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Los Angeles

Liminal Erasures:

Midwest Black Sexual Personhood in Visual Culture

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies

by

Alfretter Latasha Fair

2016

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Liminal Erasures:

Midwest Black Sexual Personhood in Visual Culture

by

Alfretter Latasha Fair

Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor Kyungwon Hong, Chair

Historian Andrew Cayton has referred to the American Midwest as the "anti-region" due to its lack of a uniform regional narrative. My study, "Liminal Erasures: Midwest Black Sexual Personhood in Visual Culture," builds on Cayton's position to argue that the Midwest understood as a set of political and economic relations, rather than as an established geography best demonstrates the liminality of Blackness. Liminality refers to the position and movement of black subjects within and outside of personhood vis-à-vis discourses of freedom and capital, and I delineate the ways in which the Midwest as a political formation plays a central role in this process. While I do not attempt to offer a totalizing understanding of "The Midwest," my project instead engages the question: In what ways has black gendered and sexual personhood been defined and actively shaped by prevailing cultural, legal, and geographical understandings of the American Midwest? While the Midwest has been a crucial site for the constitution of black personhood, it has been understudied in black feminist and queer studies and gender and sexuality studies more broadly. "Liminal Erasures" aims to fill this gap by highlighting the ways

in which the Midwest's particular history of claiming a liberal anti-racism, especially in comparison with the South comes into productive tension with its histories of anti-black policing and sexual regulation.

Guided by an interdisciplinary approach, I examine a diverse archive of cultural and historical examples in my consideration of black liminality in the Midwest. For example, I discuss legal decisions that articulate and envision foundational understandings of the region like the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, alongside key visual cultural examples such as the Bertillon System of Criminal Identification arrest records of black women who worked as sex workers in downtown Minneapolis in the late nineteenth century. "Liminal Erasures" attends to the ways in which black escape, resistance, and disappearance from institutions and visual archives of policing and regulation illuminate the Midwest as an effective site to capture and move forward the living tensions and contradictions that exist between American liberal democracy and capitalism.

The dissertation of Alfretter Latasha Fair is approved.

Juliet A. Williams

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Thu-huong Nguyen-vo

Kara Keeling

Kyungwon Hong, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2016

DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Othelia D. Spivy. Thank you for your jokes, friendship, and for being an Aquarian kindred spirit. Your unconditional love and support continues to serve as my internal compass.

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Many sources of academic and financial support at the University of California, Los Angeles have contributed to this project. I was awarded funding through the Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Program during 2009 and 2010 to begin the early stages of research. I was also awarded a Eugene V. Cota-Robles Fellowship for the 2011-2012 academic year through the Graduate Division. My development as a scholar has also been supported by UCLA's Center for the Study of Women's 2013 Kanner Next Generation Award.

The Gender Studies Department has been an incredible source of care, collegiality, and friendship. In particular, the Gender Studies staff have provided critical support from the very beginning—Jenna Miller-Von Ah, Richard Medrano, Samantha Hogan, and Van Do-Nguyen, thanks for everything. My project has been shaped at different stages by the invaluable perspectives of the faculty on my committee: Grace Kyungwon Hong, Juliet Williams, Thu-huong Nguyen-vo, Kara Keeling, and Aisha Finch through their brilliant scholarship, advising, and teaching. I especially want to acknowledge my advisor Grace Kyungwon Hong for her passionate approach to advising and unwavering belief in this project from its initial stages. Dr. Hong's attentive feedback has remained constant over the course of our years of working together, and she has managed to somehow simultaneously meet me where I am at and be at least two steps ahead which made the completion of the project more tangible.

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instruction from Juliet Williams. In LGBT Studies, Dr. James Schultz also served as critical to my growth as a teacher.

Additionally, I have benefitted tremendously from support outside UCLA. Most significantly, the Mellon Mays Graduate Initiatives Program through the Social Science Research Council has been a generous support. As a Mellon Fellow, I was awarded Mellon Mays Graduate Enhancement grants during 2009 and 2010, I participated in summer conferences in addition to the dissertation proposal writing retreat and the dissertation completion writing retreat. The friends and academic colleagues and connections I have made through the Mellon Mays program have been instrumental. Most recently, I was awarded the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation Mellon Mays Dissertation Grant (2015-2016) to complete this project, and I have had the pleasure of being a resident graduate fellow affiliated with the African American and African Studies Department at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities this year. I am thankful for the opportunity to have been welcomed into a department that much like Gender Studies at UCLA possesses a collaborative and attentive spirit. Thanks principally to Keith Mayes, Yuichiro Onishi, Rose Brewer, Christine Powell, Peter Rachleff, Njeri Githire, John Wright, Angaluki Muaka, Vanessa Abanu, and Agnes Malika for mentoring and supporting me in the completion of the dissertation. Additionally, I want to thank Rahsaan Mahadeo and Natasha Moore for extending warmth and friendship during my time at the U of M.

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Introduction

Black Liminality and the American Midwest

The Midwest is often defined as a region that comprises the twelve states in the north central part of the United States.[1] Popular understandings of the region's history advance ". . . a narrative of the accumulation of ordinary events into large-scale change rather than a story of dramatic turning points."[2] In "Liminal Erasures: Midwest Black Sexual Personhood in Visual Culture" I ask: In what ways has black gendered and sexual personhood been defined and actively shaped by cultural, legal, and geographical understandings of the American Midwest? While my objective is not to produce a totalizing definition of the region, I instead argue that the Midwest constitutes the center of a political and ontological formation that illustrates the liminality of Blackness. Although the Midwest has been a crucial space for the construction of black personhood, it has been understudied in black gender and sexuality studies. "Liminal Erasures" aims to fill this gap by highlighting the ways in which the Midwest's particular history of claiming a liberal anti-racism, especially in comparison with the South, comes into productive tension with its histories of anti-black policing and the regulation of racialized gendered and sexual personhood and labor.

My experience as a black gender nonconforming person who grew up in Wisconsin in a working class family and in communities throughout the state that were for the most part multi-racial: black, Asian American, Native American, and white, and marked by gender and sexual nonconformity has shaped my interest and focus on marginal narratives and experiences. Even as

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[1] I refer to the map of the twelve states: North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio,cited in *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia* Eds. Andrew R. L. Cayton, Richard Sisson, and Chris Zacher (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007): 3.

[2] From Andrew Cayton's "General Overview" in *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007): ix.

my primary school education largely centered normative whiteness as the most prevailing lens through which to understand state and regional history, I have continued to engage with the Midwest as a place where difference remains salient. This project is concerned with black subjects who escape visibility, who manage to disappear, or remain invisible even in plain sight in order to account for the ways in which resistance to the precarity that characterizes black liminality in the Midwest might occur in nuanced and unexpected ways. The history of black gendered and sexual personhood in the Midwest makes Blackness apparent as a formation based on multiplicity and simultaneity as it troubles any attempt to represent it as anything but liminal.

The context for my inquiry into black personhood and self-determination through visual representation is rooted in the Midwest regional history indexed by the life experiences of Dr. James Herbert Cameron, Jr.'s.[3] Born on February 25, 1914 in my hometown La Crosse, Wisconsin, Dr. Cameron survived a lynching in Marion, Indiana in 1930 due to which he is popularly referred to as "the only known survivor of a lynching." Dr. Cameron's survival is indexed in the visual record by his absence from a highly circulated lynching postcard photograph that pictures two young black men from his community in Indiana.[4] Dr. Cameron's absence from the postcard photograph demonstrates the history of black challenges to practices of capture more extensively and the particularity of the Midwest as a regional construction that has been shaped by visual capture as a strategy that seeks to curtail efforts to articulate personhood through acts of black self-determination.

[3] Here I refer to Cameron's biography on America's Black Holocaust Museum's website. Cameron's father was a barber and his mother took in washing to support their children, James and his two sisters. In 1930 James was sixteen years old when he and two other black teenagers were brutally lynched. Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith died, but, "with the rope already around his neck, James was saved. James was tried and convicted as an accessory to the murder that incited the lynching." He spent five years in prison where he began writing a memoir.

[4] Here I refer to *A Time of Terror: A survivor's Story* by James Cameron—this is a memoir that documents his life to the age of twenty-one. He originally published it in 1982, and it was republished in 1994. See James Cameron's *A Time of Terror: A survivor's Story* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1994).

Cameron's experience of survival was eclipsed by a five-year prison sentence that strongly shaped his years as a teacher, scholar, activist, and founder of America's Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Dr. Cameron was formally recognized in 2005 on the occasion of the Senate's apology for failing to pass federal anti-lynching legislation. Cameron's national recognition is couched within the terms of apology thereby further illuminating the vulnerability and unprotectability produced by and through liminality. My project seeks to account for black subjects in the Midwest who elude the violence of the visual, or whose emergence in the legal or historical record is distorted in life and in death.[5]

Historian Andrew Cayton has referred to the Midwest as the "anti-region" due to its lack of a unified regional definition.[6] Cayton's anti-region thesis connects to geographer James Shortridge's understanding of the Midwest as pastoral, which at times eclipses its industrial history; a place of localized "small" histories that lacks a unified and shared "big" history; a place of vast absence where often neighboring regional identities take hold; and lastly, a place of "creation and discovery" a narrative that violently functions to delegitimize indigenous land claims. I am interested in how these regional narratives interact with and are extended when black gendered and sexual personhood is centered to reveal the inner-workings of economic and political power in the American Midwest.[7]

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[5] The circumstances that lead Dr. Cameron's family to move throughout the Midwest (i.e. gendered and racialized violence and precariousness—familial, social, and economic) emerge out of the social and cultural conditions of anti-black racism as a national and localized formation. A well-known photograph sold as a postcard of the lynching of Cameron's friends is catalogued in *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000) by James Allen, Hilton Als, John Lewis, and Leon Litwack. I do an analysis of the violence of presence and absence that this photo signifies as it attests to Cameron's survival.

[6] Here I refer to Cayton's essay "The Anti-region: Place and Identity in the History of the American Midwest" in *The American Midwest, Essays on Regional History* Eds. Andrew Cayton & Susan Gray (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

[7] From Shortridge's *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989); Here I also draw on Kent Ryden's "Writing the Midwest: History, Literature, and Regional Identity." *Geographical Review* 89:4 (October 1999): 511-32, "Queering the Middle: Race, Region, and a Queer Midwest" special issue of *GLQ: Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* Vol 20 No.1-2 (2014), and the publication of the oral

"Liminal Erasures" attends to the ways in which the lack of regional definition also renders the Midwest a docile site through which whiteness can be further protected through the rendering of black personhood unprotectable. For example, in the first chapter I discuss the ways in which the figure of Joshua Glover, who escaped slavery in Missouri and relocated to Wisconsin, is used rhetorically by the State of Wisconsin to protect the personhood of two white abolitionists from prosecution under the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, while Glover remains outside of the category of the protectable. I analyze the fugitive notice for Glover's recapture by a Missouri slave owner as one demonstration of the liminality of Blackness in the Midwest. I assert that both the text and the print stereotype figure of a fugitive slave on the run imaged on the fugitive notice together articulate the legal and discursive structure through which Black personhood is rendered precarious in the Midwest.[8]

"Liminal Erasures" asserts that the Midwest describes the inner workings of a set of regional political and economic relations that rather than confirm a uniform geography, instead demonstrate the liminality of blackness. My approach to the Midwest as a set of political and economic relations has been strongly shaped by Ruth Wilson Gilmore's conceptualization of rapid prison expansion in California as produced by crises in surplus capital, labor, land, and state capacity.[9] Gilmore describes how the state of California reorganized itself and part of this reorganization from the 1980's to the present has occurred through state investment in carceral infrastructure thus illustrating prison expansion as the result of a set of economic and political

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history study *Queer Twin Cities* by Twin Cities GLBT Oral History Project Eds. Kevin P. Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Larry Knopp (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

[8] Refer to Figure 1.2 in chapter one.

[9] See Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

relations rather than due to a singular cause such as crime.[10] Thus, I am interested in how the Midwest might also be thought about as a set of relations, rather than a uniform regional construction. My attention to the Midwest's regional construction also draws on Katherine McKittrick's delineation of black women's geographies as formations that point out how space is socially produced in order to unsettle the static idea of geography and space more broadly as a reality that "just is."[11] Although my examples are drawn from the upper Midwest specifically Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Illinois, my focus on broader regional narratives that come to circumscribe and define the materials I discuss allow me to consider the Midwest in its broader complexity.

I address Blackness in the Midwest and more extensively vis-à-vis Stuart Hall's understanding of Blackness and black diaspora as the "result of a long and discontinuous series of transformations." I demonstrate how discontinuity and transformation also describe the condition of Blackness in the Midwest. Black liminality is a term that I advance in my project to describe the legal and ontological condition of instability and precarity of Blackness in the Midwest. I trace this condition to the movement of Blackness between personhood and property status. In particular, I argue that this legal precarity of Blackness undergirds the free state, slave state dialectic, and I point out how the fractional logic of black political and economic status of the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787 emerged simultaneous with and co-constitutes the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 as the first plan of government for the territories that became the Midwest. Article 6 of the Northwest Ordinance forbids slavery in the territories, even as it carefully upholds white property rights by recognizing the right of slaveholders to reclaim

[10] Gilmore, 8-9. Gilmore challenges the crime rationale as a basis for prison expansion through her analysis of the interplay of multiple factors conditioned by political economy and racial difference.

[11] *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) by Katherine McKittrick.

"persons held to servitude" in the territories of the Northwest. Thus, even the pseudo legal recognition of black personhood remains a site characterized by dispossession, which engenders as I argue the condition of black liminality. I examine this dynamic by interrogating two contradictory aspects of the Midwest its purportedly liberal and race-neutral image in the context of gender and sexual regulation and anti-black racism.

Capture is a term that I use to designate a process whereby Black personhood is curtailed and apprehended through the use of visual and institutional strategies—visual capture interrogates technological, legal, political, and ontological practices of containment. I draw on Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright's articulation of visuality as a "practice of looking" that describes how we see and how we make sense of what we see. Visual capture further delineates visuality in relation to Rey Chow's understanding of capture as a process of attachment rather than one of disassociation to create a lens through which to examine the ways in which power works on and through Blackness in ways that exceed purpose or intent.[12] Capture also signals my attention to black fugitive and fleeting movement that resists institutional structures of control and confinement. I focus principally on enslavement, policing, surveillance, and domesticity, and examine black strategies of resistance to them.

Cartwright and Sturken's articulation of visuality demonstrates its connection to social relations more broadly. In the context of black personhood visuality is sited in its operation in and through the contradictions of American exceptionalism specifically with regard to capitalism and liberal democratic conceptions of equality.[13] Additionally, the visual is not only limited to

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[12] *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012) by Rey Chow.

[13] See Shawn Michelle Smith's "'Baby's Picture Is Always Treasured': Eugenics and the Reproduction of Whiteness in the Family Photograph Album" in *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), selections from Film and the Emotions, Carl Plantinga's *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), and "Perverse Space" by Victor Burgin in *Sexuality and Space* Eds. Beatriz Colomina and Jennifer Bloomer (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992) among other works to help me think about biological racism and gender in

what eyesight can discern in images and on bodies as Amelia Jones has argued, but more broadly defines the field of vision in its effects and operation, thus expanding what counts as visual culture.[14] Further, the history of the Midwest has produced a visual record that reproduces domination and subordination that the subjects and cultural examples on which I focus negotiate and challenge.[15] Specifically, the emergence of the Midwest was rooted in a regional visuality that endeavored to manage and discipline difference with regard to race, gender, class, and sexuality.[16]

Further, Fred Moten's articulation of Blackness as an "extended movement of a specific upheaval" and an "ongoing irruption" at once places Blackness within a movement vocabulary that for its reproduction requires a reconstitution of time, place, and context.[17] Moten's consideration of Blackness as a cultural formation that is at the same time a continuous and ongoing effect unites the two understandings into a single expression, the voice of which we might identify as slave labor and industrial capital, and the cadence, the elisions of liberal democracy and its racialized, gendered, and sexualized erasures.[18]

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relation to the visual.

[14] Here I refer to Jones' "Introduction: Conceiving the Intersection of Feminism and Visual Culture" in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[15] From Chicago Film Archives (CFA) website: "Filmmaking in the Midwest has a long history that begins in 1907 when Chicago's Essanay Studios on Argyle Street made some of the earliest motion picture films. With the advent of 16mm film format in 1923, Chicago quickly became a center for production and distribution of educational and industrial films lasting most of the twentieth century. Chicago documentary filmmakers were among the first to work with the cinema verité style at the height of the civil rights movement in the 1950s. Midwest filmmaking continues today with many independent and avant-garde films made by Midwest artists. CFA's collections include professional and amateur films, as well as those often-neglected cultural gems known as home movies." http://www.chicagofilmarchives.org/collections/.

[16] Works such as *Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest 1880-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) by Daniel Nelson and James Madison's *Heartland: Comparative Histories of the Midwestern States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

[17] I refer here to Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

[18] Here I am inspired by the many ways that voice is theorized in Moten's *In the Break;* I draw on his formulation and apply it to Blackness in the Midwest.

Simone Browne's work on Blackness and surveillance draws on Fanon to articulate the process of being identified as Black as part of the process of epidermalization, or the imposition of race on the body, as a practice of surveillance that assigns social value to Blackness. Browne engages Fanon's theorization of the process of objectification at work in the political formation and epithet "Look a Negro" in *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952). Thus, visual capture accounts for image-based cultural materials such as photographs, but also practices and discourses that do the work of political envisioning such as legal decisions, the racial and gendered segregation of the workforce, or the sociality of race that "Look a Negro" designates. I argue that these visualities participate in the construction of the U.S. nation-state through social and cultural structures of shared and contested meaning in the Midwest.

Black liminality reveals the ways in which both aggressively racist and sexist regulation, and liberal power reference the Midwest's role in reproducing regional and national social relations. The black Midwest based cultural practices I engage challenge to the logic of black liminality as it registers through enslavement, criminalization, sexual labor in the informal economy, and American exceptionalism provide the context for the rearticulation of black embodiment and personhood as central to self-redefinition and self-determination. A focus on Blackness in the Midwest invites an interrogation of the ways in which the region has been consistently imagined homogenously as white despite diverse histories of racialization.[19] My approach is attentive to the contradictions embedded in the dominant discourses of the Midwest as politically centrist, moderate, white, and wholesome that have contributed to the protection of white personhood regionally and nationally as I demonstrate. Thus, my approach to region offers a way to think about nationalism, and I demonstrate how a challenge to national power through

[19] T*he American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006) Eds. Richard Sisson, Christian Zacher, and Andrew Cayton.

the discourse of American exceptionalism for example offers an incisive critique to capitalism. A focus on the regional allows for an understanding of the ways in which the nation-state relies on an investment in the specificity of place in tangible and symbolic ways in order to reproduce itself.

My inquiry into black gendered and sexual personhood in the Midwest as a challenge to whiteness in the regional definition is rooted in a challenge to normative racial and gendered constructions more broadly. For example, the eugenics movement in the late nineteenth-century helped generate an understanding of the Midwest as pure and exemplary.[20] Black challenges to what we might call the "protective investment in whiteness" also contribute to ongoing critiques of the dominant understanding of the region as white.[21] My focus on the investment in protecting white personhood at times through property status (i.e. Northwest Ordinance of 1787) draws on Nicholas A. Brown and Sarah E. Kanouse's understanding of the Midwest as a place characterized discursively by white innocence that assists in the prevalence of the liberal racist understanding of the genocide and land dispossession of Dakota peoples and tribes within a narrative of white settler self-defense.[22] I extend Brown and Kanouse's critique to account for the ways in which white innocence functions within white liberal heteropatriarchal structures to sturdy the regional definition.

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[20] Th*e Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of "Defective" Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures since 1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) serves as an example of Chicago-based medical eugenics working on and through the construction of family which gives substance to understanding the complexities of heteropatriarchal family formations in the region.

[21] I draw from and extend George Lipsitz's concept of the "possessive investment in whiteness" here to think about white protectability. I also refer to Ezekiel Gillespie, a black man who sued Wisconsin for voting rights in 1866 (1846 proposed state Constitution would have allowed the vote), Joshua Glover's case in 1854 and the declaring of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 to be unconstitutional, Ida B. Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching and other justice campaigns after her move to Chicago in 1893, and black club women's movements in the early twentieth-century. See "Portrait of Ezekiel Gillespie" by the Wisconsin Historical Society: http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=1472.

[22] *Re-Collecting Black Hawk: Landscape, Memory, and Power in the American Midwest* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015) by Nicholas A. Brown and Sarah E. Kanouse.

Further, the National Negro Health Movement indexes the history of the monitoring of black health through the revitalization of the discourses of biologized notions of morality used by social reformers that coincided with the eugenics movement that emerged in prior decades. For example, the National Negro Health Improvement Week's Certificate of Merit from the 1930s describes the criteria for award recognition as: "…testimony and commendation of its civic cooperation for cleanliness, improved home life, and better health."[23] The certificate connects black embodiment and personhood to visuality through the logic of surveillance present in its characterization of "cleanliness, improved home life, and better health" that relies on state sanctioned inspection and monitoring.

In this way, the certificate serves not only as archival documentation of National Negro Health Improvement Week, but also visual cultural documentation of the way in which it resonates with eugenic visual technologies of bodily inspection. Alexandra Minna Stern addresses the politics of inspection in relation to better breeding contests in *Eugenic Nation Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (2005). I draw on this example to demonstrate the way in which regulation occurs through the visual.[24] As a record that generates an understanding of black life, the National Negro Health Improvement Week certificate is engaged in determining health for black people and in so doing identifies the legacies of eugenic practices for measuring communal worth.

