage, which is particularly highlighted by his relationship with an abusive father who happens to be a police officer with the Los Angeles Police Department. The protagonist comes from a long historical line of black male figures identified as political failures; the novel suggests that these men all sold-out. As Kaufman struggles to develop what he feels is an authentic black identity manifested by his basketball playing, he also keeps his distance from the African American community by acting as a poet-witness; he writes poetry that is widely praised by critics in the novel as portraying an accurate, contemplative view of urban life in Los Angeles.

Beatty's nod to Dolphy signals to the reader that a monumental shift, much like the transition that Dolphy helped perpetuate in jazz music, is about to occur in the protagonist's life. Dolphy's presence in the text bears unpacking here; it evokes multiple questions such as: What does Beatty convey by having his protagonist listen to jazz as the 1992 violence begins? And why Dolphy, whose avant-garde approach to the alto sax and bass clarinet may not be so recognizable or accessible to the average reader? Could it be that Beatty chose Dolphy because

he grew up in Los Angeles (like the author) and was a strong presence in the city's jazz community before moving to the global stage? Is the way that the black media tried to protect and highlight Dolphy's masculinity after his death something that Beatty knew about? If so, does he evoke Dolphy to complicate traditional notions of black masculinity? Does Dolphy's training as a classical musician as well as a jazz musician, much like Ralph Ellison, signify Dolphy's ability to move fluidly through race and class barriers just as the protagonist does? Finally, does Dolphy's premature death at 36 make him an intriguing figure for Beatty, whose novel also lingers on the issue of death and suicide as rebellion to the continuous commodification of black bodies and cultural production?

Beatty's novel has been largely read as a portrait of shifting notions of black masculinity; I suggest that the author complicates such notions of masculinity when his protagonist fails to feel Dolphy's music. In this chapter, I juxtapose Sianne Ngai's assertion that minor, negative feelings result in thwarted action with the extensive body of scholarly work devoted to the connection between affect and music. Beatty's protagonist experiences a sense of delayed agency due to an intense focus on his own affective response to collective violence. By locating Beatty's depictions of the violent crowd within the realm of jazz aesthetics, I contend that the protagonist cannot feel Dolphy's innovative, experimental music because his negative feelings of self-doubt, ineffectiveness, and inauthenticity prevent him from fully performing as part of a collective, and as a consequence he fails to successfully take on a long-term leadership role in larger African American community. Like Paula Woods's Charlotte Justice in *Inner City Blues*, Beatty's protagonist is directed to explore his feelings in the midst of the collective violence; it is an act that demonstrates a division between the middle-class black body and the crowd. Without the alcohol and pain medication that numbs Woods's protagonist, Kaufman is left to experience

his raw feelings, and he immediately articulates them when he says: “I never felt so worthless in my life.”[5] Kaufman’s sense of worthlessness fits with the overall tone of the novel, which is one of self-reflection, doubt, and personal growth. In what is a contemporary absurd surrealist bildungsroman, set partly during the 1992 Los Angeles crowd violence, Beatty creates a protagonist who constantly undergoes an examination of his feelings throughout the novel, and this interior struggle, largely associated with a strained relationship between himself and his father—an African American police officer in the Los Angeles Police Department—only increases as the violent public turmoil begins.

Music scholars have turned to affect to explain a body’s reaction to sounds and music; these articulations of affect are also useful to considering how Beatty symbolically deploys Dolphy’s music. In *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity*, Anahid Kassabian uses affect to help explain how listening to Armenian diasporan jazz fusion projects helped her negotiate her own diasporan identity as an “Armenian-American feminist political mother, friend, partner and scholar of music and media” and she offers a helpful straightforward definition of affect: “*Affect* is the circuit of bodily responses to stimuli that take place before conscious apprehension. Once apprehended, the responses pass into thoughts and feelings, though they always leave behind a residue. This residue accretes in our bodies, becoming the stuff of future affective responses.”[6] (sic). Kassabian asks: “How do we listen to the music we hear everywhere, and how does that listening engage us and activate the world we move in?”[7] She argues that “*Ubiquitous musics*, these musics that fill our days, are listened to without the kind of primary *attention* assumed by most scholarship to date. That listening, and more generally input of the senses, however, still produces *affective* responses, bodily events that ultimately lead in part to what we call emotion.”[8] In relation to Beatty’s novel, the protagonist

encounters Dolphy's music as background noise; it is on Scoby's car radio. Scoby encourages Kaufman to actively listen, even feel the music, but he cannot. For the protagonist, Dolphy's music exists on the peripheries of his experience as the looting and violence begin in Los Angeles.

I suggest that Beatty employs Dolphy's music to create what Kassabian calls distributed subjectivity; it is a kind of fluid, sometimes slippery collective identity perpetuated by the ubiquitous sounds we listen to everyday. Kassabian offers the term "distributed subjectivity" to advance her hypothesis, arguing that "it is through this listening and these responses that a nonindividual, not simply human, distributed subjectivity takes place across a network of music media."[9] If we consider how this notion of distributed subjectivity might be applied to Beatty's novel, it seems that Scoby's decision to play Dolphy is part of a network of ongoing elements of identity formation that has lead up to the moment of music consumption; the black identity that Dolphy's music embodies began long before Dolphy recorded his tune. It began with Sidney Bechet, Coleman Hawkins, and Charlie Parker to name a few of Dolphy's musical forebearers. The tradition of jazz as identity forming continues as it flows through the technology of the recording studio, the record, and the radio. It does not end with Scoby or Kaufman, but it continues as part of Kassabian's distributed subjectivity. It is a gendered, hypermasculine identity that Kaufman has trouble accepting. As she explains: "Identity is a position left behind by the work of affect, and while it has been perceived as positional—that is, as static—it now looks like a constant process. Affect happens over microsecond intervals, moving on and leaving traces behind before we can feel its presence. Affect both conditions and enacts identities and identifications, and it does so not within bodies, but across them."[10] Dolphy's music has the potential to provoke an affective response in Kaufman that would create an

environment where jazzmasculinity would thrive, yet Kaufman's negative affective response, his inability to feel the music, functions as a rejection of such a collective identity.