Although the language of National Negro Health Movement can be traced to eugenic

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[23] Refer to Figure 2. The Certificate of Merit reads: "For Achievement in the Regular Annual Observance of the National Negro Health Improvement Week sponsored by the National Negro Health Movement. The community {or County} of Chicago, Illinois (Associated Negro Press), having fulfilled the required schedule of Health Week activities, April 5 to April 12 is hereby awarded a Certificate of Merit of testimony and commendation of its civic cooperation for cleanliness, improved home life, and better health." Chicago History Museum's Research Center.

[24] In literary studies, terms such as visual literature have been employed to acknowledge the interplay between image and text.

discourses of public health and hygiene, the movement also registers as a way to frame the articulation of progress on behalf of black progressive activists. While the notion of progress sometimes functioned as a strategy of respectability to discipline working class African Americans by middle class African Americans, it nonetheless signaled a black radical challenge to the death dealing effects of anti-black racism.[25] Occurring simultaneously in Chicago, the organizing of the Pullman Porters for instance generate an expansive social critique that reveals the anti-black racism, anti-immigrant, and classist ideology present in public health discourses of progress.[26] Attention to the multiple ways in which Blackness is delineated offers a context for both resistant and assimilative modes of valuing black life.[27]

I assert that midwestern whiteness as a regional formation has a unique relationship to the construction of American exceptionalism as a national discourse defined by white colonialist manifest destiny and the expansion of capitalism. Scholars such as David Noble, Dana Nelson, Cheryl Harris, and David Palumbo-Liu historicize the construction of white American exceptionalism as a process of securing economic, discursive, and racial hegemony and privilege. American exceptionalism, these scholars have noted, retains its significance and meaning from the promises it advances attached to its professed ability to balance the

[25] I will be draw on works about how black middle class people, women in particular discipline working class black people such as Carol Batker's '"Love Me Like I Like to Be': The Sexual Politics of Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*, the Classic Blues, and the Black Women's Club Movement"' in *African American Review* 32.2 (Summer 1998): 199-213.I am also thinking of Erica Edwards' work on black charisma to help me think about black class relations, leadership, and affective labor in *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

[26]Here I refer to Beth Tompkins Bates' *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

[27]The protection of black life, which has been more available and effective as a practice at certain historical junctures (i.e. during the Black Power Movement), has ultimately remained inconsistent and precarious due to the violence of racism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism. Blackness and protection have remained contradictions when considered in relation to the U.S. nation-state, community resources, etc. Also, drawing on Cedric Robinson's description of the Black Radical Tradition has dynamically challenged the language of individual property and ownership that protection as a category under capitalism has come to signify, and has instead privileged black collective preservation.

contradictions inherent in liberal democratic capitalism as a model of national belonging and economic, social, and representational lived reality. I articulate American exceptionalism as a discourse that generates black liminality and precarity more broadly as it depends on political narratives that envision and construct a national identity mobilized through the Midwest as a narrative of regional conquest.

Moreover, white innocence with regard to racialization and the Midwest can be identified as distinctly American. The East coast, as Shortridge has described is often understood in relation to white British colonial cultural influences, while the whiteness of the West coast is often posited in relation to Anglo dominance with regard to Mexican, Spanish and American rule.[28] The concept of freedom that emerges from American racial liberalism that I trace through the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 among other founding documents is the basis for the historical distinction between midwestern white liberal innocence and the brutal whiteness of the South, which can never again attain innocence. This distinction hinged on the legacy of slavery in the South allows the Midwest to not have to withstand the same level of sustained critique with regard to racism. In this way, the Midwest continues to function as a container for liberal race politics. We might even say that Midwest whiteness has helped to produce the system of liberal democratic checks and balances by which other regions are judged.[29] I address Midwest race liberalism more thoroughly in chapter one.

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[28] *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001) By Matt Garcia and *The Los Angeles Plaza: sacred and contested space* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008) by William Estrada; While the West Coast held the history and promise of Manifest Destiny, it also held the tension between Spanish and Anglo power as George Lipsitz argues in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

[29] Here I refer to the way in which the objective (innocent) biological race science understanding of white superiority that for instance surfaced through the political figure of Charles Fremont Dight of the Minnesota Eugenics Society colludes with the logic of racial superiority as a duty that emerges from the meetings notes of the Wisconsin Klu Klux Klan women's auxiliary that I have engaged through archival materials at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Midwest whiteness as a model of race liberalism can be traced, for example, to the understanding of Upper Midwest speech as "neutral" and more audibly clear than other regional accents with regard to employment for voice work for telephone operators and to do industrial voice recordings.[30] I am interested in how these regional narratives interact with and are extended when black gendered and sexual personhood is centered to reveal the inner-workings and consolidation of economic and political power in the American Midwest.

Theory & Methodology

My approach to the study of black gendered and sexual personhood in the Midwest is guided by Barbara Christian's articulation of marginal epistemology:

> My readings do presuppose a need, a desire among folk who like me also want to save their own lives. My concern, then, is a passionate one, for the literature of people who are not in power has always been in danger of extinction or of cooptation, not because we do not theorize, but because what we can even imagine, far less who we can reach, is constantly limited by societal structures.[31]

Christian's point registers the significance of self-definition for marginal communities and that cultural production is one site through which this occurs. Her attention to social structures sites the dialectical tension inherent in marginal cultural practices or ways of knowing as they confront and negotiate the contradictions that life under capitalism, racism, and heteropatriarchy produce.

In this project, I draw on intersectionality and queer of color critique as they have been elaborated by women of color feminist and queer of color theory in my examination of the way

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[30] This is a topic that I would like to explore more in relation to regional linguistics and voice politics. I draw from the Wisconsin English Language study that Frederic Cassidy, Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison conducted in the 1950s, as well as Joseph Salmons essay "Upper Midwestern English: Rich, Distinct, and Getting More So All the Time": http://csumc.wisc.edu/?q=node/79. Cayton also points to this when he describes the perception of the Midwesterners as people who "speak dialectic free American English" *in The American Midwest an Interpretive Encyclopedia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006): ix.

[31] From "The Race for Theory" by Barbara Christian in *Cultural Critique* The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse No. 6 (Spring 1987): 51-63. I refer here to Christian, 61.

in which the Midwest operates as a set of economic and political relations that demonstrate the liminality of Blackness. I apply cultural methods of analysis to historical materials through the consideration of primary sources as well as secondary historical and cultural materials that examine black personhood as a legal and political construct that renders apparent the resilience of black struggles for self-determination in the region and more broadly. I look closely at instances where black personhood and black subjects escape, emerge, and disappear from official documents and visual texts coming into focus as hypervisible and surveilled, while at the same time often remaining invisible.[32]

Through the consideration of cultural examples, I demonstrate the ways in which black gender and sexual embodiment constitutes a liminal status defined by contradiction and movement between commodity status and personhood. My study engages a diverse archive of materials such as legal decisions that articulate and envision early understandings of the region like the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, alongside key visual cultural examples and technologies such as the late nineteenth-century Bertillon system criminal identification arrest records of black women who engaged in sex work in downtown Minneapolis. I trace the construction of black gendered and sexual personhood at key moments spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in order to identify the connections across regional and national economic and political power relations.

My attention to visuality extends to a consideration of cultural examples as they demonstrate the function of social processes that structure meaning through practices of

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[32] Patricia Hill Collins explains in her chapter "Prisons for Our Bodies, Closets for our Minds" in her groundbreaking study *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004) that black personhood has been encumbered by conditions of hypervisibility and institutionalized surveillance, while at the same time remaining invisible. Also, see Juliet Williams' Liberalism and the Limits of Power (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005) and Grace Kyungwon Hong's *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

looking.[33] I argue that the diverse materials I engage, in explicit and more nuanced ways, enact or respond to visual capture in that they work to circumscribe, capitalize on, and limit black gendered and sexual personhood and expression. I show how visual forms remain connected to both the modes within which they operate (i.e. technology, ideology, etc.), as well as their effects, in particular collective preservation as a practice of resistance.

The importance of visual culture to my study rests in the ways in which visuality has been and continues to be imbricated in processes of racialization and racial, gender, and sexualized surveillance. To situate visuality in relation to Blackness in the Midwest, I consider a examples across different time periods. My project approaches visual culture as a mechanism through which social identities are produced draws on Kara Keeling's understanding of affectivity with regard to the cinematic as constitutive of social reproduction in ways that manage life and in this way function as biopolitical.[34] For Keeling affectivity is not only a process of the sensory-motor schema but also a type of work under late capitalism. Therefore, if visuality is defined as an articulation of how we see and make meaning within a capitalist culture, then it operates as an affective process as well. Attention to the way in which social reproduction occurs through affectivity draws on affect as the "forces and intensities" that compel bodies to move and to act.[35]

Further, my visual cultural studies approach to historical materials is indebted to

[33] Here I draw on Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken's *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kara Keeling's *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), and Kara Keeling's article "Looking for M— Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility, and Poetry from the Future" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2009 Vol. 15 No. 4 (2009): 565-82.

[34] In *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), Keeling writes: "Affectivity is a type of labor that is increasingly necessary to survival; as such, it is a type of labor that produces and maintains forms of social life—it is, therefore, biopolitical" (96).

[35] From Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg's Introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* Eds. Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

Kimberlé Crenshaw's articulation of representational intentionality and Michel Foucault's idea of the discursive field. Crenshaw's term representational intersectionality accounts for the centrality of issues of representation to the reproduction of race and gender hierarchy in the United States with regard to ". . . the ways in which these images are produced through a confluence of prevalent narratives of race and gender, as well as a recognition of how contemporary critiques of racist and sexist representation marginalize women of color."[36] The term representational intersectionality illuminates my approach to gender as a structure of power in society defined by differentiation and the creation of hierarchy and as a critical lens through which to understand capture, surveillance, and regulation.

As Stuart Hall asserts representation describes the process by which meaning is created through ideology, discourse, or image.[37] While, representational cultural forms such as media, television, film, visual art, and music have been understood as reflective of a world that already exists, representation through Hall and Crenshaw accounts for visual meaning as a complex system that has its own language and rules within which power is inscribed and reproduced. Intersectionality thus not only accounts for the many ways that people are situated in relation to power, but also the ways they are rendered vulnerable to certain forms of harm due to their multiple and cross-cutting identities and social locations. In addition to representational intersectionality, Crenshaw delineates structural and political intersectionality in order to describe the function and distribution of power in society. Thus, the coagulation of power relations that occur coterminous with the representational together shape visual meaning.

My approach to documents and visual materials that span the late eighteenth-century

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[36] "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" *Stanford Law Review* Vol. 43, No. 6 (Jul 1991): 1241-1299. I refer here to Crenshaw, 1282-3.

[37] *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* Eds. Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon (London: SAGE Publications Inc., 1997).

through the twenty-first century draws on Michel Foucault's notion of the discursive field. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (1969) Foucault defines the discursive field as a collection of unified thought. He describes it as being constituted by "the totality of all effective statements (whether spoken or written), in their dispersion as events and in the occurrence that is proper to them" (12). Foucault elaborates:

> Before approaching, with any degree of certainty, a science, or novels, or political speeches, or the œuvre of an author, or even a single book, the material with which one is dealing is, in its raw, neutral state, a population of events in the space of discourse in general. One is led therefore to the project of a pure description of discursive events as the horizon for the search for the unities that form within it (12).

Foucault's description of knowledge that is available to us as a "population of events in the space of discourse" registers the importance of place and space in the process of structuring knowledge. The discursive field, like the social processes at work that a representational intersectional framework makes apparent, operates both through explicitly connected bodies of knowledge, as well as through those that might appear distinct. In this way, my approach to the regional narrative construction of the Midwest primarily through visual cultural materials is rooted in an understanding of how representation shapes social meaning in ways that connect across time.

My approach to labor is grounded by an interrogation of capital. I draw on feminist reconceptualizations of labor as a source that generates social value under capitalism in order to attend to the production of life affirming alternative forms of value on the part of marginal communities. Positionality within, on the margins, and outside of labor markets historically has given meaning and form to the terms of personhood and subjectivity as scholarship by Angela Davis (1972), Jacqueline Jones (2010), and Julie Saville (1996) demonstrate. Further, as Roderick Ferguson argues in his book *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*,

the black drag queen sex worker indexes the contradictions of the racialization and heteropatriarchy with regard to the hierarchical structure of labor that has been central to U.S. democratic capitalism. Thus, labor orients variegated exploitation as a condition of professed liberty and equality.[38]

Further, my use of archival materials that account for Blackness in the Midwest invites an engagement with the archive not as a site of legitimized and unchanging knowledge, but rather a site that in the first instance is inquiry driven.[39] I put Blackness in conversation with the archive (official and unofficial) in ways that account for the fraught relationship between Blackness and objectivity since the emergence of "Negro" as a signifier of Blackness in sixteenth-century Europe as delineated by Cedric Robinson.[40] As a site assigned the historical and ongoing primary function of keeper of both compliant and resistant objects, the archive in the context of a capitalist society indexes the condition of objectivity and materiality that is always actively engaged in the work of objectification in relation to economies of not only commodity exchange, but also of desire, social legibility, and of particular concern here, cultural production. In his foundational analysis of the census, the map, and the museum in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson challenges the normative, nationalist, and institutional preservationist epistemologies and practices that have

[38] Here I also draw Siobhan Somerville's *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (2000).

[39] To assist me in making this point I will be drawing from works such as Allan Sekula's "The Body and the Archive" (1986) on the history of photography and the construction of social hierarchical archives, and Kimberly Juanita Brown's "Black Rapture: Sally Hemings, Chica Da Silva, and The Slave Body of Sexual Supremacy" special issue The Sexual in *Women's Studies Quarterly* Vol. 35 No. ½ (Spring – Summer 2007): 45-66.

[40] In *Black Marxism*, Robinson describes the complex process by which an African past was erased from historical record by white writers and thinkers, and the struggles to reclaim and renarrativize that past by black thinkers. I want to think about Robinson's work in relation to inquires into the black body from black feminist, Marxist and queer perspectives such as Smallwood's work on blackness in relation to value and representation, and Tinsley's further complication of the triangulation between blackness, materiality, and capital in her analysis of black slave affinities in "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol. 14 No. 2-3 (2008): 191-215.

constructed official archives. Guided by Anderson's critique, "Liminal Erasures" engages the archive as a space of ongoing interrogation.

My approach to archives draws on José Esteban Muñoz's understanding of queer histories and archives as best represented as ephemeral. In conversation with Muñoz's approach Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003) brings feminist, cultural, and lesbian theoretical analytics to bear on what the form of the archive might signify. Cvetkovich argues that the lesbian archive is both political and affective. I draw on both Muñoz and Cvetkovich to demonstrate that resistant reading practices are required to trace and document queer and marginal figures more broadly. A queer approach to the archive resists a practice guided merely by inclusion as a means to address exclusion, and instead seeks alternative lenses and approaches through which to document and engage marginal histories.

Chapters

The first two chapters of "Liminal Erasures" provide analyses of legal and visual mobilizations of capture that render Blackness liminal, and the last two chapters offer challenges to capture as a strategy of apprehension and curtailment of black gender and sexual personhood. Guided by an analysis of the fugitive slave notice of Joshua Glover, chapter one draws on stopped-motion photography as a visual analytic to interrogate the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850's attempt at motion capture in relation to Wisconsin's 1854 decision to declare it unconstitutional. I demonstrate how the mobilization of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the first territorial plan of government for what later became the Midwest, reproduces an understanding of Blackness and black personhood as precarious at the very same instance that it outlaws slavery. I argue that the Fugitive Slave Act extends a legal articulation of white protectability that relies on the vulnerability and precarity of Blackness that I trace to the Three-Fifths Compromise also of 1787 to demonstrate that the simultaneity of these two legal decisions as they extend and foreclose the

legal articulation of black personhood in the service of white liberal personhood.

Chapter one advances a theory of visual capture through an engagement with the invention of the portable stroboflash by Edward Rolke Farber, a former photojournalist for the *Milwaukee Journal* in 1939, and Wisconsin's 1854 decision to declare the U.S. Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 unconstitutional, the first and only state to do so. I point out how the flash more broadly and Wisconsin's decision function as technologies that endeavor to capture black personhood. I draw on these examples, and others to point to how mechanisms of capture, like the Fugitive Slave Act and photography, function both to expand and envision the nation. This chapter demonstrates that the erasure of black personhood and the protection of white liberal personhood are actually both premised on the control and evisceration of black personhood.

Chapter two examines the arrest records of black women who worked as sex workers in downtown Minneapolis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who were referred to as alley workers. I demonstrate the ways in which the alley work arrest records of black women document the coming together of photography, surveillance, and police work as part of a broader project of the modernization of policing through the tools of standardization offered by the Bertillon System of Criminal Identification. By connecting the history of policing in Minneapolis to a longer history of policing enacted through military power at Fort Snelling, a historical military post located in the Twin Cities to which settlement of the area was intimately tied, I historicize policing within the context of national expansion west. For example, I point out how the "Rogues Gallery" of the Minneapolis Police Department employed as a strategy of visual surveillance is undergirded by a longer history of state and federal practices of surveillance that sutured the Northwest to the union.

Chapter three offers an analysis of the film *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100* (1999) an independent biographical documentary by Yvonne Welbon. I argue that *Living with Pride*

challenges the individualism embedded in American exceptionalist notions of life and longevity in its depiction of black queer sociality in Detroit, Michigan through the figure of Ruth Ellis. Referred to by many as the oldest "out" African American lesbian, Ruth Ellis was a pillar of the Detroit gay community who lived to be 101 years old.[41] It is through practices of social engagement that are fleeting rather than constant that Ellis enacts black queer sociality and by extension longevity. In particular, Ellis mobilizes dancing as a challenge to domesticity, and as a way to signal a sociality of the everyday through which a practice of black queer fleeting movement is rendered central to the politics of longevity. *Living with Pride* demonstrates that black queer longevity challenges regional and national understandings of living that place life within the register of exceptionalism. Ellis enacts longevity, in so far as it serves as a social and political articulation of black lesbian identity in the Midwest, through the mundane occurrences, ephemeral intimacies, and ongoing everyday socialites of queer, racialized, economic, and gender nonconforming life-making practices.

Chapter four offers a challenge to the logic of black liminality as a structure of power that designates social value through an engagement with Chicago-based African American gay visual artist Nick Cave's soundsuits, artworks made in response to the beating of Rodney King in 1991. I argue that Cave's soundsuits produce an alternative register of social value for black life that remains in conversation with the effects of anti-black racism. As black liminality has a particular history in relation to the Midwest, Cave's soundsuits register precisely the critique of liminality in the Midwest as it extends outward. I focus on Cave's articulation of the soundsuits as a "second skin," to identify the way in which they speak back to anti-black police brutality as an assertion of power over personhood and space, and rearticulate value attached to Blackness in ways that are affirming.

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[41] As *Living with Pride* demonstrates Ruth Ellis resisted identification with the concept of "coming out."

"Liminal Erasures" contributes to approaches to gender and sexuality in the Midwest that invite an interrogation of the erasure of black gendered and sexual difference as central to the regional construction. The Midwest's liberal racial identification operates to hide in plain view its exclusionary discursive and institutional processes. For example, the ideology of the Great Plains indexes the practices that eviscerate Native American land claims in order to generate the broader idea of the Midwest as a place of "vast absence" as Shortridge demonstrates. [42] Through the chapters, I draw on works that attend to queer experiences and cultural practices as they register liminality in the region more extensively. My focus on Blackness puts pressure on the language of regional reclamation, and instead advances an understanding of the Midwest that centers on the erasure of marginal experiences and practices of resistance.[43]

[43] Here I refer to the way in which this project draws on and extends *Reclaiming the Heartland: Lesbian and Gay Voices from the Midwest* Eds. William Spurlin and Karen Lee Osborne (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

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Chapter One

The Portable Stroboflash and Black Liminality in the American Midwest

"I didn't invent the electronic flash because we needed light . . . Flash bulbs gave us plenty of light. We wanted to stop that action."
—Edward Farber[1]

"The history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist. Blackness—the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption that anarranges every line—is a strain that pressures the assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity."
—Fred Moten[2]

"The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again."
—Walter Benjamin[3]

Introduction

While looking for images of black people in public space in early twentieth-century Milwaukee, I found a photograph housed in the Milwaukee Public Library's archival folder of car accidents occurring prior to 1945. The photograph pictures a white woman gazing down at the supine body of a black person, perhaps a black man.[4] The black man lies still in the street near a curb delicately covered with a wool coat from chin to waist, his eyes closed. Taken at night, the photo directs us to the stunned but sober face of the white woman as she holds a lit cigarette while standing next to the body of the black man. To the woman's immediate left a white man talks to her while gesturing, presumably a detective. Further confirming the photograph's documentation of the aftermath of an accident is the presence of a uniformed white police officer flanking the detective as well as the murky view of a white man wearing a trench-

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[1] "Farber: Beating TV at Its Own Game" interview by Ted Rulseh in *Lake Country Living* (26 Feb 1981): 1. See Figure 1.3 for image of stroboflash.

[2] *In The Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota): 1.

[3] Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations* Trans. Harry Zohn and Ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Shoken Books, 1968): 255. First published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1968.