In their connection to jazzmasculinity, Scoby and Dolphy are also linked to the hypermasculine great man leadership style that Erica Edwards, after Hazel Carby, has explained cannot be sustained.[11] Edwards turns to Beatty's *Shuffle* to support her thesis in *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*, which contends that traditional notions of African American leadership has been violently gendered and favor a Great Man top down approach. Edwards suggests that *Shuffle*, in addition to other later twentieth century African American texts, "manages to satirize singular, charismatic political authority while maintaining the position of black male heroes at the center of the drama of African American liberation."[12] For Edwards, *Shuffle* offers a "parody of post-civil rights black politics, questioning blacks' obsession with martyred charismatic leaders and reducing the 1990s discourse of the leadership void to the absurd."[13] What emerges from Beatty's depiction of the dynamic friendship between Kaufmann and Scoby in *Shuffle* is a model for black masculinity and leadership that offers an alternative to what Hazel Carby discusses in *Race Men*. In her book, Carby makes a key connection between the transitional period in the evolution of Jazz that Dolphy helped create and images black masculinity when she suggests that "the world of jazz in the late 1950s and early 1960s provides the stage for a consideration of an alternative black masculinity."[14] Kaufman's rejection of Scoby's imperative, as well as his dislike for Dolphy's sound, suggests that the protagonist also fails to fully perform the kind of black masculinity, and leadership, that Carby associates with jazzmen. Kaufman embodies the alternative to the race man that Carby describes: he becomes a leader by articulating his own interiority, and he, unlike Scoby, does not place value on the jazz milieu that Carby describes.

In *The Kind of Man I Am: Jazzmasculinity and the World of Charles Mingus Jr.*, Nichole Rustin-Paschal uses the term "jazzmasculinities" to talk about the relationships that exist between jazzmen. The kind of intimate homosocial relationships that Rustin-Paschal explores seems to mirror the connection between Beatty's protagonist and Scoby. Their friendship develops as Scoby focuses on expanding his jazz knowledge; he tries to share his expanding music education with the sometimes resistant Kaufman. Their connection is one solidified by jazz, and also basketball, another realm where a particular kind of masculinity is performed. Nevertheless, Kaufman's negative feelings, particularly those feelings connected to his rejection of Dolphy's music, prevent him from fully participating in the identity described by the term jazzmasculinties. Rustin-Paschal briefly turns to affect theories to explore her subject when she explains that jazz culture is a "site of belonging and exclusion marked by emotions sticking to certain bodies."[15] For Rustin-Paschal, people often attach negative feelings to Mingus, but she looks to her own experience to demonstrate that different people have different jazz listening experiences. In Beatty's *Shuffle*, Scoby experiences Dolphy's jazz in a different way than Kaufman; the music allows Scoby to connect with the violent crowd, while the protagonist's failure to successfully join the collective is mirrored by his own negative feelings toward Dolphy's innovative sound.

Beatty's references to Dolphy merits our closer attention because jazz historians have identified the musician's experimental sound as a significant marker of the shift from Cool Jazz to Hard Bop. In his article "New Monastery: Monk and the Jazz Avant-Garde," Robin Kelley included Dolphy in his list of avant-garde jazz musicians and later asserts that "gendered constructions of music, as with anything else, are always racialized."[16] He goes on to explain that "in the 1950s and 1960s, part of the attraction to black music was its disruptive capacity, its

resistance to order and the dominant culture, and its rebelliousness. Rebellion in this age was inextricably tied to masculinity."[17] For Kelley, the gendering of music is largely connected to historical context. Though he rejects the notion, Kelley explains that cool jazz was often considered 'effeminate.' Therefore, the move to another form of experimental jazz has often linked Dolphy to a more masculine focused analysis. One might be able to connect Dolphy with a certain type of black masculinity affiliated with the type of jazz music he was producing. In Kelley's article, he points out that Schoenberg's Theory of Harmony had decided that dissonance and non-resolution was "feminine" where as consonance was masculine. Constructions of jazz in the 1950s and 1960s flipped these associations.

In *Eric Dolphy: A Musical Biography and Discography,* Vladimir Simosko and Barry Tepperman argue that "there is no doubt that Eric Dolphy was an important figure in jazz history at a time of transition between two stylistic streams, as well as an enormously vital creative musician with one of the most exciting and rewarding musical personalities ever recorded."[18] For Simosko and Tepperman, Dolphy was an innovator who took jazz into new directions that involved "abandoning concern with harmony and rhythm as formal boundaries."[19] For the most part, it seems that Dolphy was interested in exploring new ways to improvise; he was harmonically adventurous, often exploring the upper notes on extended chords, which created dissonance—a feature of experimental music in the early 1960s. In a sense, Beatty's novel mirrors this new form of improvisation; his portrayal of collective violence in Los Angeles seems to function without a basic harmony to bring it all together. Each scene offers a new location, a new kind of rhythm or vibe, and his characters move on to the next note before any formal conclusion is offered. In reality, Simosko and Tepperman explain that the innovative jazzmen, like Dolphy, who were performing in the late 1950s were most concerned "with

superimposition of rhythms and chords to expand the potential of improvised expression into totally new dimensions."[20] For these musicians, according to Simosko and Tepperman, this new form of innovation was more than mere technological advance, but it was focused on innovative ways of expression. Indeed, Dolphy was known for a sound that captured the human voice, often wailing, screaming, or chatting. Beatty himself in an interview said that he was fond of Dolphy's record, Outward Bound, which was recorded in 1960 and may have been the soundtrack that he imagined.[21]

Before I shift my focus to an overview and close reading of Beatty's novel, I want to turn for a moment to the way the black media tried to protect and highlight Dolphy's masculinity as I mentioned above. Perhaps *Los Angeles Sentinel's* article published in memory of Dolphy on July 9, 1964 provides a helpful way to consider how Dolphy functions as a figure who embodied a particular type of protected black masculinity at the time of his death. What makes the article stand out is they way it both introduces Dolphy and, later, how it discusses Dolphy's private life. The article's first paragraph, written by Stanley G. Robertson, begins on an unusual note:

> Eric Dolphy, the great jazz star from Los Angeles who passed away suddenly the other day in Berlin, West Germany, was an uncommonly nice man. The 'nice' in reference to Eric has no pantywaist connotations because he was all man. It does refer to the genteel human qualities he possessed which made him one of those unforgettable people one meets in a lifetime.[22]

The term "pantywaist" stands out as negative, gendered, and out of place in an article meant to remember a departed individual. Why would a publication use such unacceptable language? How can we read this article as a function of the black hyper-masculinity that was attached to jazz and its musicians as scholars like Carby, and others, have noted? Does this article function

to protect the realm of jazzmasculinities? Even at the time the article was written, which was 1964, it seems strange that Robertson's article would begin with what seems like an attempt to overprotect Dolphy's masculinity. It also begs the questions: why would Dolphy's masculinity even be discussed on the eve of his death? Why does Robertson even evoke such gendered terms? Is it merely because the genre of jazz largely functioned as strictly gendered. The second paragraph continues with an additional reference to Dolphy's masculinity. It begins with the phrasing, "when a man dies, particularly when he departs this earth in the prime of life as Eric did, the only solace left to those who knew him are the happy memories of what the individual was in life." Again, the focus remains here in the article on Dolphy's manhood; he was a man, he was in the prime of his life. These are all gendered ways of defining the musicians.

Toward the end of the *Sentinel's* article, Robertson includes a lengthy quotation for Elvira "Vi" Redd, a female jazz alto saxophone player and vocalist from Los Angeles-whose extensive work since the 1950s perhaps merits its own exploration; indeed, Sherrie Tucker briefly mentions Redd in her article "West Coast Women: A Jazz Genealogy," which explores the role of Central Avenue in the development of jazz musicians in Los Angeles.[23] Redd played in the same elementary school orchestra as Dolphy; the two musicians also played together in the All City Junior High School Orchestra, the Dorsey High School orchestra. Finally, they studied together in the Los Angeles City College music department. In the *Sentinel* article, Redd recalls her long-term friendship Dolphy and is quoted as saying: "Eric never married, not because there was anything wrong with him, but because he was too much in love with his music to. It was nothing for him to rehearse for eight hours and then go play an all night job. He was just all work." What stands out here is the way Redd explains that nothing was "wrong" with Dolphy; such an explanation again seems out of place, as if somehow it was prompted by the interviewer.

No matter how it came about, it clearly again demonstrates that the image of Dolphy's masculinity was heavily protected by the African American press at the time of his death.

Beatty's novel received wide critical attention; many scholars have explored the role of leadership, masculinity, and satire in the novel. L.H. Stallings asserts that her own work assumes that Beatty's novel is aligned "with a satirical tradition found in Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountains* and its reconsiderations of masculinity, as well as *The White Boy Shuffle's* link to its literary predecessor, Fran Ross's *Oreo*, one of the first black satirical novels with a female protagonist that also revises gender."[24] Stallings goes on to argue that "Beatty's identity as a black male within this tradition nevertheless showcases a changing guard in both the black public sphere and in masculinities."[25] Although Kaufman makes many friends as he attempts to build an identity based on what Beatty positions as traditionally accepted black and male characteristics, the relationship that stands out the most is his friendship with Scoby, the basketball playing jazz aficionado who introduces Kaufman to Dolphy's music as the 1992 crowd violence begins in Los Angeles. It is Scoby who represents jazz in the novel, and, therefore, he should be read in relation to Beatty's references to Dolphy. Scoby, who is listening to jazz when he meets Kaufman for the first time, explains that jazz is "the only truly American art form other than the sit-com" (67). During that first meeting, Scoby explains that he plans to listen to all the jazz music recorded before 1975 in alphabetical order; in part, then it makes sense that he is listening to Dolphy at the start of the 1992 violence because he has only gotten as far as the letter D. At the same time, it is clear that Dolphy's placement in the novel is meant to evoke something more monumental—his music allows us to consider *Shuffle* as an act of improv itself with a protagonist, much like Ellison's unnamed *Invisible Man* protagonist, who struggles to establish his own identity within the scope of the African American experience.

Though jazz music takes on a significant role throughout *Shuffle,* early critics of the text often focused on the novel's portrayal of popular culture. When Beatty's book debuted, reviewers like Nick Charles highlighted the novel's focus on hip-hop culture and the protagonist's attempt to establish some sense of belonging by attaching himself to Scoby. Charles's review of *Shuffle* in *The Nation* was titled "The Suicide Hip-Hop," and he claims that "Beatty's book is a clout upside your head delivered by the deacon nearest the pew that you have been playing in."[26] He goes on to describe the book as "Laugh-out-loud funny and weep-in-silence sad—Scoby didn't have to go out like that, dude—the book takes great risks when skewering what all too many hold to be self-evident."[27] In a satirical scene, that Edwards suggests mocks traditional black leadership styles, Kaufman encourages an entire crowd at an anti-apartheid rally to join him in a suicide pact; as a result, Scoby commits suicide. The scene is portrayed as the protagonist's method to encourage social justice in his college community. In reality, Kaufman's speech only leads to the suicides of his father and Scoby; their deaths highlight the significance of these characters in the novel and disconnect the protagonist from the very problematic masculine black figures who seem to ground him within the African American community. In his examination of the character Scoby, Charles calls him "a latter-day jazzhead whose hoop-legend status is built on perfection—'he never missed. I mean never'—he's the 'can't miss' brother who ultimately succumbs to the pressure placed on one expected to fail but who never does."[28] In the *Los Angeles Times*, Brian Alcorn calls Scoby the book's real hero; he explains that "Beatty takes a revisionist aim at every noble head in the African American pantheon—from Crispus Attucks to Booker T. Washington."[29] He explains that "Afrocentricism, multiculturalism, political correctness and urban chic all take mortal hits, along with more conventional targets such as police abuse, hypocritical rap stars, prep sports and white

liberal angst."[30] Alcorn focuses on Beatty's fluid identity as a writer and poet; his review is prefaced with the long title: "Trying to Stay Ahead of the Hype Machine; Books: Paul Beatty's 'The White Boy Shuffle,' an offbeat coming-of age novel set in L.A. before, during and after the '92 riots, may be his ticket to hometown fame. Just don't attach any sort of label to it—of him." Alcorn identifies Beatty as a West Los Angeles native who "grew up in the shadows of the Santa Monica Freeway near La Cienega" and later established himself on the New York poetry scene before writing the novel.[31] In the article, Beatty rejects the hip-hop identity that media outlets like *Newsweek* crowned upon him, claiming: "The 'hip-hop' thing is so overdone. All it means is that you're black."[32] Beatty's wide, wild across-the-board critiques of popular culture make sense when juxtaposed with his own claim that he actually set out to write a "weird, absurd autobiography."[33]

Beatty's comments about his own experience are helpful to consider while exploring *Shuffle* because of the many biographical similarities between the author and the protagonist. According to Alcorn, these similarities include that they both grew up in Los Angeles, had two sisters and attended Boston University—Beatty earned a Master's degree in psychology there. In fact, his studies in psychology should signal the author's intricate ability to deeply examine feelings. Beatty's graduate work in psychology provides him with the educational training to understand an individual's reaction to a community in crisis. As a native of Los Angeles, it makes sense that Beatty chose the 1992 violence as a landmark to ground his first novel. Reminiscent of the collective outpouring of the 1965 Watts Riots, the 1992 violence lasted for over a week with various sparks of fire, violence, and looting. According to Darnell Hunt, "the Los Angeles 'riots' of 1992 clearly evoked memories of the urban uprisings of the 1960s, most

notably of the Watts 'riots' of 1965 and the explosion of unrest throughout the nation's cities during the long, hot summer of 1967."[34]