[4] Refer to Figure 1.1.

coat with his back to the camera positioned just in front of a second uniformed white police officer kneeling with only his hat and a portion of his face in the frame of the image. The black man, the dead victim of the accident, is not the subject of the photograph. The image's light source positions the white woman with her stunned gaze as the central point of focus and attention. Through a hazy fog that pervades the image, the woman's line of vision emerges as most resonant as it actively orients the viewer and determines the compositional framing of the photograph. Accounting for the subjectivity of the black person in the photo requires a reading practice that would position black death as the principle subject. Instead black subjectivity is a secondary or perhaps even tertiary subject more fully anchoring the white woman as primary.

The photograph in question was taken in the late 1930s by Edward Rolke Farber a *Milwaukee Journal* photographer (1936-1946) who in 1939 invented the stroboflash, or more simply "the flash."[5] Farber devised the first portable electronic flash units used by press photographers in the United States.[6] Over forty years after his invention was introduced to the public, as the epigraph notes, Farber stated: "I didn't invent the electronic flash because we needed light . . . Flash bulbs gave us plenty of light. We wanted to stop that action."[7] The invention of the flash marked a moment in the history of photographic technology that was significant not only for the illusion of consistent camera lighting it provided, but more importantly for its ability to freeze time and motion in order to generate clear depictions of moving subjects.[8] Based firmly on the principle and technique of stopped-motion or stop-action,

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[5] In 1995 the paper became the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*—merging *The Sentinel* and *The Milwaukee Journal* both based in Milwaukee. Farber took photos of accidents prior to being hired full time by the *Milwaukee Journal*.
[6] Rulseh, 2.

[7] My emphasis. Farber uses the general term electronic flash to refer to the type of flash that his invention the stroboflash emits. However, other electronic flash inventions were made, such as Harold "Doc" Edgerton's stroboscope, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology scientist whose work inspired Farber. Farber Biographical Sketch, Wisconsin Historical Society.

[8] I use "the flash" as an umbrella term in line with the way that it is used by Farber to refer specifically to the stroboflash and to flash photographic historic more broadly. I explicitly designate at key moments my use of the

electronic flash photography utilizes fast exposures of light to capture moving subjects.

Farber's rejoinder cited in the epigraph regarding the flash's function vis-à-vis stopped-motion invokes the medium's continued use of light to image both motion and stillness in particular in relation to human and animal physicality, reminding us that at its core, photography—from its early understanding as a practice of "shadow fixing"[9] to electronic flash innovation—is hinged on the practice of stopping motion to capture moments principally defined by stillness and movement. The impulse to stop action or motion was not isolated to flash photographic advancement, but rather its very intelligibility as a principle governing the physical world was further rendered possible in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century legal and economic attempts to categorize and control unruly, unseeable, and at times unstoppable bodies, practices, and phenomena.

Ratified just one year prior to William Henry Fox Talbot's first experiments with stopped-motion photography in England,[10] the U.S. Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, I argue, operationalized the principle of stopped-motion as a legal strategy to control the pressing reality of black escape within a political context of national expansion. Stopped-motion functions here as an analytic through which to consider photographic and legal practices of apprehending black gendered and sexual personhood. As they mobilize seemingly divergent strategies of capture, photographic stopped-motion although a visual technology nonetheless provides an analytical lens through which to interrogate the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 as a legal process that reflects

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term. I use "the flash" as a general term here and throughout the chapter in order to situate Farber's photograph and his larger photo archive within the history of flash photography advancement and experimentation more broadly. The flash here primarily references flash powder and flashbulbs that preceded Farber's electronic stroboflash.

[9] Talbot referred to his development of the negative-positive photo process "the art of shadow catching," in *The Book of Photography: The History, the Technique, the Art, the Future* (National Geographic, 2005): 229 text by Anne Hoy. I return to this later in the chapter.

[10] Hoy, 230.

both regional and national visions of political unity and compromise. In 1854 Wisconsin's Supreme Court declared the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 unconstitutional, the first and only state high court to do so. Although appearing to be rhetorically anti-racist, I assert that Wisconsin's 1854 decision further creates the political and legal conditions within which black personhood can only exist as a site of erasure, or as a status that is at best conditional.

The treatment of black personhood in the context of Wisconsin's 1854 decision on the unconstitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 illustrates my project's overall argument that the regional construction of the American Midwest constitutes the epicenter of a political, ontological, and epistemological formation that demonstrates the liminality of Blackness. Wisconsin's Supreme Court mobilizes the Midwest's founding regional document, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, to ground its attempt to repeal the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 resting its claim on the document's forbiddance of slavery in the Northwest territories, now states that constitute the Midwest.

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and Wisconsin's 1854 decision as two examples of the operation of black liminality both mobilize stopped-motion as a legal strategy in order to control the discursive and political emergence of black personhood. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and Wisconsin's 1854 decision on its unconstitutionality render Blackness pliable in its movement within and outside of conditions of personhood and commodity for the purposes of determining state and regional power within the political context of national expansion. Therefore, stopped-motion as a visual strategy of photographic capture as it enables the functionality of the flash, comes to bear on the ways in which the political envisioning of national subjectivity with regard to Blackness reproduce its ongoing status as influx, unstable, or liminal.

I delineate black liminality through an analysis of its fractional definition grounded in the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787 that emerged simultaneous with the Northwest Ordinance of

1787 as it centrally positioned the Midwest as a collection of free states within a broader structure of political power articulated through the dichotomy of North and South, slave and free. The political power attributed to free and slave states propelled the movement of black subjects across state lines, and inside and outside of designations of property and personhood. I call this ontological political condition of instability and precarity in personhood black liminality. Stopped-motion then is one legal strategy of regulation through which black liminality operates.

This chapter and my project more broadly is concerned with black subjects who escape visibility, or who manage to disappear or to remain invisible even in plain sight in order to account for the ways in which resistance to the precarity that characterizes black liminality might occur in nuanced and unexpected ways. In particular, this chapter demonstrates that the erasure of black personhood and the protection of white liberal personhood are actually both premised on the eradication of black personhood and life. I assert that Blackness as ontology can be articulated neither through life or death, visibility or invisibility, motion or stillness, but as both and neither at the same time. The history of black gendered and sexual personhood in the Midwest makes the simultaneity of Blackness evident as it troubles any attempt to represent it as anything but liminal. First, I discuss the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 in the context of Wisconsin's 1854 repeal of it as a mode of stopped-motion in relation to black personhood, I then elaborate stopped-motion through a consideration of the history of blackness and photography, I then return to the context of Milwaukee as a significant site that prompted Wisconsin's appeal of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the chapter ends by returning to Edward Farber's archive of the flash and discusses it alongside Walter Benjamin's articulation of the flash of history.

Wisconsin Contests the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850

Almost eighty-five years preceding Farber's photograph of black accidental death in or near the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Joshua Glover traversed the very same area of the state.

Glover, a former slave who had relocated to Racine, Wisconsin to escape slavery in Missouri was incarcerated in the Milwaukee County Jail in 1854 where he awaited his court date to stand trial under the Fugitive Slave Act.[11] The fugitive slave notice requesting Glover's apprehension ran in the *Missouri Republican* newspaper during the last two weeks of May of 1852. Paid for by Glover's former owner Benammi S. Garland, the notice reads:

> Two Hundred Dollars Reward. Ran away from the subscriber, living 4 miles west of the city of St. Louis, on Saturday night last, a negro man by the name of Joshua; about 35 or 40 years of age, about 6 feet high, spare, with long legs and short body, full suit of hair, eyes inflamed and red; his color is an ashy black. Had on when he went away a pair of black satinet pantaloon paints, pair boots, an old-fashioned black dress coat, and osnaburg shirt. He took no clothes with him. The above reward will be paid for his apprehension if taken out of the State, and fifty dollars if taken in the State. May 17, 1852. B.S. Garland.[12]

The notice describes Glover as a "negro man" and not as a slave.[13] That Glover is not referred to as property, or as a slave, but as a man opens up the argumentative space for Wisconsin's Supreme Court to challenge the Fugitive Slave Act in 1854. It is this contradiction between property in man, and man as man that the court attempts to address rhetorically. While Glover is described as a man in the fugitive notice, the reward for his capture and the fact that he "ran away from the subscriber" simultaneously position him as a slave and therefore as property. It is precisely this legal and political disjuncture between black personhood and property status, I call black liminality, that delineates the racialized gendered construction of man as a free person, and free person as conditioned by ownership over the self that undergirds the Wisconsin Supreme Court's 1854 decision to challenge the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.[14]

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[11] Refer to Ruby West Jackson and Walter T. McDonald's *Finding Freedom: The Untold Story of Joshua Glover, Runaway Slave* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2012): 25.

[12] Jackson and McDonald, 25. Fugitive slave notice for Glover reprint from the *Missouri Republican*. See Figure 1.2.

[13] Refer to Figure 1.2.

[14] Here I refer to Grace Kyungwon Hong's discussion of the self-possessed individual in *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

The Wisconsin Supreme Court proceedings containing the Writ of Habeas Corpus for Samuel Booth, the white abolitionist who organized the jail raid that resulted in Glover's escape from jail in Milwaukee, requests his release based on the claim:

> . . . it is alleged in said warrant, and also in the complaint on which the same is founded (all of which appears in said warrant), that the said Joshua Glover was 'the property' of said Benammi S. Garland; whereas, the act of Congress under which said complaint was made, punishes the aiding, &c., in the escape of 'persons held to service or labor under the laws,' &c., and not the aiding in the escape of 'property;' for which reason said warrant is defective in substance and form.[15]

The court's interpretation of personhood is in contrast to slave status, and extends to the articulation of the right's possessed person in contradistinction from those "held to service," those without rights and no grounds for citizenship claims, slaves. The court's articulation of "person" and "property" is consistent with the racialization and gendering of citizenship status with respect to state protection from the unlawful reach of the federal government. This construction of personhood is directly tied to the language of personhood rooted in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 on which the Wisconsin decision hinges its unconstitutionality claim. Article Six of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 forbids slavery in the territories of the Northwest, while it acknowledges as legal the reclamation of fugitive slaves: "persons escaping," "fugitive," or persons "from whom labor or service is lawfully claimed" by slave holders. The upholding of white property rights is conditioned by the broader protected investment in whiteness that became enshrined in law.

George Lipsitz refers to what I understand as the protection of white personhood as the "possessive investment in whiteness."[16] Lipsitz explains that liberal individualism serves as the

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[15] I am referring to p. 4, "Unconstitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act. Decision of the Supreme Court of Wisconsin in the cases of Booth and Rycraft," (1854). "Unconstitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act" by the Wisconsin Supreme Court (Milwaukee 1855). Online facsimile at: http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.law/llst.026.

[16] See George Lipsitz's *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness, How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006). Thu-huong Nguyen-vo also assisted me in thinking about property in personhood specifically in relation to John Locke's articulation of rights in particular with regard to "limb" and

basis for the political and economic advancement of white supremacy in the United States. Lipsitz argues that whiteness "has a cash value" and insists that the "possessive investment in whiteness" allows for asset accumulation in much the same way as property speaking to what Cheryl Harris refers to as "whiteness as property."[17] Harris has detailed the ways in which whiteness attained a property status through the economic production of white supremacy through black and brown labor exploitation, white cultural capital, and other legalized practices of racial injustice. This generated modes of containment to govern all black subjects outside, through and on the body. The Fugitive Slave Act made it the duty of federal officials to capture and return fugitive slaves to their masters. It advanced a vision and plan of national expansion and unity that is exemplified in all of the acts of the Compromise of 1850. The Compromise of 1850 envisioned and disciplined noncompliance as part of its grammar, and in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 in particular.

Lipsitz's point about the structural extension of whiteness can be linked to the Wisconsin decision with regard to its investment in the personhood of Booth, in the Writ of Habeas Corpus that demanded his release from prison from "aiding and abetting" Glover, as a white man that required and actually depended on the disavowal of the personhood of Joshua Glover. The possessive investment in whiteness speaks to what Grace Hong refers to as the "possessive individual," the white male citizen subject defined principally by self-ownership, and with reference to Booth, legal protection.[18] That Glover is referred to as a "fugitive" and a "person held to service" in the context of the unconstitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act signals his inability to be self-possessed and delineates the terms of the dispossession of personhood with

"life" specifically in his book *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), this text is in the public domain and was republished in 2006 (Raleigh: Hayes Barton Press, 2006).

[17] "Whiteness as Property" by Cheryl I. Harris *Harvard Law Review* Vol. 106, No. 8 (Jun., 1993), pp. 1707-1791.

[18] Hong, 3.

regard to the reference to him on the part of the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1854.

Thus, Wisconsin's 1854 decision to declare the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 unconstitutional establishes whiteness as a protected status by way of the dispossession of Blackness. Specifically, Wisconsin's 1854 decision bolsters white liberal personhood in two ways: first through its mobilization of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and second through its focus on the white abolitionists who organized the rebellion that assisted Glover with his escape from the Milwaukee County Jail before the trail. Thus, Wisconsin's 1854 decision through its mobilization of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 extends the idea of the Midwest as racially liberal that undergirds the construction of white personhood as protectable. Racial liberalism is constitutive of the construction of the region and the suturing of it to the Union as it upholds the unprotectability of Blackness.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 propagates new territorial expansion through the creation of new states rather than through the expansion of existing recognized states and territories.[19] Although there is documentation that some slavery owners from slave states continued to practice slavery even after they relocated to free-states like Minnesota and Wisconsin,[20] the discourse of the Northwest Ordinance was important to how the new region was constituted as a collection of free-states in which the democratic ideal of the freedom of present in the newly adopted national Constitution were put to work.

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 amended in order to render more punitive the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act. Passed along with four other laws as part of the Compromise of 1850 that

[19] Jackson and McDonald, 14.

[20] I refer here to *Black Settlers in Rural Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1977) by Zachary Cooper—Cooper references images of black residents in Wisconsin some of whom are listed as slaves. I also refer to Christopher Lehman's *Slavery in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1787-1865: A History of Human Bondage in Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2011).

dealt with slavery in relation to California's entry into the union as a free state, Utah and New Mexico having no federal restrictions on slavery but instead subject to popular sovereignty, as well as the issue of state boundaries with regard to Texas and New Mexico, and prohibitions on slavery in Washington D.C.[21] The Compromise of 1850 documents national expansion at the intersection of contestations over black personhood with regard to slavery, and this in turn comes to bear on Wisconsin's repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

Thus, Wisconsin's Supreme Court's 1854 decision on the unconstitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 indexes the juridical construction of the terms by which fugitive slaves could be recaptured thereby legally binding slave and free states through the mutual regulation of Blackness. Specifically, the Wisconsin Supreme Court creates a legal basis for their attempt to repeal the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 by drawing on the language of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 as it forbad slavery, and by foreclosing the personhood of Glover, as the court draws not on the arrest of Glover, but rather on the warrant for the arrest of the two white abolitionists Samuel Booth and Timothy Rycraft. Booth and Rycraft were charged as the primary culprits in organizing the rebellion that broke Glover out of the Milwaukee jail and assisted him in his escape to freedom in Canada in 1854.[22]

The Midwest as a regional narrative rooted in the Northwest Ordinance has been central to the production of liberal whiteness as protectable.[23] Further, the white liberal protected status

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[21] From "Compromise of 1850," Library of Congress Web Guide: https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Compromise1850.html.

[22] Jackson and McDonald, 66.

[23] See Daniel Nelson's *Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest, 1880-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Andrew Cayton and Peter Onuf's *The Midwest and the Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); *Queer Twin Cities* by Twin Cities GLBT Oral History Project Eds. Kevin P. Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Larry Knopp (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). The Midwest surfaces as a contentious locale with both anti-slavery and pro-slavery factions shaped by a broader structure of racism that reproduced the property relations of enslavement. As documented in the large scale work *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), the Midwest's histories of politics, social movements, and rural and urban racialization have also produced accounts of nonnormativity that destabilize understandings of the region as white and politically centrist.

that undergirds the Wisconsin decision based on the Northwest Ordinance and designates those who are protectable and protected by the state—Booth and Rycraft. This point is rendered clearer in the Preface of the Wisconsin decision on the unconstitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850:

> The right, duty, and power of the States to protect their own citizens against the exercise of unconstitutional power, the inviolability of the Habeas Corpus, the independence of the States in the exercise of their reserved powers, and their right and duty to protect their powers reserve, as sovereign and independent within their respective spheres, co-equal and co-ordinate with the federal government within its sphere.[24]

The Preface asserts the right of states to protect citizens from having their rights unjustly infringed upon on the part of the federal government. With attention to citizenship and states rights the court positions their decision within the context of white protectability. Although the justices go on to restate the language of the Fugitive Slave Act and the Northwest Ordinance with regard to the recapture fugitives without access to due process, they do not connect this point to their discussion of the violation of the rights of Booth and Rycraft thereby creating a discursive distinction between the protection invested in white personhood and the unprotectability of fugitive slave status.[25]

Moreover, the Court determines that Booth's liberty has been stripped away thus justifying its decision to protect the rights of Booth as a citizen of the state thereby foregrounding the primacy of state's rights: ". . . is restrained of his liberty by one Stephen Ableman, the

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[24] Wisconsin Supreme Court, iv.

[25] From Preface: "1) The Act "authorizes a hearing and determination of the claim of the master, and the fact of escape, by commissioners of the United States. 2) Who cannot be endowed with judicial powers under the constitution of the United States, 3) The judicial power for the United States can be vested only in courts, or in judges, whose ten of office is during good behaviour, and whose compensation is fixed and certain, 4) the functions with which United States commissioners are endowed by the act of 1850 are judicial, and therefore repugnant to the Constitution. 5) By said act, any person alleged to be a fugitive may be arrested and deprived of his liberty 'without due process of law.' Crawford, J. dissenting. The act of Congress of 1850, commonly called the Fugitive Slave Act, in relation to fugitives from service or labor, is unconstitutional and void; because Congress has no constitutional power to legislate upon that subject. *Per* Smith, J. Wisconsin Supreme Court, 3.

Marshal of the United States for the District of Wisconsin."[26] To render their argument legible within the logic of federal law, the Court determines that it is in fact the federal Marshal who took Booth into custody and is responsible for Booth's loss of liberty—the decision's critique of the Fugitive Slave Act does not come to bear on the critique of the power conferred on the federal Marshal. Therefore, the decision limits its claims, and the result is that the central claim of the justices is simplified and directed toward the federal Marshal's infringement on Booth and Rycraft's liberty.

Further, the Wisconsin Supreme Court draws on the language of the arrest warrants for Booth and Rycraft to point out that the aiding in the escape of "property" is the most salient category punished under the law, only those who possess a property status and can therefore be classified as stolen. Along these lines, fugitive slaves "guilty" of stealing themselves out of slavery—can therefore be prosecuted under the Fugitive Slave Act. The justices assert that that the law does not punish those "who aid in the escape of property" thereby grounding their argument on the property status of Glover. The Supreme Court of Wisconsin stays firmly within the argumentative logic of the Fugitive Slave Act 1850 and the warrant for the arrest of Booth and Rycraft thereby establishing an affiliation even in its challenge to them. As a consequence black personhood remains unprotectable and Blackness remains sited within property status.

The Preface reveals the diversity of opinions of the Court regarding black personhood and slavery. In fact, it is the opinions of the justices that ground the central arguments of the decision and contextualize it. Connecting the discussion in the Preface to the body of the decision allows us to see the Court's attempt to invalidate the Fugitive Slave Act and slavery by extension by pointing out the discrepancies between the Fugitive Slave Act and the warrant for the arrest of the abolitionists. As a legal strategy this actually functions to reify the property

[26] Wisconsin Supreme Court, 3.

status of Glover. At the same time, we are made aware of the Court's struggle with the available legal language, and the limits of establishing human status through judicial procedures. Thus, the decision implicitly reveals the way that the designation of slave and free states depend on one another for meaning. The decision also helped to set a precedent for state's rights with regard to contesting federal power with regard to slavery and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

The justices rest their argument on the fractional logic of black human life, established legally by the Three-fifths Compromise by deploying the framework that defines Blackness as property, or as a site of quantification. Following the logic they reproduce so long as black subjects are "not claimed" they can continue to exercise personhood, or "be people" in the state of Wisconsin. They do not argue for the full recognition of human status for black people in general, and fugitive slaves in particular. This failure is rooted in the decision's dependence on The Northwest Ordinance of 1787.

The Confederation Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance, also known as the Freedom Ordinance, during the summer of 1787 prior to the ratification of the U.S. Constitution.[27] The signing into law in 1789 of the Northwest Ordinance by President George Washington signified that national decision-making had effectively been transferred from the Confederation Congress to the nascent U.S. federal government. Thus, the document professing the law of the land existed alongside that which established the terms through which the new government would continue to grow through white settlement and land seizure from and forced removal of Native Americans. Wisconsin was one of the original territories of the Northwest area that was later established as a group of free states. The Ordinance established the newly emerging government's position on expansion by means of the creation of new states, rather than

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[27] "Northwest Ordinance" Library of Congress Web Guide: https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/northwest.html.

through the expansion of already existing states. Thus, the legal practice of the dispossession of lands from Native Americans operationalized the process through which the liberal self-possessed individual could emerge as the privileged citizen subject. In this way, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 assisted in the project of westward expansion by legally constituting white liberal personhood by way of a definition of property that acknowledged the right to transfer property ownership, a right that pre-supposed self-ownership.[28]

The Northwest Ordinance's prohibition on slavery became central to the Midwest's self-definition as it attempted to distinguish itself as a region. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, passed just a few years after the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and the precursor to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, was weakened by the *Prigg vs. Pennsylvania* decision of 1842 that made it illegal to capture and return to slavery any person.[29] While the Wisconsin decision challenges the Fugitive Slave Act like Prigg vs. Pennsylvania it does not advance the same radical critique to the logic of property in black personhood. The Wisconsin Supreme Court instead advances the logic of black liminality by drawing on the contradictory claim of both property status and personhood vis-à-vis "persons held to servitude" in the Fugitive Slave Act. The Wisconsin decision upholds Article Six of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 as it forbids slavery even as it protects white liberal personhood through the recognition of the property rights of slavery thus simultaneously condoning the capture of fugitive slaves:

> There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted: Provided, always, That any person escaping into the same, from whom labor or service is lawfully claimed in any one of the original States, such fugitive may be lawfully reclaimed and conveyed to the person claiming his or her labor or service as aforesaid.[30]

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[28] Article 1 of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 delineates the right to transfer land as property in the case of death. It also acknowledges that both men and women can own property.