Other scholars have devoted their attention to the role of the Los Angeles violence in cultural production; they also delve into the underlying causes of the violence. King-Kok Cheung, who turns to Critical Race Studies to consider the role of legal institutions in igniting the violence explains that scholars "have observed from different angles, however, that the court is far from neutral in its insistence on formal justice. Kimberlé Crenshaw and Gary Peller argue that it was part the sidestepping of racial considerations that led to the 'not guilty' verdict in the King beating."[35] During a similar assault, a group of young black men were recorded as they beat Reginald Denny, a white truck driver; Beatty chooses to focus on this particular event in *Shuffle* when the protagonist beats a white bread truck driver with his own bread during the 1992 violence; I suggest later that this scene is meant as a continuation of the jazz aesthetic signaled by Dolphy's music at the beginning of the violence. The beating of the truck driver with the innocuous bread functions like a drum solo; each strike is a note in the scene's ongoing movement as it shifts from one image to the next. According to Cheung, the Denny beating paired with images of black and Latino looters and arsonists that filled the television screen suggested to some viewers "that the mass violence was prompted purely by retaliation and greed among racial minorities."[36] As Darnell Hunt explains, "the infamous beating of white trucker Reginald Denny by blacks and the targeting of local Korean businesses for looting and arson became emblematic images in mainstream news coverage of the events."[37]

In *Shuffle,* Beatty's Kaufman struggles to makes sense of the racial clashes and images of the 1992 uprising as he maneuvers through the streets with his friend Scoby. The two young men improvise their way through the days' violence; this improvisation mirrors the way

Dolphy's musical experimentations functioned at the height of his career. Dolphy was known to explore different ways sounds could be expressed; he deployed his experimental sound in his improvisations. He was inspired by traditional Indian music as well as the sounds he heard in the street. Indeed, it has been well documented that Dolphy often tried to mimic the sounds of birds with his flute. He has said, "At home in California I used to play and the birds always used to whistle with me. I'd stop what I was working on and play with the birds. Birds have notes in between our notes."[38] When discussing the birds in more detail, he explains: "You try to imitate something they do and, like, maybe it's between F and F sharp, and you'll have to go up or come down on the pitch. It's really something…again like Indian music, which has the same quality-different scales and quarter-tones."[39] Indeed, Dolphy, along with other jazz musicians were known to attend Ravi Shankar concerts; Dolphy even went backstage to discuss the music with Shankar. Dolphy has said, "I've talked with Ravi Shankar and I see how we can incorporate their ideas. Indian music is the music of the people, and jazz is the music of the American Negro. Don't forget that Bartok's music reflected folk themes too."[40] In "The Slow Death of Chocolate City," an *LAWeekly* article about the African American community in Los Angeles, Jervey Tervalon recalls how Eric Dolphy's music was influenced by his early experience in Los Angeles, "when I was introduced to the music of Eric Dolphy, I swear I could hear those wild parrots in his solos. And when I read someplace that Dolphy, who was raised not too far from us, was influenced by those wild parrots, it all made sense."[41] What is key here is that Dolphy's musical vocabulary was extensive; it reached past jazz traditions to European and Indian music. His interest in bird sounds marks a break even away from the human, to consider how expression, and therefore, emotion, might be passed on through bodies beyond the human, which echoes ideas present in Spinoza's meditations on affects, sound and bodies.

Dolphy's interest in experimentation is important when considering how Beatty uses Dolphy in the novel—Dolphy represents a shifting identity, an exploration of unmarked barriers. When the two main characters are in their car as the 1992 violence begins, Dolphy's music is playing. They stop at a stranger's home who offers to let them watch the news; here the protagonist feels a sense of rage that he cannot act on: "Sitting on that couch watching the announcer gloat, my pacifist Negro chrysalis peeled away, and a glistening anger began to test its wings. A rage that couldn't be dealt with in a poem or soothed with the glass of milk and glazed doughnuts offered by our host" (131). Kaufman's rage echoes the sort of rage that Grier and Cobbs wrote about in the sixties, but also mirrors Ngai's suggestion that negative feelings portrayed in popular culture are meant to suggest an artist's or novelist's own frustration with art's inability to manifest significant social change. By turning to Adorno, Ngai evokes art's inability to bring about change in society with the realization that at the same time "one could argue that bourgeois art's reflexive preoccupation with its *own* 'powerlessness and superfluity in the empirical world' is precisely what makes it capable of theorizing social powerlessness in a manner unrivaled by other forms of cultural praxis (*AT*, 104)."[42] In Beatty's novel, the protagonist frowns on his own inability to make change when he thinks, "the day of the L.A. riots I learned that it meant nothing to be a poet. One had to be a poet and a farmer, a poet and a roustabout, a poet and a soon-to-be revolutionary" (132). Nevertheless, Kaufman's attempt at revolutionary action get him nowhere, at every avenue his movements toward action are thwarted. Dolphy's music is evoked for a second time at the end of this scene at the stranger's home.

Beatty extends his reference to Dolphy as Kaufman and Scoby leave the old man's home. As the teenagers get in their car to leave the house, the man asked, "Is that Dolphy?" The older

African American man's ability to identify Dolphy marks him as somebody who is literate in jazz history, and, as a result, he is also aware of African American popular culture. Put another way, this man, who invites the two teenagers into his home to witness the beginnings of the unrest in Los Angeles, is a consumer of history and culture. It makes sense that he observes the violence from his home, on his couch, eating sweet, bland comfort food. In a way, this man functions much like the old retired doctor at the Golden Day in Ellison's *Invisible Man*; his presence functions as a warning the the teenagers of what they might become—ineffective witnesses or merely consumers of media. Kaufman does not recognize the warning, just as he cannot feel Dolphy's music. And the music itself also functions as a kind of warning. As Kaufman reflects further on the music, he offers a judgmental critique that drips with disgust: "we made our way toward the commotion, listening to Dolphy play his horn like he was wringing a washrag. I couldn't decide whether the music sounded like a death knell or the cavalry charge for a ragtag army" (132). Beatty allows the music to function in an improvisational manner as both a death knell and a cavalry charge for these characters; unbeknownst to him, Scoby is on his way to his own death and Kaufman is about to unsuccessfully embark on a sort of "cavalry charge" to perform as a social activist—he briefly participates in political activism at Boston College only to return home after Scoby's untimely death. Before these teenagers face their future, they try to participate in the 1992 violence. Nevertheless, their actions are minimal and without lasting impact.

Beatty begins his scenes of collective violence in Los Angeles with a jazz improvisation aesthetic. When Scoby plays Dolphy's music, he provides a soundtrack for the violence, which might according to affect theorist function as a means to transmit an improvisational inspired affect, but Kauffman remains unmoved. Dolphy was largely associated with the rise of

improvisation in what became known as free jazz. In an introduction to the anthology *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*, Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle consider the affective response of protesting crowds to music; they use as one of their key examples the way Grime music—which is a form of underground local music characterized by the emotional rage and anger—was successfully played to transmit affect across a crowd during a student protest that took place on December 9, 2010 in London. They explain this connection between music, affect and crowds more closely adding that "Grime, the auditory enemy to the establishment, is a symbolic musical scapegoat, blamed for the ills of society."[43] Ultimately, Thomas and Biddle suggest that "if music has the capacity to encourage the obedience of citizens, then it also has the capacity to induce civil disobedience—to cause bodies to march for, or against, the state."[44]

Although the anthology edited by Thompson and Biddle is useful to understanding how affect functions in Beatty's novel, it is important to note that their articulation of affect differs from Ngai. Where Ngai intentionally, interchangeably uses the terms affect and emotion, Thompson and Biddle claim that "while affects play a role in the formulation of feeling and emotions, they nevertheless remain distinct: affects are discrete and innate, while emotions can be thought of as more complex and personal."[45] What is particularly useful here is their definition, taken from Spinoza, of the term body, which is often used to discuss the flow of affects: "For Spinoza a body does not simply refer to the flesh and bones of the individual human body. Rather, a body is a dynamic ensemble of relations that is defined by its affective capacity: the power to be affected and the power to affect. So a body may be a human body, but it may also be an animal body or plant body, a crowd, a social body, a linguistic corpus, a collection of sounds or even a mind or idea."[46] Here, I want to suggest that if such a definition of the body is correct, then Beatty offers several potential bodies in his scene that depicts the Los Angeles

violence. Not only does the scene begin with the bodies of Scoby, Kaufman, and those they encounter on the street, but other "bodies" exist as well that include Dolphy, Dolphy's recording, and the car radio which Scoby uses to play Dolphy's music. All these bodies function in the text to provoke affect. According to Vladimir Simosko, "In 1992, a video documentary titled *Eric Dolphy: Last Date* was made by Hans Hylkema and Thierry Bruneau for Akka Volta, consisting of the typical assortment of interviews and stills, plus video clips from Dolphy's TV appearances on 19 November 1961 and with Mingus in April 1964, radically excerpted and often talked-over."[47]

Another scholar, Lynley Edmeades, turns to Massumi's definition of affect before arguing that "the affect or intensity of the event is an unmodulated, autonomic bodily reaction, attributable to the unconscious mind."[48] Edmeades also turns to Ngai's notion of stuplimity which is meant to be a combination of the words sublime and stupor—which she outlines in *Ugly Feelings*—in her analysis of how affect and sound, specifically the "musication of language," should be considered in the interpretation of the composer John Cage's experimental piece "Empty Words" when she argues that the Cage's work "encourages an affective engagement with the work."[49] In fact, Kaufman's own reaction to Dolphy's music mirrors Ngai's description of the stuplime. Edmeades goes on to suggest that "our regular systems for interpretation become, to some degree, redundant or irrelevant because we are urged to approach the work from a pre-semiotic perspective or forced into a space of 'stuplimity' where a potential semantic overload occurs."[50] Ultimately, Edmeades tells us that "paradox precedes affect: we are both invited to, and prevented from, attributing meaning to the piece, repeatedly encouraged to sidle up towards meaning from a sound-making space, but constantly reminded of the boundary that separates us from a fixed meaning."[51]

In a continuation of Beatty's reimagining of the 1992 violence in Los Angeles, Kaufman and Scoby reenact something akin to the Reginald Denny beating. They attack a white-bread truck driver with his own shipment of bread; here Kaufman and Scoby demonstrate how they are capable of what Edmeades describes as acting and being acted upon. Nevertheless, their actions are largely innocuous; they do not leave any lasting impression on the white male truck driver. The following is a chaotic scene of unsuccessful improvisation—the teenagers use bread when no other weapon seems apparent to them, not even their own bodies:

> I'd never seen anyone afraid of me. I wondered what my face looked like. Were my nostrils flaring, my eyes pulsing red? I was about to shout 'Ooga-booga' and give the guy a heart attack when Scoby clambered from the rear of the truck, chewing on a cupcake and holding loaves of bread. Our captive dropped to his knees, begging for mercy. He took out his wallet and showed us pictures of his kids, as if they were for sale. I took a doughy satchel and swung it at his face, striking him solidly in the cheek. I know it didn't hurt, but the man whimpered in shame and resigned himself to the beating. Nicholas and I pummeled him silly with pillows of white bread until it snowed breadcrumbs (132).

Although the two teenagers reenact the Denny beating here in this scene of absurd surrealism by striking the truck driver with his own bread, they do not cause any significant harm. The breadcrumbs floating through the air make the interaction seems more like a snowball fight than a violent street attack in the middle of an uprising. The bread turns what could be a threatening interaction into one that resembles a child's game; it is almost playful. Rather than fists, they use "a doughy satchel" and the only damage they do is cause their victim to experience a sense of shame. Kaufman and Scoby are essentially ineffective participants in the mass violence; their

own improvisational approach to the collective violence, prompted by their middle-class privilege, places them on the outside of the crowd where they function more as observes than participants. Dolphy's presence at the beginning of this scene sets the tone for Kaufman's own misadventures; his music serves as a sound track for the protagonist's own inability to function as part of a collective.