[29] *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* Oyez IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law: https://www.oyez.org/cases/1789-1850/41us539.

[30] Refer to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.

Fugitive personhood emerges in the language of the Wisconsin decision as "persons held to service." Thus, the racialized and gendered designation of enslaved status protected white personhood from being "held to service" within the terms of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that foreclosed personhood as a legal status under racial slavery. In this way, "wage earner," for instance constitutes white liberal personhood as it stands in contrast to "person held to service" especially in the case of indentured servitude. The racial logic that characterizes being "held to service" was drawn from the logic of captivity that apprehended Blackness as an object of ownership, a designation that fugitive status directly defies.

As I have demonstrated, white liberal personhood as a racial liberal structure of power is grounded in the manifestation of "whiteness as property" as a site of accumulated political and social value. Through its attention, in Article 1 to the property rights of white settlers and its concluding focus on the forbidding of slavery at the same time that it upholds fugitive slave capture in Article 6, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 articulates whiteness as a protected legal status. At the same time, the Northwest Ordinance protects the property rights that facilitate the establishment of the possessive individual that undergirds white liberal personhood.

From here, we might read the order of the articles as a reflection of the priorities reflected through the Ordinance: first, the protection of white property rights in Article 1, and last the recognition not of black personhood, but rather property in Blackness as expressed in Article 6. The first and last articles function as bookends contextualizing the other articles of the Ordinance in strategic order of significance to the governing of the territories. Although attempting an explicit challenge to slavery, the Northwest Ordinance obscures Blackness and forecloses black personhood. Instead of arguing for the fact of black personhood as a way to forbid slavery, the Northwest Ordinance instead upholds the property rights of slave masters to reclaim fugitive slaves thereby protecting white male property rights over both land and black "persons held to

service."

The Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787 emerged simultaneous with the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and together they advance black liminality through the extension of black dispossession from personhood.[31] The Wisconsin Supreme Court rested its 1854 refusal to acknowledge the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 first on the Northwest Ordinance wherein it was decided that the territory northwest of the Ohio River would be free of slavery—an outgrowth of a political moment that produced the fractional logic of black personhood. Second, the Wisconsin Court argues that the warrant issued for the arrest of Samuel Booth and Timothy Rycraft, the white abolitionists involved in Glover's escape from a Milwaukee jail and relocation to Canada, was not consistent with the Fugitive Slave Act in its articulation of personhood and property status.

The Wisconsin decision was based on both an investment in the protection of the white liberal personhood of the abolitionists Samuel Booth and Timothy Rycraft framed as a matter of state's rights at the same time as eschewing the personhood of Joshua Glover. With respect to Booth and Rycraft, the warrant became a central point of focus in the court proceedings and served as a tool to make visible the case of the overreach of the federal government. From this place, Wisconsin determined that the warrant erred in its identification of Glover as "the property" of Benammi S. Garland, because the Fugitive Slave Act punished "persons held to service or labor under the laws," and not "the aiding in the escape of 'property.'

The federal warrant for the arrest of Booth and Rycraft serves as a stage for contestation over the definition of freedom on the part of the state and the federal government. Wisconsin declares the Fugitive Slave Act unconstitutional based not on an assertion of the personhood of

[31] For the purposes of political representation and taxation black people were counted as three-fifths of a person beginning in 1787. See "The Three-Fifth Compromise," Digital History ID 163: http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=163

Glover that would then oppose his designation as property, but rather on the unlawful arrest of Booth and Rycraft whom the state identifies as its citizens. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 preceded and framed the terms through which Glover would be defined in the warrant. For these reasons the Court determined that the legal basis for the warrant and thus the warrant itself was "defective in substance and form."[32] In the text of the decision, just as in the fugitive notice for Golver's arrest, Glover is rendered peripheral. Wisconsin's 1854 decision was limited in its definition of personhood as it adhered to the objective liberal conception of personhood based in property rights articulated in both the Northwest Ordinance and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

Moreover, the legal strategy of the Wisconsin decision functions to establish black personhood through a juridical challenge to the discrepancies in the classification of property status—thereby revealing the ways in which the protection of personhood is selective in its racialized and gendered expressions. The line of argument of the Supreme Court meant that the personhood of Glover could not be explicitly argued. Thus, Wisconsin delineates a construction of liberty within the terms of state and regional power that erases the possibility for the emergence of black personhood within the terms of the 1854 decision.

As a juridical strategy, the decision puts forward an understanding of Blackness that continues to situate it within the dialectic of property and personhood, thus reaffirming its liminality. Wisconsin's repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 points to the ways in which permission to recapture escaped slaves in the Northwest was just as formative to the legal articulation of the American Midwest as the forbidding of slavery vis-à-vis the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 as a document that signals both the protection of white property rights and white personhood. More specifically, this genealogy of the formation of the Midwest explicates its reliance on black precarity in the process of establishing the free Northwest in contrast to the

[32] Wisconsin Supreme Court, 4.

pro-slavery South. Thus, the foreclosure of black personhood and the further rendering of it as liminal serve as the basis for the legal and political formation of the American Midwest. Although in 1857 the federal government overturned Wisconsin's 1854 decision, Wisconsin continued to be defiant by refusing to file the federal mandate endorsing the Fugitive Slave Act. The mandate reconstituting the state's support of the Fugitive Slave Act was never filed. Along these lines, the Wisconsin's 1854 decision to declare the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 unconstitutional remains significant in the history of Midwest challenges to slavery in the context of the reification of white liberal personhood as protectable.[33]

Blackness and Visual Capture

"What *should* a portrait of a fugitive slave look like?"

—Sarah Blackwood[34]

Although Joshua Glover's arrest occurred just prior to the first experiments with flash photographic stopped-motion technology and many decades before the integration of photography into police work, he did not escape visual capture. Accompanying the notice for his capture is a stock print character of a fugitive slave on the run, known technically as a stereotype.[35] The fugitive slave stereotype consisted of one of a number of general stock print-types and remained in use until the end of the Civil War. In "Fugitive Obscura: Runaway Slave Portraiture and Early Photographic Technology" Sarah Blackwood describes the ways in which the print stereotype documents the legal and political contradiction posed by black personhood through its ongoing erasure. The slave notice stereotype further signals the designation of

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[33] I refer here to: "Famous Cases of the Wisconsin Supreme Court: In Re: Booth, 3 Wis. 1 (1854)": https://www.wicourts.gov/courts/supreme/docs/famouscases01.pdf and *Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin, 1840-1861* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1998) by Michael J. McManus.

[34] Italics emphasis not my own, from Sarah Blackwood's "Fugitive Obscura: Runaway Slave Portraiture and Early Photographic Technology" *American Literature*, Vol. 81 No. 1 (Mar 2009): 101.

[35] See Figure 1.2, the fugitive notice for Glover's arrest.

Blackness to property status, and in the case of Glover, a property status actually hinged on an empty reference to personhood.

In an article in the *North Star,* Frederick Douglass critiques the printing of slave notices using an example from the *Missouri Republican,* the same newspaper that printed the fugitive notice and reward for Joshua Glover's capture.[36] Regarding the print stereotype of the fugitive slave Douglass asserts: "we are supposed to know that it is in fact a human being."[37] Douglass challenges the fugitive slave stereotype as a representational device that visually reifies property in personhood with regard to Blackness.

Further, the fugitive slave notice for the apprehension of Glover describes him as a "negro man," not as a slave.[38] That Glover is not referred to as property, or as a slave, but as a man opens up the argumentative space for Wisconsin's Supreme Court to challenge the Fugitive Slave Act in 1854. This seemingly apolitical slippage that conflates black personhood and Blackness as property actually defines the condition of the criminal and legal administration of Blackness through the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that readies Blackness for erasure and political exploitation. It is this dichotomy that exists between property and personhood that grounds Wisconsin's 1854 decision on the unconstitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act. This oppositional dichotomy is the precisely the site of the production of Blackness as a liminal status that is unprotectable and precarious.

The unprotectability of Blackness is further produced through the racial discourses that established Blackness as a site of inferiority that can be sited in the politics of liberal thinkers

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[36] Here I draw on Blackwood's discussion of Douglass' editorial printed in the *North Star* on Feb. 22, 1850. See Blackwood, 103.

[37] Blackwood, 103.

[38] See Figure 1.2.

such as Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson describes Blackness and black people as forever embodying an alterity that casts them outside of the American nation. For Jefferson Blackness is by nature exists like a “veil,” on the surface of the skin, or below the skin, but not something that is actually part of the human body.[39] This way of understanding Blackness places it outside of the body. Jefferson’s articulation of Blackness serves as an anchor for the designation of Blackness to property status imposed by slavery and liberal notions of personhood based on ownership where Blackness is a feature of property rather than attached to the body.[40] The contradiction in Blackness as both personhood and property is grounded in the economic, political, and social relations of slavery and capitalism.

Therefore, Jefferson advances an understanding of Blackness hinged on a racist articulation of black social and political difference—a difference that is not embodied, but rather operates on and through the body. The genealogy of Blackness that articulates its alterity through the logic of a distance from the ability to be self-possessed and within the terms ownership more broadly indexes the basis for liminal Blackness. Saidiya Hartman refers to this condition as the *unfolding* of slavery’s ongoing impact on the here and now, a process that lays bare the imprint of history onto the black body, and onto places and institutions that retain legal and definitional power over the designation of black personhood.[41] Blackness was created as a means to justify slavery and colonial exploitation on the basis of human biological difference.[42] Biological

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[39] Here I am guided by Michelle Wright’s discussion of Jefferson (p. 16) in *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) in reference to Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1803).

[40] *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983) by Cedric Robinson.

[41] Hartman discusses slavery as an *unfolding* in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 51.

[42] I draw on Omi and Winant’s description of the movement of race from a biological to a social understanding in *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 1986). Blackness and race more generally were primarily understood as biological within mainstream Western and U.S. culture until 1945 when biological understandings of difference were challenged by political and social movements and positions that began arguing for

understandings of race have been challenged as they have provided a means for the ongoing labor and political exploitation of racial, gendered, and sexual difference.[43]

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's characterization of Africa as "the dark continent" that would forever be inferior and situated outside civilization as defined by the existence of a liberal democratic state strongly shaped nineteenth-century understandings of Africa as a dark place populated by dark people.[44] Also contributing to nineteenth-century understandings of race, Joseph Arthur de Gobineau articulates racial purity as embodied based not on race but first on class and social status, but was advanced within American racism to bolster the belief in race as biological.[45] In conversation with naturalized understandings of race, Blackness signals both a system of hierarchy based in the social relations produced by racism as an institution, as well as a space of liminality given meaning by the condition of self-dispossession advanced through but not limited to Blackness. As in the case of Glover, personhood functions as a site that is indeterminate and interstitial and through which Blackness is indexed, but is not conferred subject status.

As cited in the chapter epigraph, Fred Moten asserts: "The history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist. Blackness—the extended movement of a specific upheaval, an ongoing irruption that anarranges every line—is a strain that pressures the

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social constructionist conceptions of race and identity more broadly instead.

[43] For example, in *Becoming Black* Wright describes how there is no biological basis for race: ". . . there is no such thing as a 'black,' 'white,' or 'Asian' gene, and the amount of genetic disparity between persons of different races is the same as that between persons in the same racial category" (1).

[44] Wright, 44.

[45] Wright, 46. Wright points out how de Gobineau's theories were focused principally around class, but in the U.S. context his ideas were used to forward racism and race essentialist ideas of race as a biological manifestation of inferiority.

assumption of the equivalence of personhood and subjectivity."[46] Moten's understanding of Blackness accounts for the ways in which as a process it operates outside of bodies.[47] The articulation of person and subject is revealed as illusory with regard to Blackness.[48] This articulation of Blackness as a "fact" of object resistance directs us to the history of the relationship between Blackness and object status. A relation that I assert is rooted in the fractional logic of black humanity based in the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787 that advanced the economic and political condition of liminal Blackness. The Three-Fifths Compromise further facilitated the shifting of Blackness in and out of personhood, property and therefore object status thus illuminating the continuity between black precarity established within the dichotomy of slave and free states. Thus, Blackness, as it has functioned through the constitution of the American Midwest as a region through the Northwest Ordinance and in the U.S. more broadly has been constituted through its own process of *unfolding*.

Visual Capture and the Economistics of Liminal Blackness

The economic definition of Blackness for political representation purposes that characterized the function of the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787 is directly connected to its designation as unprotectable and therefore liminal. This unprotectability is directly tied to the visual representation of Blackness as defined through the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. For instance, the fugitive slave notice requesting the apprehension of Glover ran in the *Missouri*

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[46] From *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). See p. 1 for Moten's theorization places a conceptual limit on notions of the human that do not account for the inherent and ongoing tension that Blackness specifically has produced through its colonial, slave trade, and military service genealogies and legacies.

[47] Moten does not disembody the space of black subjectivity, and he resists a delineation of Blackness that would situate it always within the terms of anti or post identity, due to its liminality.

[48] I refer to Sylvia Wynter's discussion of Blackness in relation to the human in "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument" *CR: The New Centennial Review* Vol. 3 No. 3 (2003): 257-337.

Republican for the last two weeks of May of 1852. Paid for by Glover's former owner Benammi S. Garland, the notice reads:

> Two Hundred Dollars Reward. Ran away from the subscriber, living 4 miles west of the city of St. Louis, on Saturday night last, a negro man by the name of Joshua; about 35 or 40 years of age, about 6 feet high, spare, with long legs and short body, full suit of hair, eyes inflamed and red; his color is an ashy black. Had on when he went away a pair of black satinet pantaloon paints, pair boots, an old-fashioned black dress coat, and osnaburg shirt. He took no clothes with him. The above reward will be paid for his apprehension if taken out of the State, and fifty dollars if taken in the State.' May 17, 1852. B.S. Garland.[49]

The reward offered for the capture Glover represents a percentage of the exchange value that he would be worth at auction.[50] The fugitive notice assigns numerical values to the distance traveled by both Glover and his captor. It offers two hundred dollars for out-of-state capture and fifty dollars if he were caught in state. Thus, freedom and slavery, free states and slave states, together create the economic structure for the apprehension of fugitive slaves. Since out-of-state capture is presumably determined by free-states, as they constitute the desired locales of escape out of slavery capture in free states actually generate more revenue for bounty hunters and slave catchers thus providing incentive to capture in slave states. Karl Marx delineates the political economy of exchange in *Capital* in his discussion of the commodity's use-value and exchange-value with regard to the social relations of capitalist political economy:

> The commodity is a thing without phenomenon, a thing in flight that surpasses the senses (it is invisible, intangible, inaudible, and odorless); but this transcendence is not altogether spiritual, it retains that bodiless body which we have recognized as making the difference between specter and spirit. What surpasses the senses still passes before us in the silhouette of the sensuous body that it nevertheless lacks or that remains inaccessible to us (151) . . . No substantial essence hides behind the thing, but effect born of relations (154).

According to Marx's articulation of the commodity fetish, social relations under capitalism are disguised as relationships between commodities, rather than relationships between laboring populations and capital. This relation occurs outside of the use-value of a particular

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[49] Jackson and McDonald, 25. See Figure 1.2.

[50] Marx discusses exchange value and use-value in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867): 148.

commodity—its utility as an object. Rather, it is produced through the exchange of objects, and it is at the moment of marketability that a thing transforms into a commodity.

In *Capital* Marx describes the commodity as a "queer thing" that is produced out of exchange relations that he delineates through the equation selling to buy (C->M->C), a hypothetical wherein someone sells in order to acquire or accumulate, a framework that emphasizes the utility or use-value of an object. Thus, Marx marginalizes the utility of the commodity in favor of a focus on what he refers to as buying to sell (M->C->M) which represents the relations of exchange. He argues that it is in the process of exchange where something "queer" or mystifying occurs and lingers—the object, in its transition from a thing to a commodity, acquires exchange-value. Marx explains that the difference between the surplus formula (M-M1) and the exchange formula is that surplus generated through the money-form describes a tangible change: M-M1—where M1 represents surplus-value. Although Marx identifies exchange-value, he nonetheless remains confounded by it due to its seeming intangibility.[51]

Jacques Derrida argues that Marx's focus on the exchange-value of the commodity occludes a connected excess that is produced in exchange value. Derrida asserts that not only should the excess in meaning that creates exchange value be interrogated, but also that which is attached to use-value must examined as well.[52] Derrida's argument is particularly significant given the construction of human capital that transformed Blackness into a commodity. To see the

[51] Marx, 146-152. This process is described in the context of the circulation of commodities, and the production of money into capital. Also, here I draw on Peter Rachleff's *Black Labor in Richmond, 1865-1890* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984).

[52] In *Specter's of Marx* Trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), Derrida discusses Marx's analysis of exchange-value and what he understands as the mystical character or fetish in commodities that is generated from the transition from use-value to exchange value, when a thing is made into a commodity. Derrida advances a discussion of Marx's description of the commodity through specters and ghosts specifically with regard to Marx's critique of Stirner in *The German Ideology* and in Marx's explanation of the formula that yields exchange-value in *Capital*.

life and power of use-value becomes another way to value black life rather than to situate slave personhood as crudely attached to exchange-value as the linchpin of the accumulation of capital through circulation. Marx's concerns about the relationship between exchange and use value is critical here, because it is this process that undergirds the economic logic of persons as property that circumscribes the liminality of black life under slavery.

Moreover, Marx's articulation of the process by which exchange value is attached to the commodity as it is transitions to an object to be sold, describes the way in which capital picks up more value in circulation. The object in a sense becomes more than it was before its transition to a commodity (M1). When the thing to be sold transitions into a commodity it attains exchange-value. Marx assigns the value attained in circulation to the labor of the worker who produces the commodity. He refers to this particular form of work that occurs through the bodily form of alienation he refers to as "moving power:"

> "For instance, the foot is merely the prime mover of the spinning-wheel, while the hand, working with the spindle, and drawing and twisting, performs the real operation of spinning. It is this last part of the handcraftman's implement that is first seized upon by the industrial revolution, leaving the workman, in addition to his new labour of watching the machine with his eyes and correcting its mistakes with his hands, the merely mechanical part of being the moving power."[53]

"Moving power" as a descriptor for the invisible labor of Marx's exploited industrial worker, also expresses the condition of labor attributed to black fugitive status. Marx explains that the process of value exchange is a site of injury in which moving power is sited as labor, a site wherein the fetish reigns, therefore we might understand the attribution of value as possessing the potential to produce collective trauma. Marx's analysis of moving labor as a coming together of the skills of the worker, and the requirements of machine work, offers an

[53] Marx, 374.

important theorization of the way in which the bodily discipline under "moving power," is in fact an articulation of the labor of the body that the process demands.[54]

Thus, fugitive labor as moving labor then characterizes the erasure of the labor of all enslaved populations that contribute to the social conditions that propel black fugitivity status into motion. For example, black women's challenge to slavery on the plantation as Angela Davis demonstrates existed as part of a tradition of black self-determined defiance of the conditions of captivity connected to the moving labor of fugitives such as Harriet Tubman and Joshua Glover.[55] Thus, the labor of fugitive movement defies the understanding of economic value that attached the value of black life and personhood to property and commodity status, even as it draws on the history of resistance launched from that very status.

Stephanie Smallwood describes exchange value as yielding excess under slavery, specifically with regard to Blackness as a commodity status.[56] Smallwood details the ways in which the process of commodification is actually a representational process that confers meaning in addition to value: "As a discursive system however, commodification always exists alongside other, competing systems of representation, meaning commodification is always a political process. It is always a contest between different systems of representing or articulating value" (295). For Smallwood value is part of a larger system that is generated out of rival forms of representation that produce other forms of value. While Marx determines that value is generated in the process of commodity exchange of the products of industrial labor, Smallwood asserts that

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[54] I return to moving labor in chapter four in a discussion of the production of alternative value in relation to Blackness.

[55] From Davis' essay "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" *The Massachusetts Review* Vol. 13, No. 1/2, Woman: An Issue (Winter – Spring 1972): 81-100. Also, see Sarah Haley's *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016) addresses this with regard to black women and captivity in the convict labor system.

[56] From Stephanie Smallwood's "Commodified Freedom: Interrogating the Limits of Anti-slavery Ideology in the Early Republic" *Journal of the Early Republic* Vol. 24, No. 2 (Summer 2004): 289-298.

multiple competing forms of value exist. Smallwood's delineation of commodification accounts for economic and social meaning attributed to commodities that are produced outside of the social relations of the economic market, but that are constitutive of it with particular regard for cultural representation.