Beatty concludes his scenes of the first day of violence with a nod to the multiculturalism of the looters and the Los Angeles community more broadly. He returns to his Hillside neighborhood where he encounters local business owners—the Montoyas and Ms. Kim—who support the violence and consider the looting a form of political uprising. Kaufman first visits Manny Montoya and his wife Sally; the couple runs a combined barbershop and chiropractic office. Here Beatty writes: "Handing out free tamales and steaming bowls of ponchi soup, Sally proudly told stories about how Hillsiders had historically acquitted themselves well in Los Angeles' riots…Manny smiles at his wife's recounting and predicted that La Insurrección de '92 would be the biggest of them all" (133). Sally's retelling of past violence in Los Angeles suggests an ongoing string of inequality that has remained unresolved; these problems continue to haunt generation after generation and function as a form of collective memory. The Montoyas remind the reader of these ongoing inequalities. Kaufman's next stop—an attempt to quench his thirst after eating at the Montoya's makeshift restaurant—brings him to Ms. Kim's store. As a part-Korean business owner, the biracial Ms. Kim struggles with the disconnect between blacks and Koreans in the aftermath of the death of Latasha Harlins, the black teenager who was shot by a Korean shopkeeper. In Beatty's novel, Ms. Kim threatens to, and finally does, burn down her own store because she empathizes with the community; the looters look on as Ms. Kim uses Molotov cocktails to destroy her own business. The protagonist explains: "The crowd refused.

Ms. Kim was too well liked. Maybe if she had been one hundred percent Korean they'd have busted a few windows just for appearance's sake" (133). Again, the community of characters that Beatty has created in the wake of the violence is meant to suggest the extensive hybridity and multiculturalism that functions in Los Angeles. Just as the protagonist finds himself grappling with a complicated identity that does not easily fit within a specific kind of regulated black masculinity, the community itself is also varied and difficult to easily define.

Dolphy's music does not emerge again when Kaufman ventures into the streets for a second day of looting, but Beatty continues to evoke a jazz aesthetic throughout his depiction of the violence. Take for example when Kaufman and Scoby try to loot a car accessory store called "What Did You Say?" because it specialized in loud car stereos; the car stereos should be a reminder of Dolphy's music that was playing on Scoby's stereo only a day earlier. The two teenagers must squeeze through a small hole in a wall to get into the store; once inside, they discover that the looters are lined up to get one item each. If they want a second item, they must line up again. Here we find a jazz beat; it is the rhythm of the riot. Each person squeezing through the hole in the wall develops a kind of cadence that directs the characters' movements; Beatty writes: "the looters were very courteous and the plundering was orderly" (135). The orderly nature of the looting surprises Kaufman, and he is disappointed when all he gets at the end of the day is a box of pine-tree-shaped car air fresheners. I want to suggests here that this is an example of how the protagonist cannot successfully participate in the looting; at every corner, Kaufman's attempts to join the uprising are thwarted in some way. He is an inept looter, and this may be partly due to the fact that he cannot feel Dolphy's music. Beatty's protagonist cannot feel Dolphy's music, just as he cannot successfully join in the violence. He does not buy into the collective identity associated with the violence, and he cannot perform the kind of identity

politics that Dolphy's music has been associated with. Dolphy's music represents a masculine sound; yet, Dolphy's own personal identity perhaps did not solely mirror the sounds that he projected. Put another way, Dolphy's identity was more complicated than simply the performance of a certain kind of black masculinity. He was concerned with developing new sounds, and, therefore, new ways of expressing himself. Although his music has been largely associated with a hyper-masculine sounds of hard bop jazz and, as we have seen, *The Sentinel*—the Los Angeles African American newspaper that functioned as a voice of the community where Dolphy grew up—was largely concerned with protecting the image of his masculinity, Dolphy himself had decided to move to Europe where he would be able to live away from the Jim Crow tainted United States. When Dolphy died in Berlin, he had already made up his mind to leave.

In Beatty's final scenes meant to evoke the 1992 violence, Kaufman finds himself trying to help his friends steal a heavy safe from a department store only to be interrupted by his father, a police officer. In this climatic scene that functions as a finale of the protagonist's attempts to loot during the violence, it is key that the father finally brings Kaufman's series of failed attempts to join the collective violence to a dramatic halt. The father literally knocks the protagonist unconscious; it is a blow that renders the character paralyzed and sends him into a coma that ends his participation in the 1992 violence. The language from this scene merits an extensive quotation:

> I could taste the salty ash on the pavement. Ash that had drifted from fires set in anger around the city. I remembered learning in third grade that snakes 'see' and "hear" with their sensitive tongues. I imagined my tongue almost bitten through, bearing the polyrhythms of my father's nightstick on my body. Through my

> tongue I saw my father transform into a master Senegalese drummer beating a surrender code on a hollow log on the banks of the muddy Gambia River. (138)

Here, the father is an authority figure in multiple ways; he is a father and also an officer. Beatty evokes phallic images in this scene in many different ways—from the snakes, to the nightstick, the drumstick, and, finally, the river. Again, music, in the form of the Senegalese drummer, is present here and it is meant to function on a dual level. First, the drummer solidifies and concludes the jazz aesthetic present in the looting scenes. Additionally, the drummer's position on the banks of an African river is also meant to evoke Langston Hughes's poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." In the famous, often quoted poem, Hughes conjures up the African Diaspora when he writes: "I've known rivers:/I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human/blood in human veins/My soul has grown deep like the rivers."[52] In a way, Beatty's protagonist not only critiques his own father here, but he also means to be critical of his literary fathers as well. Indeed, Kaufman directly mentions Hughes in an earlier scene when he and Scoby arrive at a technology store that has already been cleared out by looters. As the protagonist considers the empty store, he asks: "What happens to a dream deferred?" and Scoby's answer is "Fuck Langston Hughes. I bet when they rioted in Harlem, Langston Hughes got his." And Kaufman goes on to satirize Hughes's poem with the following lines: "Does it dry up like a wino in rehab? Or gesture like a whore, reeling from the pimp's left jab?" (134). It seems relevant for Beatty to recall Hughes "Harlem" poem here; it makes a reference to the reoccurring nature of collective violence in black communities with its final lines answering the question "What happens to a dream deferred?" with another question: "Does it explode?"

In Beatty's novel, 1992 Los Angeles does explode, and the explosion leads to a confrontation with the protagonist's father that renders him unconscious. As the protagonist falls

to the ground, he tastes the salty ashes from "the fires set in anger" and it is this taste that triggers his critiques of black masculinity as he drifts into a coma. The protagonist cannot function here; he cannot perform the kind of masculinity that his father expects just as he cannot feel the jazz music that Scoby asks him to feel. Kaufman's father maintains his authority in this intense situation; he also performs a kind of black masculinity that, like Dolphy's music, the protagonists cannot feel. Kaufman fails to get in touch with the music that should regulate his movements through scenes of looting and violence, and he ultimately fails to feel anything, except the "polyrhythms of his father's nightstick," when he goes into a coma (138). The rhythm also reminds readers of the father's past abuses. The protagonist's shift into a coma ends the scene, and, in doing so, it also ends Kaufman's attempts to perform the kind of violent masculinity that both the looters and his father express. Instead, the protagonist is left with an inoperative body; the corporeal injuries perpetuated by the father figure leave him unconscious and unable to feel anything, including Dolphy's music.

Beatty's novel has received wide critical attention, with a large interest in the novel's focus on black masculinity, community and cultural production. Sara Pfaff claims that the critical contribution of *The White Boy Shuffle* "lies not in revealing cultural production to be contingent upon political exigency, or the reverse, as much as it does in recognizing the value of contingency itself."[53] In a turn toward the character Scoby and music, she writes that he "attempts to protect certain cherished cultural artifacts, like the jazz music he adores, from commodification. Contemplating the black Atlantic alongside Gunnar on the night he takes his own life, Scoby attributes infiniteness to music, a quality he claims the written word lacks."[54] In "Punked for Life," Stalling argues that "Beatty's creation of Scoby as a jazzman is key to how we must read the author's fictional rejection of authentic black masculinity, for Scoby is not a

jazzman. He does not play, but he loves to listen to the music."[55] Stalling asserts that Scoby represents black masculinity: "he is poor and urban, adopts the cool pose, has a reputation as a phenomenal basketball player, and listens to jazz."[56] Stalling further suggests that "Scoby's dream to be able to see himself, his own individual glory even in the presence of a group however much like him, means something to him. It means that a person can still have some part of himself that does not have to be obstructed, deformed, or crowded by a group's societal or nationalistic aims."[57] For Stalling "Scoby's interest in jazz is more about destroying essential and authentic notions of race and gender rather than perpetuating them. Scoby's interest in jazz is Ellisonian: 'For true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group' (Ellison 234).[58]

In relation to commodification in *Shuffle*, Rolland Murray argues that "the core contradiction of Beatty's novel, then, does not reside in a vexed nostalgia for coherent community, but in the fact that the text draws euphorically on the abstractions of commodification."[59] He explains that Gunnar and Scoby are "icons of black communal belonging and authenticity."[60] When discussing Gunnar's assertion that he is ready to die, Pfaff writes that "this declaration echoes Baudrillard's theory on suicide as a means of redress within the hyperreal, which capitalizes on a vestigial promise of symmetrical exchange that haunts the semiotic order's asymmetrical, simulative economy."[61] Murray, like Pfaff, also aligns Beatty's fascination with mortality to Baudrillard, explaining that "In a world in which all blackness has been thoroughly commodified Gunnar recommends a poetics and politics that seeks to reassert black national agency by rewriting death as a possibility…black suicide offers an intriguing twist on Baudrillard's vision of agency within capital."[62] For my purposes, I find this discussion helpful only because Scoby, who is connected with Dolphy and jazz, ultimately commits suicide.

Indeed, such an act seems out of character for the jazzman that Scoby embodies, yet Beatty kills off Scoby and Kaufman's father who both embody different forms of black masculinity in the novel. In killing of these characters, Beatty seems to be gesturing away from a certain kind of black masculinity, particularly a masculinity associated with jazz.

Fred Moten lingers a bit on Dolphy in the first chapter of his book *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. He devotes an entire section to Dolphy, which he titles "Praying with Dolphy." It is a title that stands out because one might read it at first glance as "playing" with Dolphy. The title of the section alone begs the question: Why would one pray with Dolphy rather than play? Dolphy biographers have documented that Dolphy grew up in a religious household; he played music at his church. Moten provides another explanation for his reference to prayer in his brief introduction to the section: "The title comes from a Mingus composition and requires some meditation on the brilliant proliferation of Eric Dolphy's sacred, unknown tongues."[63] Moten's discussion of Dolphy is loosely focused on improvisation, listening, and the early loss of Dolphy. In a review of Moten's book, Candice Jenkins states that "jazz is not merely the subject matter of much of Moten's work, it seems to be the work's stylistic inspiration. Moten's text is less an argument than an extended meditation, and he does not so much present his ideas as perform them."[64] Although much of Moten's section on Dolphy is experimental, when he does most specifically, though still somewhat cryptically, write about Dolphy he says: "Dolphy's syntax, yes, but also that even in his outness he insisted upon some reference to the chord, that in his mind there was an insistence of the chord, that it had been there and remained in its irruption…After its performance is over is when music is heard." He later quotes Dolphy's remarks at the conclusion of a recording of "Miss Ann" from 1964, but transforms Dolphy's words into poetry: "when you hear music/after it's over/it's gone/ in the

air/you can never/capture it again."[65] Finally, Moten writes: "When Dolphy died he was preparing himself to play with Cecil Taylor, that necessary submergence. You wonder how to play without a bridge, how to navigate what is no longer song but carries song."[66]

In 2000, Moten published a poem titled *Eric Dolphy* in *Callaloo* which begins with the line "the ironworks on alameda."[67] Although Moten does not refer to Dolphy directly by name except in the poem's title, the reference to the jazz musician suggests that his music mimics the sounds of the ironworks. Moten also seems to suggest that Dolphy's music mimics the sounds of urban violence when he writes: "two screams announced the fire on the other/side of downtown. this is a long-ass road./one time I made a dancer's hand fly off." Indeed, the phrase "fire on the other side" brings to mind James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, while it also conjures up a reference to the burning of a city during an uprising. Finally, Moten's dancer image suggests the violent affective response of the corporeal to music—he was also supposedly engaged to a dancer at one point. In Moten's poem, Dolphy's music is so unpredictable, extreme and intense that the body cannot keep up—it breaks, coming to pieces like the discordant sounds. Moten's poem demonstrates the kind of affective response that Scoby urges Kaufman to experience when he plays Dolphy's music during the initial scenes of crowd violence. Kaufman cannot feel the music, and he cannot perform the kind of jazzmasculinities that Scoby would like him to experience. In his failure, Kaufman expresses Beatty's own critique of jazzmasculinities, and a particular type of black masculinity that Edwards and Carby associate with tradition great man authoritative leadership in the African American community. For Beatty, such images of masculinities have failed to fulfill their promise of uplift.