Further, Stuart Hall asserts that all existing meaning in the world is predicated on earlier forms of meaning, therefore a prior desire or anticipation produces the commodity fetish, the disarticulation of labor from the object.[57] Along these lines, the slave notice possesses an economic structure that functions like a price tag, it notes an exchange-value for the fugitive slave, but at the same time the reality of its existence makes plain the fact that competing forms of value exist. Freedom, for the fugitive slave, cancels out exchange-value—the cost of life and being assigned a raw bodily economic worth under slavery, a competing system of value. Several forms of value are signaled in and through the slave notice: the exchange-value of capture (in state and out of state), in addition to the systems of value that we do not see such as the knowledge and courage to escape as well as an experiential understanding of the geography of escape—where to go, and how to get there. These forms of value are situated as a political economy of freedom elaborated through the tradition of black fugitivity as black self-determination. Therefore, we might say that the economy of freedom as it determines the value of black personhood mediates between the demands of the racial state and the exploitative liminal effects of capital.

Therefore, the fugitive slave notice signals a representational economy, a system for the production, exchange, and circulation of meaning that exceeds the economy of money-person exchange for which Blackness is mobilized. The stock print figure that accompanied the notice

[57] See *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* Eds. Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans, Sean Nixon (London: SAGE Publications, 1997).

of a slave on the run, known technically as a stereotype attests to this.[58] The stereotype that was a part of the general stock print-types signifies the internal contradictions and erasures around personhood illuminated through the slave notice. The slave notice stereotype was in use until the end of the Civil War, and it came to signify the dispossession of black subjectivity based in its property status. The ongoing significance of the fugitive notice as a visual representation of property in personhood designates slavery as a capitalist economic system signals this history.[59] Along these lines, the representational significance as well as the circulation of the fugitive notice reveal the exchange relations of slavery as they assign value differentially to slaves.

Thus, the fugitive notice for the capture of Glover indexes the institution of slavery's construction of Blackness as an epistemic economy through the legal and social reproduction of an exchange value in Blackness within the institution of slavery.[60] This is a value that according to the economics of the slave trade depreciated due to enslaved people's age, physical ailments, disability, and death, when in fact all slave labor even from those who were physically impaired slaves—although due to the conditions of labor many slaves were disabled—yielded exchange value that is still in circulation today.[61]

Sarah Blackwood refers to the slave notice as black portraiture, which she describes as a conjuncture of photographic and visual and textual based modes.[62] Blackwood discusses the

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[58] See Figure 1.2.

[59] For instance, artists such as like Glenn Ligon and Kara Walker have brought the vestiges of the legacy of this material culture and the iconography it produced into the contemporary moment.

[60] Here I refer to Saidiya Hartman's "Venus in Two Acts" *Small Axe* Vol. 26 (June 2008): 1–14. I also refer to Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

[61] We might look for contemporary examples of this in the endowments of corporate, governmental, and academic institutions that are continuing to thrive on the wealth generated from black slave labor. Also, see *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013) by Craig Steven Wilder.

[62] By visual texts, Blackwood refers to newspaper accounts, literary narratives, and other written-forms as generating images and representations of Blackness.

print stereotype as a pre-photographic site of the continuity between literary and visual representations of Blackness as generative of visual capture thereby creating a space for descriptive language in literary depictions of slave life. In this way, the stereotype as a newspaper stock print-type can be regarded as part of the visual tradition that preceded photography. Thus, the fugitive slave notice as medium through which the stereotype operates is also rendered a pre-photographic technology. The slave notice, as a pre-photographic technology, arrests motion through the representation of the stereotype and the descriptive language of identification. Thus, the slave notice serves as an indication of the moving labor of fugitive slaves out of conditions of racialized gendered and sexual alienation produced by slavery. Fugitive movement through the production of an alternative way to value black life directly resists the market relations of exchange under slavery and in this way exceeds the description of the slave based on the projections of the master as it publicizes both the exchange and use-value of black fugitive slaves.

Glover is described as a man in the notice even as we are supposed to know that he is a slave and therefore property. Through the notice Glover represents a schism in the binary between real and imaginary, material and immaterial—Glover takes on a life in the slave notice stereotype as his liminal status is transferred from the notice to the warrant for the arrest of Booth and Rycraft and finally to the discourse of the 1854 Wisconsin's Supreme Court decision on the unconstitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Due to Glover's escape to Canada, his representation in the Wisconsin decision is shaped by the fugitive slave notice including the print stereotype as well as the designation of him as a "person held to service" in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, and property in the context of the U.S. Constitution. Together these understandings of Glover constitute the terms of liminal Blackness to which he was subject. The three designations we might say operate like a pre-photographic mugshot of Glover deploying

the logic of stopped-motion designed to capture him and to limit the terms of personhood extended to him based in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the Wisconsin decision of 1854.

Glover's fugitive status challenges black liminality as a process of visual capture stopped-motion, and the slave notice points to the history of racism with regard to Blackness through visual capture.[63] The stereotype as a visual representational economy of stopped-motion simultaneously collapsing Glover's individual use-value into one of collective black enslavement through a print type meant to represent him and all slaves on the run. The notice is a site of crisis over "lost assets" that simultaneously allow us to see the tension between slave and free-states, and black existence.

Moreover, the reward offered in the notice draws value from the reduction of Blackness to an economic status that is legitimated by the electoral enumeration of slaves in the Three-Fifths Compromise through which Missouri, the state from which Glover escaped, was brought into the union. The stereotype—for its contemporary significance and its role in print culture and technology articulates the personhood and property dimensions of Blackness. The stereotype and the slave notice function as evidence of the contradictory language that determine black property status at times from a designation of personhood present in the Fugitive Slave Act with regard to the extension of its power through the warrant. In this way, liminal Blackness offers a way to describe the ways in which the understanding of Blackness as unprotected yet claimable extended beyond the plantation and into stopped-motion of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 activated by and through the dichotomy between slave and free states.

Therefore, two hundred dollars, fifty dollars, and three-fifths operate as the quantified forms of stopped-motion that consistently renewed the property status of Glover, and by

[63] See *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* Eds. Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

extension of enslaved and free populations more extensively, thereby further enumerating the condition of black liminality through the disjuncture between personhood and property. That slaves were counted as three-fifths of a person for the purposes of white electoral representation, and could be worth "two hundred dollars" if caught and returned established the modes through which the property status and precarious personhood of Glover and others delineate the liminality of Blackness. Liminality here is activated through both "buying to sell" and "selling to buy." Black liminality is then more than the condition of in-between, not fully formed, not yet here, it is also a form of power gaining expression through the visual apprehension of Blackness in motion in its attempt to enact change. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was an important engine for the operation of this quantified notion of Blackness that revealed the deep intimacy and interrelation of slave and free states as it attempted to usher forward an image of compromise and national unity.

The embodiment of black fugitive slaves simultaneously read as property and laboring persons who had fled their charges index the Fugitive Slave Act's attempt at conjuring up an image of national cooperation at a time of crisis between slave and free states, while at the same time revealing the structures of early racial capitalism to be interdependent.[64] In *Aberrations in Black: Toward A Queer of Color Critique* (2004) Roderick Ferguson describes the ways that the queer figure of the black drag queen prostitute points to the terms that allow for her emergence. Following the lead of Ferguson's queer figure, the shadow of the black fugitive subject indexes the processes that produce fugitive status such as quantified personhood and forced labor, on which the state is founded. I say shadow to give weight to the representational and actual dark dimensions of fugitive status that site the liminal personhood of Blackness subject to hiding and

[64] Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983): 75. Also see, Peter Rachleff's *Hard-Pressed in the Heartland: The Hormel Strike and the Future of the Labor Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1993).

running. Within the terms of liminality, Blackness names a status that approaches but never reaches legitimized personhood. With regard to the Fugitive Slave Act, the shadow describes the very condition of fugitive status and mobility.

William Henry Fox Talbot was also attentive to shadows, referring to photography as "fixing shadows," a term that conveyed the similarly used "shadow catching" with regard to photographic experimentation.[65] Talbot's invention of the negative-positive photo process utilized both the capacity of lightness and darkness set in relation to one another thus generating the reproductive capacity of photography. The negative-positive process, in so far as it operated as a structure of representational social meaning, technicalized the hierarchical and dichotomous cultural dimensions that existed between light and dark as a photographic development process. Bryan Palmer refers to the representational significance of what he refers to as "cultures of darkness" as one analytic through which to read power relations in capitalist societies.[66] Palmer determines that "the dark" is not only a site of marginal existence, but also one of generative social and political critique.[67]

The fugitive slave notice is thus expressive of an economistics of Blackness sited within a register of pre-photographic visual capture. Thus, the fugitive slave notice, as I have argued, upheld the Fugitive Slave Act as it produced an image of national unity and extended personhood differentially. In this way, the fugitive slave notice functioned as a primary mode through which we might say stopped-motion as a strategy of curtailment was exercised discursively and visually in the context of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Through its structure

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[65] See Larry Schaaf and William Henry Fox Talbot, *Records of the Dawn of Photography: Talbot's Notebooks P & Q* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): xviii and Hoy, 29.

[66] Refer to Bryan Palmer's *Cultures of Darkness: Night Travels in the Histories of Transgression* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

[67] This serves as a point of challenge to Hegel's racialization of Africa as the inferior "dark continent."

of descriptive identification, the fugitive slave notice articulated the contradictory ways in which Blackness was understood with regard to personhood and property status. The Fugitive Slave Act as a visual mode of representing and envisioning national unity depended on the legal right to seek out, contain, and curtail the movement of fugitive slaves and black people more broadly.

As I demonstrated legal and political discourses of the Northwest Ordinance and the Fugitive Slave Act defined Blackness as unprotected and therefore claimable by way of liminal personhood and property status. A focus on the fugitive slave notice as a representational economy of image production also points to the technological and ideological dimensions of black liminality as a strategy of stopped-motion endeavoring to catch and fix shadows. The fugitive slave notice stops motion through the use of the still image of the stereotype and its descriptive language of identification. Thus, the process of capturing fugitive slaves was not only a brutal and active process of manhunts and incarceration, but it was also a process of image production both visual and descriptive, that generated knowledge about slaves and federal and state's rights. The slave notice along with the print stereotype and the warrant were all utilized to create an image of not only Glover's relationship to personhood, but of the contradictions in the project of envisioning the nation to which the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 contributed.

Thus, the fugitive notice that was posted for Glover's capture is a pivotal coming together of discursive, legal, and cultural codes that rely on one another for meaning. The visual descriptive knowledge of the notice and the stereotype instigated a battle over meaning and self-definition that influenced how black people were seen alongside the images they presented and produced of themselves. Slaves were required to present freedom papers and other documents to demonstrate their free status, and to attempt to challenge bills of sale and runaway notices that moved subjects in and out of property and personhood status. Identity documents were mobilized to do the work of representation demanding visual accounts of black slave and free status that

defined the designation of legal personhood.

Blackness and Photographic Capture

By the late-nineteenth century pre-photographic modes like the fugitive slave notice were successfully absorbed into the practices of criminal classification and documentation of early modern police photography. John Tagg's description of the emergence of police photography demonstrates the advancement of visual capture processes and practices into a modern technology.[68] The fugitive slave notice as a pre-photographic enactment of stopped-motion offers a lens from which to consider the history of Blackness and photography. In this way, we might read acts of black self-determination as simultaneously a project of image production that challenges the liminal conditions of stopped-motion.

When photography emerged in 1839 two imaging techniques were popular: the talbottype or the calotype which was based on a technique that introduced the negative-positive process thereby making photographic reproductions possible, and the daguerreotype which yielded one positive image, it was the more popular process through the 1840s, but fell out of use in the latter part of the century because it was too arduous.[69]

Talbot's first experiments with stopped-motion in 1851 labored to isolate in minute detail human and animal movements into individual still images.[70] Scientists and photography practitioners used early stopped-motion to explore questions that had previously been situated in the realm of the spiritual, the divine, the mystical, and thus, outside the boundaries of what humans could see or know for certain. The first attempt at stopped-motion photography divided

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[68] I refer to Tagg's "Evidence, Truth and Order: A Means of Surveillance" in *Visual Culture: A Reader* (1999) edited by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall.

[69] See *The Book of Photography: The History, the Technique, the Art, the Future* by Anne Hoy (National Geographic, 2005).

[70] Hoy, 61.

the movements of a galloping horse into separate sequences in order to determine if the horse at any point had all four hooves off of the ground. The practice of disarticulating the full fast motion of a horses gallop into manageable visual representations of slowed stillness reflected photography's visual and technical endowment based in still life painting and portraiture.[71]

The use of photography in the U.S. as proof or truth was established in the 1890s when the Bertillon System of Criminal Identification—a point of focus in my second chapter—was popularized. The Bertillon system, a French devised process of criminal identification, introduced the use of the mugshot and offered an organizational method to catalog knowledge about the bodies and activities of people who were arrested. Police departments using the Bertillon system collected height, hair, weight, complexion, and beard measurements, the dimensions of the head, nose, ears, forehead, and build, as well as marks, scars, moles, deformities, and information regarding criminal history, nativity, and peculiarities of habit and action together on one record.[72] This generated a convergence between photography and the attentiveness to minute detail present in the early experimentation of stopped-motion through surveillance and police work.[73]

As Shawn Michelle Smith has argued, the nineteenth-century was subject to a transformation in image making that changed how people saw and remembered particularly with regard to racialized difference.[74] Photography held the promise for black thinkers and organizers,

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[71] Hoy, 406-12.

[72] I refer here to archival research I conducted concerning the Minneapolis Police Department's Bertillon ledgers and the St. Paul Police Department's Bertillon mugshots that span the years 1891-1918. Minnesota Historical Society.

[73] See Tagg's "Evidence, Truth and Order: A Means of Surveillance," in *Visual Culture: The Reader* Eds. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: SAGE Publications, 1999): 253.

[74] See Shawn Michelle Smith's *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

like Douglass and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, of producing new representations of Blackness that would help to eventually put in place the social conditions that would allow for the recognition of black humanity.[75] At this moment, efforts to free, capture, and picture black enslaved persons operated concurrently with the experimentation and popularization of photographic processes.[76] In 1850, the same year of the ratification of the Fugitive Slave Act, Louis Agassiz, a Swiss natural history professor and inventor then teaching at Harvard University, was at work making daguerreotypes of slaves in the U.S. and in Brazil.

Moreover, the daguerreotype was an early photographic process that yielded one positive image that was not reproducible. As a process popularized within the cultural conditions of slavery it forced to the fore the issue of the private ownership of the imaged and enslaved black body. Agassiz's daguerreotypes have come under strong scrutiny in black visual cultural studies—scholars, curators, and practitioners have pointed out his abuse of power particularly with regard to the demand that slaves pose nude. Suzanne Schneider has discussed this process in relation to what she refers to as the fetishized homoeroticism embedded in the gaze of Agassiz's daguerreotypes.[77] Thus, photography's emergence as a medium was bound up with the history and practice of black, gendered, and sexual property-status and personhood. Like the Fugitive Slave Act, compulsory photographic technologies attempted to identify, define, and control Blackness. As the example of Agassiz demonstrates, photography's advancement was connected to that of American and European nineteenth-century political conquest and nation building. Agassiz's body of photographic including the political and social relations through which it was

[75] Wallace and Smith, 18.

[76] In making this claim I am guided by works by Fatimah Tobing Rony, Jennifer Brody, Michele Wallace, Amelia Jones, Andrea Smith, Daniel Heath Justice, and Jenny Sharpe.

[77] See Suzanne Schneider's "'Polygenesis, Pornography, and Other 'Perfidious Influences'" in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

produced it illuminates this history. Thus, stopped-motion as a photographic process importantly sites the legal and political division and dispersal of power thereby designating the liminality of Blackness as one of visual capture through historical attempts to curtail black movement and self-determination.

Stopped-motion, the Discursive Field, & Intersectionality

I draw on Michel Foucault's articulation of the existence of a discursive field and Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of representational intersectionality to delineate a framework from which to articulate stopped-motion as a photographic technology that designates both image and political capture. Together their theories demonstrate that knowledge relies on earlier knowledge as it generates legitimacy largely through linguistic exclusion. In *the Archeology of Knowledge* Foucault defines the discursive field as a collection of unified thought. He describes it as being constituted by "the totality of all effective statements (whether spoken or written), in their dispersion as events and in the occurrence that is proper to them" (12). Foucault elaborates:

> Before approaching, with any degree of certainty, a science, or novels, or political speeches, or the œuvre of an author, or even a single book, the material with which one is dealing is, in its raw, neutral state, a population of events in the space of discourse in general. One is led therefore to the project of a pure description of discursive events as the horizon for the search for the unities that form within it.[78]

Foucault's description of knowledge that is available to us as a "population of events in the space of discourse" speaks to the way in which Crenshaw's conceptualization of representational intersectionality marks the multiple and crosscutting modes through which representation can produce oppression and critique at the same time.[79] Just as visual culture

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[78] See Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on* Language (1972) Tavistock Publications Ltd. 12 Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 2010): 12.

[79] Intersectionality not only accounts for the many ways that people are situated in relation to power, but also the ways they are rendered vulnerable to certain forms of harm due to their multiple and cross-cutting identities and social locations. Crenshaw identifies three types of intersectionality: institutional, representational, and legal in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" *Stanford Law Review* Vol. 43 No. 6 (Jul 1991): 1241-1299.

encapsulates a range of materials whose purpose is to be looked at and read including text-based works and synesthetic accounts that might generate the visual through the use of sound for example, a discursive field also operates through practices of engagement, association, and disarticulation. From this vantage point stopped-motion operates within a discursive field, a nexus of shared and exchanged interconnected meaning structured by scientific, political, and legal systems of knowledge. Although stopped-motion is commonly applied within of the field of photography, the very nature of a discursive field necessitates that we consider the ways that the field (i.e. photography and law) produces shared meaning.

Therefore, stopped-motion as an intellectual principle or an analytic is dependent on previous structures of thought. I assert that the Fugitive Slave Act constitutes a previous source of knowledge—though only one-year prior—through which to trace the production of stopped-motion as a mechanism through which to apprehend motion and exercise control. As a knowledge source that utilizes stopped-motion, the Fugitive Slave Act then is not separate from, but rather a part of the discursive construction of the principle of stopped-motion itself. Concepts rely on previous knowledge to become intelligible.

Stuart Hall defines representation as the act of naming meaning that already exists.[80] According to Hall, "a message must be perceived as meaningful discourse and be meaningfully de-coded before it has an effect, a use, or satisfies a need."[81] Therefore, the use precedes the existence of meaning, language, and representation. By resting on earlier systems of knowledge, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the flash deploy stopped-motion in their processes of capture, representation, and image making.

[80] I refer here to the documentary *Representation & the Media* (1997) SAGE Video London.

[81] "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" (Birmingham: Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1973).

As Hall asserts representation assigns meaning to words and images that exist outside of the actual object referenced. When articulated in relation to the Fugitive Slave Act, stopped-motion can then be understood as a process that generated a national image of black unprotectability that also managed abolitionist organizing. Stopped-motion as a mode of representation then anticipates the ways in which it might be useful to advances within the realm of photography such as the advent of the electronic flash.

As Edward Farber affirms, photography is structured by another layer of meaning: '"It was good discipline looking through the ground glass of a viewfinder with a camera on a tripod . . . Now, I look at my fire pictures and accident pictures, things I do under stress, and I'm amazed to find that the subconscious mind is in there helping me compose a picture."[82] The discursive field and the implication of the co-construction of representational modes allow us to identify the resonance and mutual articulation within sites outside of photography such as the state practice of capture and surveillance of black subjects through the mobilization of the Fugitive Slave Act.

Identifying stopped-motion not only as a technological, but a representational process that is expressed through the legal discourse of the Fugitive Slave Act and the image production of photography, requires an engagement with the way that photographic images have been engaged as they have been generated through both the technological and the representational. In *Camera Lucida* (1980), Roland Barthes describes the act of sitting for a picture as undergoing a small death—*la petit mort*, which describes the belief that a part of the self is taken by the flash of the camera, and transferred into the photograph. The act of self or soul-stealing that "la petit mort" implies remains simultaneously bound up with its alternative significance as the unfolding or undoing of self that often characterizes the reaching of orgasm. Barthes' paranoia and mistrust of photography had to do with its hyper-reproducibility as a commodity, and what he saw as its

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[82] Rulseh, 2.

function to copy rather than to create.

Relatedly, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer describe the reproducibility of the commodity in terms of the "Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in their foundational text *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), written while the two were in exile in the United States. Using the visual analogy of the vital force that paintings supposedly emit, they argue that while "true art" like the painting *Mona Lisa* has an aura of authenticity highly reproducible cultural products like photographs do not; instead, these forms of culture function primarily to reproduce the existing capitalist social relations. I am interested in how photography can be thought about as doing both—asserting truth-value as well as an endless reproducibility within capitalist exchange relations based the visual and legal capture of Blackness.

Lighting Stopped-Motion

> We can think of the lantern as a prosthesis made mandatory after dark, a technology that made it possible for the black body to be constantly illuminated from dusk to dawn, made knowable, locatable and contained within the city.[83]

The advancement of photography and its subsequent ascendency to a seemingly unflappable status as documenter of authentic truth has been absolutely contingent on its use of light—natural and flash. Nineteenth-century pre-emancipation experimentation with stopped-motion technology was foundational to the electronic flash unit lighting advancements on which Farber's invention was built. In addition to stopped-motion technological experiments that paved the way for photographic lighting advances, there were earlier pre-photographic compulsory lighting technologies deploying stopped-motion that had particular consequences for black subjects. The use of lighting and image production technologies to discipline and break down the human body's movements into constitutive moments was fundamental to early stopped-motion

[83] Simone Browne's "Everybody's Got A Little Light Under the Sun: Black Luminosity and the Visual Culture of Surveillance" *Cultural Studies* Vol. 26 No. 4 (July 2012): 553.

experimentation.[84] Before the advent of flash photography and prior to the integration of police photography in late nineteenth-century police work, alternative image capture and lighting techniques were used to track and to reveal that which eluded vision.

Light has been used as a tool to discipline and dehumanize black people, even as it has been subversively recuperated to assist with resistant practices such as reading and aiding in covert communications and escape from captivity. Nevertheless, being visible, seen, and looked at holds an important place in the arsenal of racist and colonialist violence and economic exploitation tactics and processes. Simone Browne's "Everybody's Got a Little Light Under the Sun: Black Luminosity and The Visual Culture of Surveillance" (2012) details the ways in which lantern and candle light have paradoxically been used as technologies of invisibility to police black people. With a title that intertextually references the bridge lyrics to "Flash Light," (1978) the popular funk classic by Parliament, Browne lays bare the relationship between the history of black captivity, compulsory lighting, and black resistant cultural practices.

Brown's theory of *black luminosity* cites the coercive tactics of lantern laws instituted in colonial New York City during the eighteenth-century that forced black slaves who were outside after dusk to hold a candle or a lantern to their faces. Browne argues that rather than produce visible human subjects lantern laws position black people outside of the category of the human, thus rendering them invisible.[85] The lantern laws relay the contradiction embedded in the exchange relations of slavery that positioned Blackness conveniently as a liminal site between property and personhood. Black luminosity accounts for the ways that Blackness can render subjects illuminated and invisible at the same time. Browne explains how the condition of

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[84] Hoy, 60.

[85] Browne describes the way in which black luminosity's surveillance lighting actually generated a saturation of light that made it difficult to distinguish the facial features of the lit person rendering them unable to be seen.

unvisibility gave rise to “acts of freedom,” a number of life-affirming performative strategies that black people created to survive, and through which they communicated with one another. She points out how these life-affirming practices are resonant with urban black expressive practices today such as dance. Thus, Blackness at its core is thus undeniably attached to processes of seeing and being seen.

Browne positions her theory of black luminosity more explicitly in relation to Foucault’s definition of panoptic power as it operates through the: “‘the realm of the sun, of never ending light . . . the non-material illumination that falls equally on all those on whom it is exercised”’ (545-5). Browne’s title also recalls the culminating refrain of the song “Flash Light,” “under the sun,” “under the sun,” “under the sun” that identifies a repetitive and interminable light that shines on “everybody” in contradistinction to the spot, neon, stop, street, and red lights that are “shinin’ on the funk” and do the work of cultural and political illumination. The use of light to reveal and to control, including photography’s use of light and darkness, is ensconced in racism’s history of capture, confinement, and enslavement. Thus, racism and colonialism together functioned as political maneuvers that rendered lantern lighting a mode of policing in colonial New York.

With regard to the stroboflash, Farber’s privileging of motion over lighting might now be read as a potential challenge to the primacy of light-chasing or “shadow fixing,” as Talbot referred to photography, within the history of the advancement of the medium. Along these lines, the call for stopping motion might perhaps push back on the expectation to perfect seeing ability, and the investment in the will to see above all at each stage of photo advancement. The logic structuring his approach to stopped-motion on this level might be read as offering a critique to that of the stopped-motion practice of the Fugitive Slave Act as a tool of surveillance and visual capture that, if possible, would be made to light the hiding places of all fugitive slaves. At the

same time, the investment in stopped action or motion, at its core, remains centrally a practice of visual and legal containment.

Just as the lantern laws and the flash have played particular roles in shaping how we see bodies conditioned by racialized gendering and commodification, the Fugitive Slave Act produced an articulation of stopped-motion that further encoded Blackness as property that operated within a legal structure that produced lantern laws and fugitive notices. Even as they mobilize seemingly divergent strategies of capture, photographic technique of stopped-motion although photographic in its operation nonetheless provides an analytical lens through which to interrogate the political and legal deployment of stopped-motion that assists in the process of envisioning and realizing regional and national unity. Visual capture in the case of the lantern laws operated through practices of gender and racial subjection. Control and power operates through image cultures surface for example in relation to the slave men photographed by Agassiz, while the forced experimental, invasive, and repetitive surgeries performed on African American slave women by J. Marion Sims demonstrate the interplay between the stopped-motion of the racialized body and the production of knowledge that would later legitimate the field of gynecology.

In conjunction with the first stopped-motion experiments in the early 1850s, Sims lectured about and published writing on his experiments on the reproductive, sexual, and other bodily organs of slave women as Jeffery S. Sartin has described.[86] Using mirrors, Sims captured the bodies of black women through the reflection of sun and artificial light. From these mirrored reflections he illustrated vaginal fistulas and other reproductive ailments that resulted from pregnancy maladies and untreated conditions inflicting the women. In his medical illustrations he

[86] Here I refer to "J. Marion Sims, The Father of Gynecology: Hero or Villain?" *Southern Medical Journal* Vol. 97 No. 5 (2004) by Jeffrey S. Sartin. Sartin discusses Sims' "Silver Sutures" lecture from 1857.

depicted the women as white, and in his lectures he referred to them as healthy young "Negro women" omitting the reality of their slave status. As he had purchased some of the women for research purposes, his silence on their slave status shielded him from criticism.

Sims' process illustrates another use of light to stop-motion, allowing for a medicalized looking practice that controlled the image construction of the women through his illustrations and descriptions of them thus further managing how they could be seen and understood. This method of looking or what Cartwright and Sturken call a "practice of looking," allowed Sims to perfect the use of the duck-billed speculum, his most widely recognized invention that remains widely utilized in contemporary gynecology. Thus, black women's bodies constituted the intersection of slavery and medicine as gendered and racialized sites structured by liminality. We might ask: what type of gaze was returned to Sims by the black enslaved women as they lie on the operating table? Did the women's eyes meet his or return his gaze? Sims' deployment of light to generate images of black women's bodies might be seen as another attempt to control that which appeared elusive.

Like sitting for a picture, lying on an operating table can be thought about as undergoing a type of small death, *la petit mort*, akin to the one of which Barthes speaks. Thus, *La petit mort* signifies a relationship between death and sexuality, two conditions that Sharon Holland has identified as constitutive of the construction of black identity as it has been subject to the dictates of white Western cultural and economic hegemony.[87] Both the photographic images and the illustrations of Agassiz and Sims of enslaved black people draw on both sexuality and death as the conditions that bring black subjects under close scrutiny. These images draw on death by approximating blackness to increased degrees of illness for research purposes, and more broadly

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[87] I refer to Sharon Holland's *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

to the point of death within the deathly and death threatening institution of slavery even as black practices of resistance challenge this positioning at the same time.

Moreover, Sims' drawings negated both the Blackness and the enslaved status of the women he studied by depicting them as white. His process disappears the women, using their bodies as prototypes for the advancement of gynecological medical procedures. The misrepresentation of the women he experimented on as white or free black women psychically and subjectively denied the exchange relations of slavery, thereby render the women rendering the women property whether he owned them or not, and therefore subject to the will and power of his eye and hand. The practices of Sims and Agassiz allow us to see in concert the stopped-motion of the operating table, the camera flash, and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

Further, assigning gender and sexuality to bodies has not only been a process of identification, as Foucault has pointed out in relation to nineteenth-century Western discourses on sexuality, it has been one of creating knowledge about bodies, categorizing bodies as different types of people—this practice created the homosexual in the mid-nineteenth century and late the heterosexual.[88] In relation to black gender and sexuality in particular, Patricia Hill Collins argues in *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism* (2005) that the discourse of black hypersexuality is rooted in the ongoing practice of approximating and equating black people to animals. The construction of black people as hypersexual has served to justify the violation of black bodies, and light and photography have both contributed to the liminality of Blackness.

Thus, the discursive field, as represented by and through processes of visual capture, is not a consistent, unbroken thru-line of knowledge, but rather occurs as a series of fragmented

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[88] See Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction* Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1976).

enclosures of knowledge systems (i.e. law and medicine) that all appear distinct from one another. In reference to Sims and Agassiz, the emergence and disappearance of black subjectivity and personhood, or rather its liminality, is actually a symptom of the mechanisms of visual capture that seek to render disparate the inherent connections within the discursive field. In line with Agassiz and Sim's, the logic of black liminality that positioned Blackness as unprotectable in the Wisconsin decision replicates the power of stopped-motion in its delineation of Blackness through its designation as a free state and therefore a terminus of black escape. Escape would not be possible without the reality of the existence of both free and slave states along with their approximation and dependence on one another. Thus, although Wisconsin's decision claims to undermine the Fugitive Slave Act, it functions as the Fugitive Slave Act's condition of possibility.

From this juncture, the Fugitive Slave Act's image of national unity functioned as a representational strategy—a unified vision of an imagined reality that in actuality was quite fraught and contradictory. It serves as one central conjuncture through which to trace stopped-motion as a practice of image making, and as a specific tool used to manage black resistance. Black resistance here signifies direct defiance of the Fugitive Slave Act, or a challenge to its logic. Apprehending Blackness in motion was produced as an answer to the dialectical tension that existed between slave and free states. The demand to seek out, arrest, and confine black fugitive subjects on the move back to property status emerged from a political and scientific context where the possibilities for picturing human life that stopped-motion technology offered were newly in circulation.

The Fugitive Slave Act in text and in practice engineered both the emergence and disappearance of black people as subjects, and deployed stopped-motion to reproduce Blackness as an outlaw status that continued to be defined by and to defy the issues of personhood,

property, and commodity that so intimately shaped it. Slave notices and warrants served as the visual technologies that often authorized and accompanied slave owners and federal marshals' use of the Fugitive Slave Act. The descriptions of fugitive slaves codified in fugitive slave notices, and other documents given power by the Fugitive Slave Act to activate modes of surveillance that policed black subjects in "free states" operationalized the image production capacity of stopped-motion of the Fugitive Slave Act. The notice serves as a staging ground for a number of discursive, legal, and cultural struggles over the definition of citizenship, state's rights, and Blackness. This was predicated on physical and spatial control over Blackness contingent on the political position produced by the free-state-slave-state formation. Thus, stopped-motion operates through legal and visual structures of capture.

Fugitivity in Milwaukee and Visual Capture

The city of Milwaukee became significant in the region's discourse on slavery as it served as the site of Glover's escape and Booth's incarceration, and the incubator of the events that ignited the state's open defiance of the federal government. Milwaukee's proximity to Canada, rivers, lakes, and to other free states, as well as its opportunities for work made it an important end point and stop for fugitive slaves. Its accessibility by train and its industrial economy drew black people to the city with the promise of securing factory work. Although exceptionally high in proportion to black factory employment in other cities, as Joe William Trotter points out in his formative study *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945*, racism barred many black migrants from securing industrial jobs, they instead primarily worked as domestics, barbers, beauticians, and porters—the same category of jobs in which they had been concentrated in the South (19). Milwaukee—the largest city in the state at the time, and with the largest black population, which was quite small until the late 1880s—played an important role as the site of rupture that lead to the state Supreme Court's

ruling on the Fugitive Slave Act.[89]

Trotter analyzes the political economy of Milwaukee with regard to its black populations, its consolidation of industrial capital, labor, and its unprecedented election of several socialist mayors (1910-1940). Trotter details the ways in which Milwaukee's practices of managing black racialization have been central to shaping U.S. national and Midwest regional economic and political formations. Trotter's analysis of Milwaukee offers the opportunity to see the ways that industrialism brought the city into contact with other Upper Midwest cities like Detroit, Chicago, and Minneapolis.

In the mid nineteenth-century Milwaukee's small black community did respond to the Fugitive Slave Act through local black newspapers and in community meetings regarding the high profile case of Joshua Glover.[90] The issue of black fugitivity was juxtaposed with "legalized" channels for attaining freedom. For example, Glover's contemporary Sully Watson who bought his freedom from his master in Virginia is a celebrated figure in Milwaukee's city history and in the state in general.[91] Milwaukee served as a site for both the challenge and extension of white liberal personhood as expressed through the repeal of the state decision on the unconstitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act. Although Joshua Glover was a significant figure in the history of the city's struggles for racial justice, he remains marginal in comparison to Sully Watson to some degree perhaps due to the amount of primary documents that remain.

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[89] *Black Settlers in Rural Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1977) by Zachary Cooper.

[90] In 1850 the black population in Milwaukee was about 100. I refer to "The Legacy of Sully Watson: From Slave to Citizen of Milwaukee" by John B. Lundstrom and Albert A. Muchka in *Wisconsin Academy Review* (Fall 1994). The State of Wisconsin Collection: http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/WI/WI-idx?type=HTML&rgn=div1&byte=1778122015.

[91] Lundstrom and Muchka, 1. Regarding the Fugitive Slave Act Lundstrom and Muchka point out that: "The crisis caused members of Milwaukee's black community to band together for the first time to express their political views and defend their rights. A public on October 7, 1850, vigorously attacked the Fugitive Slave Law. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* published the minutes of the meeting including the remarks of Sully's son, William Thomas Watson, who spoke of."

Sully Watson remains an important and prominent figure in Wisconsin antislavery studies. Attaining his free status in 1834, Watson worked as a blacksmith, harness maker, mason, and whitewasher and "made payments toward his man price" of $500 and subsequently bought his free status.[92] He married Susanna Custelo a free black woman and moved to Milwaukee in 1850, where he bought land and established a home. The Milwaukee Public Museum identifies a portrait of him on view as "his receipt for his own freedom." Sully Watson's struggle has to a large degree been discursively situated as a history of exceptional black perseverance into American liberal individualism and personhood.[93] While Glover's subjectivity and escape from slavery and journey to Wisconsin served as a critical moment for deliberation on the role of the federal government over state autonomy. In the context of the distinction between slave and free, Watson's subjectivity becomes recuperable and simultaneously marginal precisely because of the status of black fugitive slaves in the state. In this way, Glover and Watson's experiences are disarticulated narratively in the advancement of the centrality and legal protection of white liberal personhood.

Glover's personhood, like Watson's, shifts with movement to secure and to more fully establish a status as free. As H. Robert Baker has noted Glover as a figure indexes the history of struggles over state's rights and the abolitionist organizing in Wisconsin.[94] The case of Glover incited a battle between the Wisconsin Supreme Court and the federal government on the issue of state's right, it brought slavery more actively into public discourse in the state of Wisconsin along with the unresolved issue of how to deal slave status in non-slave territories that the

[92] "The Legacy of Sully Watson" The State of Wisconsin Collection, *Wisconsin Academy Review* (Fall 1994).

[93] From "The Streets of Old Milwaukee" exhibition interpretive materials at the Milwaukee Public Museum.

[94] Refer to H. Robert Baker's *The Rescue of Joshua Glover: A Fugitive Slave, the Constitution, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006).

Compromise of 1850 had instigated, but could not resolve.

"The Streets of Old Milwaukee" and Black Visual Capture

"The Streets of Old Milwaukee," a permanent exhibition at the Milwaukee Public Museum, serves as a critical juncture wherein the positionality of Glover and Watson sit at the intersection of white liberal personhood and black liminality.[95] "The Streets of Old Milwaukee" indexes precisely the racialized gendered history of the city within which Glover and Watson emerge. A tintype photograph self-portrait of Watson signed by his former master serves as the official confirmation of his freedom. This photographic proof of freedom merges the textual and visual dimensions of image production transferring the text based truth claim of freedom papers to the self-portrait. It affirms the connection between photographic history and that of slavery and capitalist exchange.

"The Streets of Old Milwaukee" at the Milwaukee Public Museum features an installation dedicated to Sully and Susanna Watson called "The Sully Watson House." The exhibition includes historical models of nineteenth-century immigrant "villages," the "gaslight company," and other local well-known businesses in Milwaukee at the time. When I visited the exhibition, I noticed that its immigrant "villages" are almost exclusively Northern and Western European with the exception of an "Eastern European Jewish House." The exhibition serves as a site through which to encounter state history more fully. With interpretive materials that demonstrate its articulation of history vis-à-vis the "village" and "house" structure, the Milwaukee Public Museum highlights the complexity of the city's history with regard to racial and ethnic difference. The house structure to some extent signals an individualism that eclipses collective histories of labor and struggle.

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[95] The Milwaukee Public Museum attracts large numbers of visitors a year, especially from local schools like the Page Museum at the La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles or the Field Museum of Chicago.

Peering through the living room window of the Watson House, I saw the model of Sully Watson, sitting, while Susanna Watson reads next to him, their faces partially lit by the gloomy house and a lantern designed to be historically accurate. The peripheral "street" location of the Watson House outside of the circle of European villages and on the way to the entrance ideologically connects to the installation of Native American tribes of the Upper Midwest situated near the exit hallway of the exhibition. Both act as visual and temporal bookends, reminders of the larger displacement of black, of color, and indigenous histories in official Wisconsin and regional narratives. The exhibition's experiential telling of the city's history is visually codified in the physical and ideological centrality of the white heteropatriarchal settler family unit, represented by dozens of culturally-designated houses complete with life-like reconstructed families that make up the "European Village" situated at its core. The "European village," constructed from the actual historic Milwaukee signature light tan colored building bricks.[96] The bricks landed Milwaukee its nineteenth-century nickname "Cream City" and their use in the exhibition is integral to how the exhibition stages the unfolding of a history haunted by the marginal presence of the figures of the Watsons and of color histories more broadly.[97]

The centrality of the evolution of white personhood can be sited through the layout of the exhibition. Thus, "The Streets of Old Milwaukee" demonstrates the way in which racialized marginality becomes necessary to the production of the centrality of whiteness. The exhibition brings into the present Wisconsin's relationship to black escape through the various crossings

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[96] Milwaukee's cream-colored brick building began in the 1830s made from clay found in the Menominee Valley close to Milwaukee, with a boom from 1850s-1870s increase in brickyards and outbound shipments throughout the region and elsewhere. I refer here to nineteenth-century newspaper accounts of "Cream City" courtesy Milwaukee Public Library.

[97] "The Streets of Old Milwaukee" exhibition's engagement with marginal subjects allow us to interpret the ways in which the narrative that the museum attempts to tell about the founding of the state is implicated in power relations at multiple levels that extend from the peripheral position of the Watsons and Native American tribes to the models of children in the "Eastern European Jewish House" counting money and the complete absence of Asian immigrant, Asian American, and Latino migrants.

that produce black personhood. It serves as a metaphor for the Midwest's regional discourse that has always centered whiteness, positioning racialized identities, specifically Blackness and Native American identity on the margins.

Moreover, the liminality of black personhood rooted in personhood and property status is reproduced through the museum's approach to the past that operates through the positioning on the periphery of the Watson House. The historical models of the Watsons in the exhibition perhaps open up a space through which to consider not only black alterity, but also nonnormative conceptions of humanness with regard to Blackness. The historical model, a person-like construction, signals the ongoing tension of the back and forth shuttling between personhood and objecthood that black liminality signals.

While the historical model is not human, it does signal vitality in its capacity to demonstrate the interconnections between the history of black fugitivity and freedom in the city and more broadly. The vitality of the black historical model we might say speaks to the "vital force" that the Senegalese writer and intellectual Léopold Sédar Senghor describes in relation to Blackness. Not vital in the sense of living to reproduce the existing social relations that attempt to invisibilize the contradictions that are integral to life under capitalism and heteropatriachy, but rather vitality in the sense of wrestling with the tensions and connections between an intersectional Blackness that is culturally and economically produced, and one that emerges from subjective and creative embodiment. These indices of vitality are articulated through the black history museum figure and the act of freedom that the photograph of Sully Watson keeps present.

With visitors young and old crowding its pathways throughout the year, "The Streets of Old Milwaukee," offers the opportunity to encounter city and state history and the subjects of that history. The historical human model brings history to us and us to history, thereby destabilizing chronological reality. The porous boundaries that the exhibition's built recreation of

the past offers destabilize even as it reifies distinctions between history and the present through the use of objects. As a researcher, my experience at the museum, surrounded by school-aged children and their chaperones, was mediated by my black queer feminist and cultural studies desires to approach the peripheral and interstitial aspects of the exhibition. The Watson historical models conjured the same eerie feeling that had washed over me a day before at the sight of an aging black baby doll on an old doctor's scale at the Wisconsin Black Historical Society. Both the museum exhibition and the archival collection as historical repositories raised the issue of documenting the past with regard to Blackness.

However, marginal subjects in the exhibition, including the Watsons, do more than stay out of the way of true history—their very presence is a queer one signaling a long tradition of black nonnormativity even as they are in many ways meant to model normative Blackness.[98] Marginal figures in the exhibition might cause a pause in a walking tour, or just as easy an unwitting erasure. With reference to the exhibition as a whole, the house is sited as a visual and spatial departure from a broader history of white settlement. The popularity of the exhibition with visitors gives it the quality of being lived in with the attendant dust, wear, and tear you might expect of a popular public place. The visual organization of the exhibition is designed to represent the history of the city through dim lighting, human models, as well as period appropriate building materials.

Further, the historical human model functions as a medium through which to read the dimly lit Blackness in the exhibition as pointing us toward the violence that is integral to the process of the production of respectable, seeable, and knowable black humanness mined from liminality. From this vantage point, the illumination of the Watsons as historical figures along

[98] Here I refer to Rod Ferguson's articulation of the queer of color figure in *Aberrations in Black: Toward A Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

with their house within the exhibition space of the "Streets of Old Milwaukee" shifts from dim, to dark, from person, to object and back to dim again. This representation of Blackness is aligned with a history of image production that signals visual capture. The photos of the Watson family and for example notable white, light-skinned, or multi-racial European fur traders and politicians restage the production of the discourse of racialization of the city. The family photographs are in the tradition of still portraiture part of the advancements in photo lighting that indexes Edward Farber's stroboflash.