In this chapter, I have argued that Beatty's *Shuffle* evokes Dolphy's music at a time of collective social uprising in order to expose his protagonist to a kind of identity inspired by the

ubiquitous listening that happens everyday, it is this listening that, as Kassabian explains, creates a distributed subjectivity. Further, I suggest that Rustin-Paschal's sense of jazzmasculinities is helpful to articulate the kind of identity that Dolphy's music, as it plays on Scoby's car radio during the 1992 crisis in Los Angeles, is meant to perpetuate. It is an identity that, when paired with Edwards and Carby's notions of a restricted black leadership style, demonstrates how Beatty's novel rejects certain traditional notions of black masculinity. His protagonist fails to feel Dolphy's music as it plays in Scoby's car, this failure is not only a subtle rejection of Scoby and his identity as a jazzman, but also a larger rejection of collective identity represented by the crowd, and the collective violence depicted in the novel. Kaufman's negative reaction, his minor feelings of irritation and rejection, to Dolphy's sound foreshadows his own inability to function, or to act within the collective as the violence begins. With each attempt to participate in the looting or violence, the protagonist comes up empty handed, he fails to make an impression, and, ultimately, he finds himself in a state of restricted agency when his father knocks him unconscious and sends him into a coma. Beatty's depiction of the 1992 violence renders his protagonist temporarily paralyzed, a prisoner within the corporeal. He is unable to feel anything beyond the taste of ashes left behind in the aftermath of the fires. These ashes taste of the rage that others, not the protagonist, have acted on. Instead, Kaufman is left to linger on his negative feelings—he exists within a body without agency, unable to move.

[1] Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. *63*

[2] Rustin-Paschal, Nichole. *The Kind of Man I am: Jazzmasculinity and the World of Charles Mingus Jr.* Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2017. 1.

[3] Ibid., xxvi.

[4] Rustin-Paschal, 5.

[5]Ibid. 130.

[6] Kassabian, Anahid. *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity.* Berkeley: UC Press, 2013. 74 and xiii.

[7] Ibid., xi.

[8] Ibid., xi.

[9] Ibid., xxvi.

[10] Ibid., xxix.

[11] See Carby's *Race Men* and Edward's *Charisma*.

[12] Edwards, Erica. *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 83.

[13] Ibid, 157.

[14] Carby, Hazel. *Race Men*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998. 3.

[15] Rustin-Paschal, 5.

[16] Kelley, Robin D. G. "New Monastery: Monk and the Jazz Avant-Garde." *Black Music Research Journal*. 19:2 (1999) 135-168. 140. Kelley provides a detailed, insightful discussion of Dolphy here; see pp.160-163.

[17] Ibid., 141.

[18] Simosko, Vladimir and Berry Tepperman. *Eric Dolphy: A Musical Biography and Discography.* New York: Da Capo, 1971. 4.

[19] Ibid., 7.

[20] Ibid., 7.

[21] See Powell's interview. The interview says: "Eric Dolphy shows up in more than one of your books, so I have to ask: What's the first album to listen to if you don't have any? And Beatty says: "Maybe *Outward Bound*. That's one of my favorites. It's fairly accessible." He later explains further: *Outward Bound* is definitely one of my favorites. The ones in Europe are okay. And maybe *Out There* and *Here and There*, also. Those are all good."
http://www.powells.com/post/interviews/reading-along-to-the-paul-beatty-shuffle

[22] Robertson, Stanley. "The Modern Touch." Los Angeles Sentinel; July 9, 1964. B6.

[23] Ibid. Another scholar, Yoko Suzuki, also published an article on Redd's contributions to jazz; See Suzuki, Yoko. "Invisible Woman: Vi Redd's Contributions as Jazz Saxophonist." *American Music Review*. XLII:2 (Spring 2013).

[24] Stallings, L.H. "Punked for Life: Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* and Radical Black Masculinities." *African American Review*, 43:1 (Spring 2009) pp. 99-116. (100)

[25] Ibid., 100.

[26] Charles, Nick. *The Nation.* Vol. 263: Issue 2 July 8, 1996 pp. 30-32, 31-32.

[27] Ibid., 32.

[28] Ibid., 31.

[29] Alcorn, Brian. *Los Angeles Times* (pre-1997 Fulltest); Los Angeles. 10 July 1996: 1.

[30] Ibid., 1.

[31] Ibid., 1.

[32] Ibid., 1.

[33] Ibid., 1.

[34] Hunt, Darnell. "American Toxicity: Twenty Years After the 1992 Los Angeles 'Riots.'" *Amerasia Journal* 38:1 (2012): ix-xviii. x.

[35] Cheung, King-Kok. "(Mis)interpretations and (In)justice: The 1992 Los Angeles 'Riots' and 'Black-Korean Conflict." *MELUS* 30:3 (Fall, 2005), pp. 3-40. 19.

[36] Ibid., 13.

[37] Hunt, x.

[38] Horricks, Raymond. *The Importance of Being Eric Dolphy*. Great Britain: Costello Publishing. 21.

[39] Ibid., 21.

[40] Ibid., 20-21.

[41] Tervalon, Jervey. "The Slow Death of a Chocolate City." *LA Weekly*. Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2007 4 p.m. http://www.laweekly.com/news/the-slow-death-of-a-chocolate-city-2151175

[42] Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005. 2.

[43] Thompson, Marie and Ian Biddle, Eds. *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013. 4.

[44] Ibid., 12.

[45] Ibid., 8.

[46] Ibid., 9.

[47] Tepperman, Barry. *Eric Dolphy: A Musical Biography and Discography*. New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1996. 11.

[48] Edmeades, Lynley. "Affect and the Musication of Language in John Cage's 'Empty Words.'" *Comparative Literature* 68:2 (2016) 218-234. 219.

[49] Ibid., 220.

[50] Ibid., 220.

[51] Ibid., 226.

[52] Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." See: www.poetryfoundation.org

[53] Pfaff, Sara. "'The slack string is just a slack string': Neoformalist Networks in *The White Boy Shuffle*." *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 26:106-127, 2015. 106.

[54] Ibid., 120.

[55] Stallings, 113.

[56] Ibid., 113.

[57] Ibid., 114.

[58] Ibid., 114.

[59] Murray, Rolland. "Black Crisis Shuffle: Fiction, Race, and Simulation." *African American Review,* 42:2 (Summer, 2008), pp 215-233. 230.

[60] Ibid., 224.

[61] Pfaff, 122.

[62] Ibid., 228. Also see Baudrillard *Symbolic* 39.

[63] Moten, 63.

[64] Jenkins, Candice. "Reviews: 'In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition' by Fred Moten.'" *African American Review* 38:2 (2004), 344-345. 344.

[65] Ibid., 81.

[66] Ibid., 82.

[67] Moten, Fred. "Eric Dolphy." *Callaloo*. 23:4 (Autumn, 2000), 1180.

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