The exhibition's black historical model absorbs and projects back at us our own desires, fears, and anxieties about the contemporary moment and its history as it "flits by" all at once as Walter Benjamin might say. The black historical model also signals a historical mode of visual capture that exists in relation to the fugitive slave notice, the "man price" portrait that serves as proof of freedom, and the print stereotype symbol tows the psychically porous boundary of the inanimate and the human. In this way, the model generates a practice of making history that challenges the liminality of Blackness as it signals black self-determination.

The Flash, Visual Capture, and Blackness

> Like a car accident, in which, in the last moment before impact, the occupants of each vehicle simply close their eyes and give themselves over to the force of physics, the explosive event that the camera flash records represents an instant of mechanical collision in the world. It is a collision that, while it may for all intents and purposes encapsulate a real occasion in time, is nevertheless a moment, some would say of crisis, that exists only through the interpretation of the result—the 'real' has been lost somewhere in those seconds of the shutter's snap.[99]

In her essay "Louis Agassiz and the American School of Ethnoeroticism: Polygenesis, Pornography, and Other 'Perfidious Influences,'" Suzanne Schneider's metaphor of the flash's operation as signaling an automobile accident is particularly resonant with a discussion of Edward Farber's invention of the stroboflash. Farber's first assignments for the *Milwaukee*

[99] Wallace and Smith, 211.

journal and subsequent professional recognition was based on his photographs of automobile accidents, fires, train derailments, factory fires, and explosions. Farber's accident photos are housed at the Milwaukee Public Library, and a second collection of images, letters, invention patents, and other materials are on view at the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison. Relatedly, Farber is the photographer listed on nearly all of the photographs in the photo-archive of car accidents pre-1950 at the Milwaukee Public Library.

Edward Rolke Farber grew up in a small town outside of Milwaukee next door to a fire department, and from a young age he informed police about fires and other emergency situations. With his first camera he took a photo of the nearby Otto Falk barn burning, and it was this composition that secured him a job at the *Milwaukee Journal*. The visual representation of accidental death in Farber's early work can be thought about as revealing the hazards of city life and factory work, as well as more administratively such as lax rules regarding drivers license requirements prior to 1940 and how this might have contributed to unsafety for drivers and pedestrians. The visual trajectory of Farber's photographic work with regard to the subjects he documented signals the overall transition from death and stillness in the 1930s to life and motion in his later work.

Farber worked primarily in Wisconsin and was a relatively obscure figure in the history of photography—he is not listed in the history of photography or science sections of the prodigious over 1800 page volume: *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia* (2007). However, he is included in *Home Front Heroes: A Biographical Dictionary of Americans During Wartime,* and acknowledged in catalogues of scientific inventions.[100] In 1937,

[100] Farber's obituary in *The New York Times* states that he passed away at 67 years old on January 22, 1982 in his hometown of Delafield, Wisconsin. It states that he was a "pioneer in electronic lighting who is considered to be the inventor of the portable strobe light for still cameras." See Les Ledbetter's "Edward R. Farber, Inventor of Flash" *The New York Times* (24 Jan 1982).

Farber invented "the first practical application of electronic flash for newspaper photography, both in the field and in the studio."[101] The *Milwaukee Journal* was on the cutting edge of news photography and Farber's advances in photo lighting by way of the portable stroboflash contributed to the journal's reputation.[102] Also, news photographers at *The Milwaukee Journal* were first to carry the portable stroboflash units.[103] The electronic flash's capacity to picture motion and stillness advanced overtime through the medium of flash photography. Incorporating the function and use of nineteenth-century flash powder and twentieth-century flashbulbs, the stroboflash, as a representational technology, continued to intervene in existing structures of visuality to shape the technology of photographic illumination.

The stroboflash's development contributed to the lighting advancements with respect to flash photography, and extended the innovative work of Harold "Doc" Edgerton, a physicist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology who invented the stroboscope a few years earlier. The electronic stroboflash designed to light subjects and to manage darkness also manages and captures motion, and in so doing it operates on the illusion of motion. The stroboflash contributed to the further development of the ability to capture movement and action. Doc Edgerton's stroboscope operated on flashbulbs and could only capture still images. While the stroboflash utilized an electronic strobe system to picture moving subjects.[104] The stroboflash

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[101] *Milwaukee Sentinel* news of Farber's passing (23 Jan 1982).

[102] There were other advancements in photographic history that contributed to lighting, for instance the Chicago-based photography studio and company James H. Smith & Sons Corp. specialized in flash technologies as well such as flash powder, bulbs, and synchronizers. See Smith-Victor Corp.: http://smithvictor.com/company/history.asp?s1=History and also see Wisconsin Historical Society Farber archival documents.

[103] "Farber, Edward Rolke (1914-1982)" by Melissa A. Marsh published in From *Home Front Heroes: A Biographical Dictionary of Americans During Wartime, Vol. 1* Ed. Benjamin F. Shearer (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007): 284.

[104] "Farber Develops 13-Lb. Portable Stroboflash" 12-Photography *Editor and Publisher* (May 1942). Wisconsin Historical Society Farber archival documents.

provided photographers with the ability to control and optimize lighting, a practice that technically offered more flexibility with respect to location.

Since before the American Civil War, the first extensively photographed American war, there has been an ongoing development of flash photography, making the equipment safer and lighter. Farber's invention is significant in the history of the development of flash technology for its portability and its advanced flash. The development of the stroboflash was important because it aided in the efforts to stop motion and thereby render the process portable which was especially useful for news photography. Farber's body of work shifted from flashbulbs to stopping action with stroboflash, his transition from scenes of accidental death to images of liveliness and action mark his shift to the flash that also signaled a shift to imaging motion. Farber's 1930s photographs of accidents and death did not secure his recognition in the history of photography—rather he is most recognized for the photos of live action that he took with the stroboflash as well as his development of flash equipment for the U.S. Army during World War II.[105] Farber's equipment " . . . created a new dimension for journalists covering the front lines, minimizing the baggage military photographers had to carry."[106] The portability of the design revolutionized press photography.[107]

As a stack of letters housed at the Wisconsin Historical Society between Farber and his mother indicate, Farber was based at a war technology research site in Maryland during WWII. Stroboflash experimentation and advancement then functions in addition to its numerous uses as also an visual technology of war in its use on the battlefield and otherwise. Late nineteenth-century advancements in shortened exposure and photo processing time along with the

[105] Marsh, 284.

[106] Marsh, 284.

[107] Please see "Stroboflash on the Hoof" in *Newsweek* (29 June 1942): 62.

development of artificial lighting through flash technology all contributed to the strobflash's portability and manipulation of light. That the war instigated the movement towards desegregation in the U.S. more broadly, the actual connection between death and life in photographic depiction is made more explicit through the violence of war. The flash's advancement in technology and in design is thus referenced through the history of World War II, a war that is often identified with regard to the experiences of black soldiers under segregation, and the movement to desegregate the armed forces that shaped Black post-war social and political movements.[108]

To reiterate, the trajectory of Farber's career from primarily using flashbulb lighting to the electronic stroboflash demonstrates a cleaving in the subjects of his photos from scenes of accidental death to those of movement and life, thereby aligning the pre-stroboflash period of his work with death and the stroboflash with life. It is in the pre-stroboflash moment that Blackness emerges requiring for its interpretation a contextual analysis that attends to the issues of stillness, motion, and stopped-motion all central to photography and to the history of black struggle and representation. For example, recent attention to the racist design of color photography's film's narrow light range—made specifically to compose images of white subjects—has unearthed photography's complicity in racialized practices of seeing the body.[109] The visual capture of the body is thus implicated in social and political processes of managing difference. As Sharon Holland so powerfully states in *The Erotic Life of Racism,* "Racism can also be described as the emotional lifeblood of race; it is the 'feeling' that articulates and keeps the flawed logic of race

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[108] See Barbara Lewis Burger's "Pictures of African Americans During World War II" National Archives: https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/ww2-pictures/.

[109] From David Smith's "'Racism of Early Colour Photography Explored in Art Exhibition" *The Guardian*, (25 Jan 2013): https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/jan/25/racism-colour-photography-exhibition. Refer to materials from photography exhibition at the Goodman Gallery London by artists Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin.

in its place (6).”

The stroboflash indexes a broad history of stopped-motion that extends from photography to political and legal domains of social life. For example, as I have argued, stopped-motion and image movement capture with respect to black subjects remain conceptually and technically linked vis-à-vis the discursive field. Figures such as Agassiz or the federal Marshal who took Joshua Glover into custody mobilized photographic and pre-photographic visual print materials such as fugitive slave notices and warrants to capture Blackness. This history is based on how the practice and aesthetics of capturing motion through images simultaneously produced ways to capture people. Thus, restaging photography’s relation to histories of perception and interpretation in addition to technological modernity aids in a deeper understanding, for example, of the visual constitution of the fugitive slave notice. The evolution of visual capture sited here demonstrates the continued production of Blackness as liminal as the central lucrative site of property in personhood with regard to life, death, stillness, and motion.

The flash and A Photo

A photograph of the only black person in Farber’s photo archive at the Milwaukee Public Library undergirds my analysis of Farber’s work.[110] There is no specific date or identifying information available for the photo. It was likely taken in the late 1930s, while Farber was working as a freelance photographer for the *Milwaukee Journal*, or soon after he had been officially hired in 1939. Farber was hired on at the *Journal* as a staff photographer before he introduced his invention of the stroboflash. The photograph is a distinct but hazy composition that is reminiscent of Talbot’s nineteenth-century calotype that he began making before the flashbulb was invented. The calotype with its ethereal quality and soft detailing was often associated with painting rather than with photography.

[110] See Figure 1.1.

Taken at night, the line of vision of the photograph directs the viewer first to the stunned, but sober face of a white woman standing and holding a lit cigarette—presumably to calm her nerves. The viewer follows the woman's gaze down to the supine body of a black person, perhaps a black man. The black person lie still in the street, eyes closed, with a coat draped delicately over the top of them. The presence of possibly a detective talking to the woman, flanked by a uniformed police officer, and the murky left side of a man wearing a trench-coat with his back to the photograph, confirm that this is the scene of an accident of some sort. The black person appears to be the victim of the accident, but not the victim-subject of the photo. The photo indexes the trauma and haunting excess of black premature death as a ubiquitous and accepted figure in U.S. national history.

The image captures a history of anxiety and violence that has been characterized by the regulation of nonnormative forms of social interaction, Kevin Mumford refers to this space of contact as "interzones."[111] One of the functions of the black nonnormative, seemingly out of place, or queer subject according to Roderick Ferguson, has been to reveal power relations.[112] Due to the lack of detailed information about the photograph, it is not possible to know if Farber used an early version of the stroboflash or a flashbulb to illuminate the photo in question, I use the general term "the flash" to situate the photo and the rest of his archive in relation to the longstanding advances in flash photography.[113] The cultural conditions of picturing blackness and whiteness together especially after WWI through the 1930s as the

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[111] I refer to Kevin Mumford's *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth* Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[112] Even in death the black subject is still doing cultural work that cannot be silenced or erased, but because the death of the black body operates through national representations of Blackness, it is always excessive of a politics of death that attempts to control and contain not only the black body, but racialized gender and sexual anxiety and difference as well.

[113] If Farber did not use the stroboflash, he likely used flashbulbs as they were the primary sources of night photographic lighting in the 1930s. I cite his mention of their effectiveness in the epigraph to the chapter.

history of lynching indicates signals black injury or labor (i.e. violence, death, service).[114] Farber's photo depicts a broader structure that manages interracial relations and cross-gender relations through injury especially with regard to contact between white women and black men.[115]

Raising the question of Farber's use of a flashbulb or the stroboflash keeps relevant the issues of the ways in which the flash in all of its iterations—from flash powder, flashbulbs, to the electronic stroboflash—structures through lighting subjectivity and marginalization. The images taken with the early iteration of the strobflash only picture white men as the subjects of *strobovisuality*, and this serves as the introduction to objects in motion using the technology. The archival images of men running, jumping, and clowning around are haunted by the early images of accidental death, including black death, taken during Farber's shift from the flashbulb to the stroboscope and eventually the electronic stroboflash.

The flash broadly then as a technology of visibility intervenes in existing structures of visuality to shape and illuminate how we see the intersection of the race, gender, and sexuality and the power relations it manages. Farber's images generate a way to think about black people, precisely because so much of his archive contains the absence of Blackness. The photo and the larger context of the absence of black subjects in the Farber archive offer a point of entry into the history of imaging Blackness.

If history, as Walter Benjamin suggests as I cite in the epigraph, is actually alive in the evanescent and ephemeral "flashes" of the past rather than in how we actually live and experience the past in the present, I want to suggest that the past is also alive in our the

[114] See James Allen, John Lewis, Hilton Als, and Leon Litwack's *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms, 2000).

[115] Refer to Pamela Haag's *Consent: Sexual Rights and the Transformation of American Liberalism* (Ithaca: Cornel University Press, 1999): 124.

management and distribution of death. Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes death distribution as the condition of racism "…the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."[116] This racialized process of "vulnerability to premature death" relies simultaneously on practices of representing and imaging gender and sexuality that assign status.

Farber's photo visually decenters the role and presence of the detective, thus materializing for us the distinction between his work, for instance, and film and fiction noir. The visual narrative structure of Blackness in the photo is managed through both natural and artificial light sources, and darkness with regard to the aesthetic and technical processes of black and white photography.[117] Farber's 1930s photos were a part of a visual culture of photo journalistic representations of the economic depression, urban crime, homicide, and working class community spectatorship.

For example, the photographer Weegee who was famous for his sensationalist, gruesome, and dangerously honest portrayals of white working class and immigrant life in New York, quite possibly was a figure whose work would have inspired or elicited some kind of a reaction from Farber.[118] As the first widely known tabloid photographer, Weegee's work was nationally published. Weegee photographed accidents, murders, and dramatized the traumas of working class life from a place that, though often problematic, was not pathologizing and resonated with mass audiences.

While Weegee's subjects were firmly situated in the City of New York, Farber's photos

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[116] Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007): 12.

[117] Black and white photography relies on a grey scale that organizes the way in which light and dark function in the photo development process and in the final photograph. Refer to Hoy, 319.

[118] See discussions of Weegee: Cartwright and Sturken, 11 and Hoy, 180.

for the most part stand out as non-urban. Interestingly Farber's photo of the black person is the exception and appears to document a city street, most likely Milwaukee. In the photo we see a curb, asphalt road, in contrast to many of the other images taken by Farber that appear to have the same black and white contrast, style—possibly taken around the same time with the same camera. Many of these images are surrounded by grassy fields and appear to be taken outside of the city.

The white woman's arresting gaze is actually the subject of the photo. Centered and standing, the woman's facial expression and proximity to the person on the ground implicates her in the events that transpired. The viewer sees from her level of vision—it is her face that is captured, her expression. If we read "against" the line of "the flash," and instead resituate our gaze from bottom to top, we might restructure the organizing visuality of the photo, centering the death of the black person, the black body as the subject instead. I say death, and not dead, because death conveys a process that implicates those surrounding the body. There are many forms of power that flash to the fore in this photo: national hysteria and anxiety over miscegenation, sexual and black gendered violation—everyone in the photo is positioned at the intersection of power relations that converge and attempt to elide each other.

There appears to be something excessive on the surface of the image. Derrida, in *Specters of Marx,* asserts that: "The mystical character of the fetish, in the mark it leaves on the experience of the religious, is first of all a ghostly character" (148). The "ghostly character" or quality that I read in Farber's photo is not the black person, but rather the imposed vulnerability on the body of the black person that the coat signifies. This photographic vulnerability sits in relation to the forces of racism that mobilize vulnerability in many ways as the experiences of Dr. James Cameron symbolize, and as the perceived death of the black subject in the photograph name for us.

Further, in the photograph the coat is a careful affirmation of vulnerability that might also serve the purpose of covering up blood or wounds. The appearance of the coat does not confer dignity onto black subjectivity in death, but rather a more complete vulnerability. It is the power of this kind of vulnerability—both the violence of it, and also the power of it that is transmitted here as liminality. This liminality is constructed as a byproduct of anti-black racism and the precarious delineation of property in personhood that I discussed earlier.

Gender and sexual violence towards racialized bodies has always been a core dimension of racism and white supremacy. The photo specifically names the anxiety and fear of black male approximation to white women. An anxiety that through its manifestation in various forms of violence reveals racism to contain its own homoerotic and sexist structures that constitute how it works on and through bodies. Roderick Ferguson discusses surplus populations and the racialization of people of color and how these relations reveal the political and social tenets of capitalism to be excessive and expansive.[119] In this way death, loss of freedom, and brutality all function as the conditions that render Blackness a site of surplus. Surplus extends beyond itself generating the conditions for its own demise that are rooted in the conditions that affirm black life on the level of the everyday and the representational.

Black masculinity in the photo is positioned as vulnerable, and perhaps even feminized. The photo's depiction of black manhood to some extent is contrasted with the racist hypersexual image of black men that emerged during Radical Reconstruction.[120] The nineteenth-century was also the moment in which the generation of another knowledge about black male subjectivity and sexuality as predatory occurred in the aftermath of emancipation. It is no coincidence that this

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[119] See discussion of surplus populations in the introduction to *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004): 1-11.

[120] See Siobhan B. Somerville's *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000): 35.

occurs at the very same time that black people were asserting a post-emancipation personhood within the terms of the Reconstruction Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Subjectivity in these amendments is framed in terms of personhood and male citizenship, two sites that have been defined over and against Blackness. I read the black subject in the photo as working even in death. It is through vulnerability and seeming liminality that the subject asserts black humanity in the presence of the white woman, the detective, and the police officer.

The photo stages a connection between Walter Benjamin's flashing image of the past that "flits by" and the photographic flash and the seeming permanence of its evidentiary claim on the past. Farber's photograph attempts to challenge this evidentiary significance and permanence by demonstrating not only what we see and what we barely see, but also what we cannot see or know from the photograph. For example, we do not know for sure what happened to this person—were they hit by a car? Was this person shot? Due to the ways in which the photo incites but leaves so many questions unanswered we are able to narrate it and create new meaning. This practice of generating new meaning from deathly circumstances is a part of the legacy of black resistance in particular. The photo functions to reveal the ways in which lighting captures Blackness sometimes in death or in life as it speaks to the history of black death, and at the same time beyond it.

The folder location of the photograph in the archive suggests that perhaps it is possibly of a car accident—the white woman pictured was the driver and she hit the black person lying in the street, but this story cannot be corroborated without more information. The facts of the situation are less imperative here as I am more interested in thinking about the horror of the photograph as a part of a genealogy of black collective preservation and struggle, rather than simply an enumeration of black death.

Kimberly Juanita Brown identifies the ways in which images of black death often

dehumanize black subjects as a means of objectification and shock.[121] Considering this photograph within that context of a national visual culture that is saturated with images of death, it becomes even more important to offer a framework through which to view the work that is in line with the time of the photo, but also fits the critical needs of a contemporary image culture. The photo stages the occasion for a closer look at visual cultures of black death and the multiple ways in which Blackness has been situated in relation violence as a condition of subjectivity in the United States.

Cedric Robinson's understanding of collective preservation which he refers to as the "ontological totality" and Orlando Patterson's conceptualization of social death as natal alienation together demonstrate black struggle under conditions of liminality. Each formulation offers a way to mourn and to account for the psychical and physical traumas of a monetized black embodiment. Although Robinson and Patterson's formulations reveal hierarchical power relations that position Blackness as liminal in ways that are distinct, they both index the way in which black subjects have produced cultural practices that are life affirming. Blackness has demanded constant approximation to conditions of actual death even as it has created generative cultural practices.

In the photo the woman is positioned in the middle of the shot, drawing the viewer in with her downward, shocked stare which produces a "split" view whereby it becomes difficult to stare at both subjects at once—her and the black person on the ground. The photo visually arrests and transfixes the viewer even as it is evocative of the histories and social relations it forces us to remember. Although it is unclear why Farber appears to have stopped taking accident photos when he fully transitioned to using the electronic stroboflash, it is difficult to deny the

[121] Refer to Kimberly Juanita Brown*'s The Repeating Body: Slavery's Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

stroboflash's alignment with life and vitality, while the flashbulb seems to be relegated to stillness, death, and immobility.

As a representational structure of meaning the invention of the stroboflash relies on Farber's earlier photographic work on death. Thus, attention to a seemingly absolute state of stillness was necessary in order to advance technology that allowed for the capture of motion. Further illustrating the dialectical relationship of things based in the logic of opposition or contradiction hinged on a capitalist mode of production. In this way, there is a necropolitical legacy to the stroboflash although its technology resonates with life, movement, and progress.[122]

The images taken by Farber further dramatize the relationship between stillness and motion characterized by the shift in his body of work, or as Ted Rulseh explains: the "electronic flash made it possible for photographers to 'freeze' fast-moving subjects by exposing them to a burst of light lasting the tiniest fraction of a second.'"[123] In the pre-stroboflash photographs, flashbulbs and other equipment are sometimes pictured in Farber's photographs, however most of the photos disguise the light source, and remain lit from outside of the frame. This unintentionally reveals the constructed nature of the photographs even as they function as revered accounts of the truth as news photographs. The other photographs by Farber in the Milwaukee Public Library photo archive of accidents range from tragically gruesome in their portrayal of death and bodily harm to those appear to be taken after the victims have been taken away.

The history of the stroboflash points to the photographic archive as a collection of meaning indelibly linked to the history of photography as a medium. The absences and erasures in archives often demonstrate internal organization of power itself. Farber's archive performs

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[122] I refer here to Achille Mbembe's "Necropolitics" in *Public Culture* Vol. 15 No. 1 (Winter 2003): 11-40.

[123] Rulseh, 3.

this recording of history that maps power, loss, and privilege vis-à-vis still and moving subjects and life and death. Farber's photo documentation of industrial and auto accidents index race, gender, and public space politics in urban and rural Wisconsin.

The invention of the stroboflash offers a relevant technical and conceptual lens through which to interrogate the documentation of the past. Stopped-motion advancements traced through the stroboflash signal the role of visual capture as a producer of black liminality. The visual examples I have discussed in relation to black photographic and political liminality as stopped-motion such as the slave notice and the stereotype deployed to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act account for the way that stopped-motion relied on stillness and motion. Farber's archive serves as an important site to consider the history of flash photography as its technological advances have intersected with the subjects it gained the ability to image.

Further, the technology of stopped-motion itself rests on the dialectic between stillness and motion. Farber's stroboflash utilizes the illusion of intermittent lighting to convey motion through the still camera image. Intermittent strobe lighting performs a visual expression of the condition of being seen and not seen, appearing and disappearing. As the stroboflash creates the illusion of uniform lighting, through fast bursts of intermittent light it signals the operation of social relations that produce Blackness as liminal. In so far as the Midwest can be delineated through the free state designation and free personhood at the same time as through fugitive status it registers Blackness whether still or in motion liminal. Like intermittent strobovisuality, black subjects come in and out of personhood, and disappear and reappear as deserving or defiant subjects.

Opposition to black liminality has been produced in unlikely places that do not always register within existing lenses of identifying resistance. The emergence and disappearance in historical and visual archives of black gendered subjects, such as Glover in the text of the

Wisconsin decision, or the black subject in Farber's photo, articulate a practice of resistant labor. It is not only that marginal subjects are subjected to disappearance, but also that their articulation of self-determination can only register in ways that appear erratic or intermittent. Glover's disappearance to Canada serves as one example. It is these forms of labor that surface through Smallwood's articulation of alternative value that is secured through the rearticulation of the excess of the commodification process with regard to Blackness. Movement and stillness have been central to black practices of survival. The photographic flash captures not only the stillness and immobilization of black liminality, but also the dynamic interaction it inspires through resistance.

While Farber's photo directs us to what appears to be the absolute stillness of death and its effects via the woman's stunned expression**,** it actually generates a movement between stillness and motion, death and life. We are made to see that stillness is not immobility. The absolutism of death in life, social death, and natal alienation is opened up, while its power to convey the ontological erasure that property status conveys on black subjectivity remains. Recalling the function of the slave notice as a visual form that mobilizes stopped-motion in order to mediate and discipline the movement between stillness and motion that black escape enacts provides a context for how black escape might function to challenge capture with regard to absolute stillness such as death or slavery.

Thus, the stroboflash as well as the electronic flash photographic technologies that precede it all function in distinct ways to arrest motion. While advancements in stop-motion photo flash technology are often effectively aligned with the ability to document subjects in motion, Farber's photo archive through its documentation of moments characterized by stillness and motion account for the ways in which both stillness and motion have centrally shaped photography as a medium with respect to the subjects captured. Specifically, whereas Farber's

accident photos that picture injury and death were taken before or while he was still in the process of devising what later became the stroboflash, the images in his archive taken using the stroboflash largely document liveliness, action, and physical activity. Thus, Farber's archive stages stillness and motion as a dialectic that comes to bear on the visual capture of death and life through the use of stopped-motion as it transitioned and progressed through innovation in flash technology. Even as stopping action captivated Farber's attention, a central focus on lighting remained imperative to the function of electronic flash photography as it further perfected the art of documenting motion in still camera images.

While stopped-motion is explicitly intelligible as a photographic technology with regard to the stroboflash, it serves as a lens to interrogate the political operation of black liminality through the Fugitive Slave Act as it attempted to control black movement as a strategy to achieve an image of national unity through compromise. Stopped-motion describes the practice of curtailment of the Fugitive-Slave Act as it produced an understanding of personhood and legalized the capture of fugitive slaves. The Fugitive Slave Act deploys stopped-motion using visual technologies that are rooted in attempts to apprehend blackness. Stopped-motion lays bare the degree to which being subject to the flash of camera or the carceral intention of the Fugitive Slave Act produce a liminal state. The legal and political maneuvers of the Fugitive Slave Act, as a tool of managing black life as well as the conditions that elaborate premature death are thus rendered possible through stopped-motion in the process of imaging black capture. By connecting the Fugitive Slave Act to the photographic and specifically the stroboflash photographic, we are able to establish the visual capture of Blackness as a mode through which black liminality operates.[124]

[124] Please refer to Hortense J. Spiller's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" *Diacritics* Vol. 17 No. 2 Culture and Countermemory: The "American" Connection (Summer 1987): 64-81, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race" *Signs* Vol. 17 No. 2 (Winter

Along these lines, stopped-motion as an instrument rendering Blackness liminal has been central to the particularity of the Midwest in defining regional and national power with regard to Blackness. Black fugitivity as an active challenge to conditions of precarity, or liminal capture narrate the construction of Blackness in the Midwest and more broadly as it intersects with gendered and sexual difference through visual, legal and economic institutions to define regional boundaries and national power. An examination of the visual construction of Blackness as limited with regard to its movement in and out of conditions of personhood and commodity define the terms for the regional articulation of the American Midwest in the broader context of national expansion.

Conclusion

In his famous essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History" published in *Illuminations* (1968) Walter Benjamin writes: "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again."[125] Benjamin's attentiveness to the ephemeral speaks to his critique of what historicism renders common sense, transparently knowable, and universal with respect to history. His "angel of history" displays a cautious attentiveness to the future. The flash captures the past as "the monad" composed of the dimensions of the historical that should have been erased.

Stopped-motion as it has functioned as technological and visual technology has shaped how we see and understand history casting it out of the logic of successive events, one after the other, or as Benjamin has described "wreckage upon wreckage" and into a network of politically

1992): 251-274, Evelynn Hammonds' "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality" *Differences* Vol 6. No. 2-3 (1994): 126-45, and Katherine McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

[125] Benjamin, 255.

constituted associations, dependencies, and intensities. Benjamin's notion of the flash of history provides an intertextual and discursive field index to the photographic flash linked to the stroboflash, bringing it full circle to account for the ways in which it has shaped, helped to discipline, as well as opened up our practices of reading and narrativizing history.

Benjamin's flash offers an interpretive lens through which to understand and access history. Farber's flash attempts to bring the subject more fully into view in the archive of the past. Both Benjamin and Farber demonstrate history's ability to come to us in flashes, rather than in succinct and coherent narratives. Benjamin's flash requires that we acknowledge the conditions that produce the past allowing it to emerge and disappear at key instances, or as he asserts "in a moment of danger." Farber's flash is connected to Blackness through his photograph as well as through the longer history of photography that has been implicated in issues of race and power with regard to Blackness, as I have demonstrated.

What flashes up in the instance of seeing the photograph is a past of black death, public harm, and interracial contact.[126] As a photo lighting technology, and also a conceptual tool in the history of representing and documenting the past, the flash has been central to processes and practices of representation. Benjamin's flashing image of the past engages to the photographic flash as a technology of stopped-motion, and the seeming permanence of the photograph as a visual form that possesses an evidentiary claim on the past.[127]

Further, Benjamin understands the past as available to us through a historical materialism that does not attempt to make the future, but rather attends to the past as its relations of power

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[126] Also, framing the conditions of the photo is the ongoing governmental neglect of black communities, especially throughout the Great Depression years when the photograph was taken have been documented and are exemplified through work of black women organizers like Mary Church Terrell.

[127] According to Benjamin, it is actually in the citation practices of historical writing, historical materialism, that grapples with the contradictions elided from "homogeneous time" time and space that history is allocated to that flattens out history and shapes narratives in favor of elite historical and political guardianship.

come to bear on the present. Benjamin explains that historical materialism utilizes a methodological practice that endeavors to “brush history against the grain” (257). He explains how history is structured like a system of mirrors wherein the dominant culture is puppeted back at us:

> A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism gives the ‘eternal’ image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called ‘Once upon a time’ in historicism’s bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history (262).

For Benjamin, the present is a situation in which “time stands still and has come to a stop” this relationship to the present, disarticulates it from a positivist continuum as the point of translation from past to future, and instead renders it intelligible through a pause that is informed by the purpose for and the mode of engagement with the past. This pause can be sited in the photographic flash as it captures moments in time.

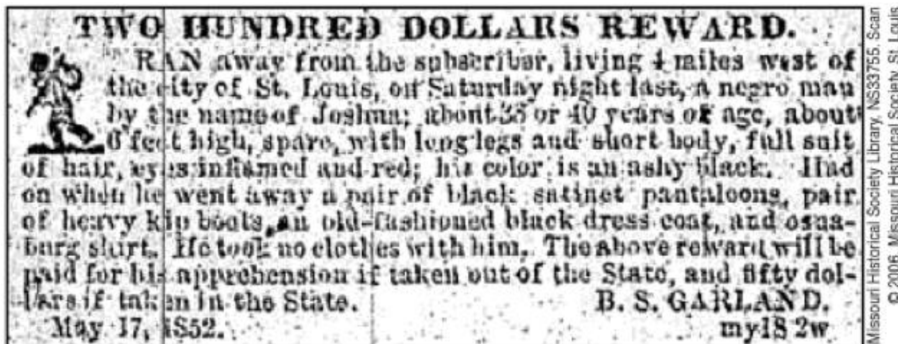
An articulation of resistance that can account for the ways in which marginal subjects even in death continue the work of self-determination requires some attentiveness to the ways in which these practices, just like the subjects that exercise them, emerge and disappear as the Fugitive Slave Act, the photo, and articulations of black injury here document. In this case, the stopped-motion that attempts to foreclose the recognition of black life in Farber’s photo is enacted in the way in which the black figure emerges and disappears. The black subject is not the center of the image, nor of the practice of looking, making it difficult to designate it principally as an image of black injury. Instead, the practice of looking that is privileged is one that moves from the white woman to the black person, moving them in and out of focus, and in and out of subjectivity—emerging and disappearing. Resistance is therefore a form of labor that must linked to our viewing practices to “read against the grain” of history. Benjamin’s example of history as something that flashes up and is “never seen again” invites an approach to the past that

can account for erasures nuances and contradictions—he does not say that the flash produces exclusion from history, but rather an absence of visuality.

In the work of Farber, liminality might be documented through the flash technology itself with regard to its intermittent strobe lighting that appears consistently balanced. It might also be sited through the photographic archive that reveals the erasures of the past. I have endeavored here to document the erasures of black personhood through an examination of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the 1854 Wisconsin decision on the unconstitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act, and through photography more broadly. My focus on stopped-motion as a political and legal analytic that indexes black liminal personhood resists the impulse to demand a unified black subject that is rendered consistently visible in life or in death, and instead attends to the ways in which black subjectivity has been rendered heterogeneous and liminal.

Figures

Figure 1.1
Photograph by Edward Farber (C. 1938)
Milwaukee Public Library
Photography Archives



TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.

RAN away from the subscriber, living 4 miles west of the city of St. Louis, on Saturday night last, a negro man by the name of Joshua; about 35 or 40 years of age, about 6 feet high, spare, with long legs and short body, full suit of hair, eyes inflamed and red; his color is an ashy black. Had on when he went away a pair of black satinet pantaloons, pair of heavy kip boots, an old-fashioned black dress coat, and osnaburg shirt. He took no clothes with him. The above reward will be paid for his apprehension if taken out of the State, and fifty dollars if taken in the State.

B. S. GARLAND.

May 17, 1852. my18 2w

Missouri Historical Society Library, NS33755. Scan © 2006, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis

This reward notice by B. S. Garland for the return of Joshua ran in every issue of the *Missouri Republican* for the last two weeks of May 1852.

Figure 1.2
Notice for Joshua Glover's capture with print stereotype of

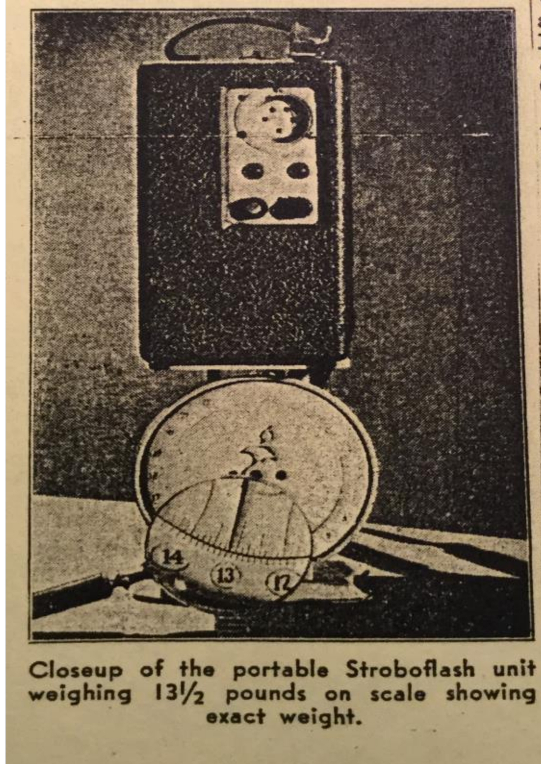

Closeup of the portable Stroboflash unit weighing 13½ pounds on scale showing exact weight.

Figure 1.3
Edward Farber's stroboflash
Image from Editor and Publisher (May 1942)
Edward Farber Archive
Wisconsin Historical Society

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Chapter Two

“Alley Work” and The Politics of Black Women’s Sexual Labor in Industrializing Minneapolis

“One of the numerous colored women who infest south Minneapolis, robbing white men in alleys . . .”
—Minneapolis Police Officer L.P. Jones[1]

“The intent of this practice is not to give voice to the slave, but rather to imagine what cannot be verified, a realm of experience which is situated between two zones of death—social and corporeal death—and to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance.”
—Saidiya Hartman[2]

Introduction

The yellowing pages of the Bertillon system record of Ethel Walters arrested in Minneapolis in 1908, identify her as an “alley worker” and a dark “Brown Skin Negra” who was: “Suspected of having robbed a man of his pocket book and contents.”[3] As the record details, the man she was “suspected of having robbed” left the city and no official complaint was made. We learn the charges against her were dismissed. The officer’s description goes on to point out that Walters “had also robbed a man of $100 last summer” and that case too had been dismissed. The front of the record lists as her occupation, “CoP & Alley Worker.”[4] This chapter demonstrates that the Minneapolis Police Department Bertillon System of Criminal Identification’s documentation of alley work renders black women consonant with this particular category of commodified sexual labor. I argue that the Bertillon system’s efforts to categorize

[1] This quote comes from Frances McRaven’s 1917 Bertillon system record (#4186), ledger 9 (8/31/1916-8/27/1918). Heidi Heller also discusses it in her post “Minneapolis ‘Alleywalkers’ and The Campaign to End Prostitution” published on The Historyapolis Project website (1 Jul 2014): http://historyapolis.com/blog/2014/07/01/minneapolis-alleywalkers-and-the-campaign-to-end-prostitution/.

[2] See Hartman’s “Venus in Two Acts” *Small Axe* No. 26 Vol. 12 No. 2 (June 2008): 11.

[3] The officer’s cursive writing reads as Walters, however, it might also be spelled “Walhers.” Ethel Walters’ alias is listed as Ethel Warfield (#2935), Reg No. 558. See Figures 2.4 and 2.5.

[4] “CoP” appears to be an abbreviation signifying “colored prostitute” as “Co.” was used to designate black people as “colored”—sometimes “colored” is spelled out and sometimes it is abbreviated “Co.” by officers filling out the Bertillon record ledgers.

alley work functions as a visual strategy to devalue black women's social and economic difference, or more closely to position black women as ontologically liminal. The police's efforts to identify black women as deviant reveal black sexual labor to be an unruly site of regulation in the context of modernizing Minneapolis.

As the chapter epigraph notes, the assessment of Frances McRaven by Minneapolis police officer J.P. Jones as: " . . . One of the numerous colored women who infest south Minneapolis, robbing white men in alleys" offers a prevailing description of alley work with regard to the Bertillon system. Jones' 1917 denunciation positions black women as predatory not only with reference to white men, but to the city as a whole as they are identified as thieves who indiscriminately prey on presumably innocent white heterosexual male victims. McRaven's Bertillon system record identifies her occupation as "housewife" and her crime as "ally worker." Although McRaven is cited for running a "disorderly house," a term used to describe a domicile where prostitution occurs, it is actually the context of her designation as an "alley worker" and by extension the alley itself that more fully situate her criminalization within the context of devalued black commodified sexual labor. Further, it is the intersection of race, gender, and sexual difference congealed in the category of "alley worker" that render it useful for identification and criminalizing purposes with respect to the Bertillon system.

The articulation of alley work as a site of black women's sexual labor and social difference in the Twin Cities occurred within the categorizing schemas of the Bertillon System of Criminal Identification in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[5] The Bertillon system was adopted first by the St. Paul police in 1891, followed by Minneapolis in 1899.[6] Devised by

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[5] I refer specifically to the use of the term "alley work" by the St. Paul and Minneapolis police in the context of the adoption of the Bertillon system. The term may have also been used in other cities.

[6] Although the oldest Minneapolis police Bertillon ledger archived at Minneapolis City Hall is from 1907 in an Annual Report from 1899 the Superintendent of Police states that the system was in use that year. See "Annual Report Superintendent of Police" in *Annual Reports of the Various City Officers of the City of Minneapolis,*

Alphonse Bertillon, a French criminologist and forensic documentarian, the system standardized information collected about suspected offenders as it helped to establish the terms and categories of modern criminal identification.[7] The Bertillon system played a significant role in advancing photography as scientific truth through policing, and in this context identity then presumably could be rendered immutable and fixed as well.[8]

In an early comprehensive study of the Minneapolis and St. Paul police and fire departments by Frank J. Mead and Alix J. Muller published in 1899, the Bertillon system is described as allowing for more rigorous police work that in turn further advances the goal of upholding the law. For Mead and Muller, the more accurate police procedures offered by the Bertillon system existed in a context where the once explicit "vigorous manhood" expressed through volunteer police and fire service in the early "village days" of the Twin Cities was able to find a more concrete expression in the practices of the Bertillon system after the transition to a paid force.[9] Thus, the police department's deployment of the Bertillon system's standardized criminal identification process bolstered and rendered more palpable a gendered and largely racialized duty to effectively manage and regulate the growing city.[10] In this way, the regulation of black women's alley work through the Bertillon system was part of an ongoing process to order city life.

Minnesota for the Year 1899 published in 1900 by Minneapolis: Tribune Printing Co. I also refer here to "The Bertillon System: Science and Crime in the Global Information Age" by Kirsten Delegard on The Historyapolis Project website (23 Apr 2014).

[7] *Reasoned and Unreasoned Images: the Photography of Bertillon, Galton, and Marey* by Josh Ellenbogen (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

[8] Ellenbogen, 30.

[9] See Muller and Mead's *History of The Police and Fire Departments of the Twin Cities their Origin in Early Village Gays and Progress to 1900: Historical and Biographical* by Mead and Muller published by the American Land & Title Register Association (1899): 6: https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/011408404.

[10] Muller and Mead document one black police officer who worked in the Rondo area, a historically black neighborhood in St. Paul.

The area in which Minneapolis and St. Paul are located was established as Minnesota Territory in the eighteenth century and constituted as part of the Northwest, the Great West, and the Old Northwest that later became the Midwest. In fact, the establishment of Fort Snelling responsible for the first U.S. federal presence in the Upper Northwest was referred to as the "northwesternly army post on the frontier."[11] Fort Snelling also served as significant in the early Twin Cities as a site through which settlement was managed. In reference to the "civilization" of the region through settlement of white migrants distinguished on the basis of ethnicity and class, Mead and Muller refer to the ongoing need for "good European stock" to migrate to the area in order to "improve and adorn the waste places of the west."[12]

Further, Fort Snelling's role as an apparatus of colonial expansion that sutured the Northwest to the union through militarism extended to its larger role as a site for the training of soldiers and as a regional army headquarters. For example, During the Civil War the Fort was a central site for the Union war effort in the Midwest. According to the Minnesota Historical Society, 100 black men from Minnesota enlisted in the Union Army and were trained or spent time at Fort Snelling: "If captured by Confederate troops, black soldiers were not treated as prisoners of war but as escaped slaves. The 1860 census lists a total African American population in the state of only 259 men, women, and children."[13] Fort Snelling signals the history of black liminality in the Northwest as it was governed under federal law thereby upholding slavery in a region and a state where slavery was expressively forbidden according to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Specifically, Dred and Harriet Scott worked as the slaves of a physician at Fort Snelling from 1836 to1840 and at other military posts throughout the

[11] Minnesota Historical Society Fort Snelling Timeline formerly at: mnhs.org/about/dipity_timeline.htm.

[12] Muller and Mead, 25.

[13] Minnesota Historical Society Fort Snelling Timeline.

Northwest. The property status of the Scotts at Fort Snelling illuminates the fraught relationship between federal and state law with regard to slavery as well as the connection between locational jurisdiction and black liminality.[14]

Fort Snelling established U.S. power in the area in part gained control over travel and movement up and down the Minnesota and the Mississippi rivers using surveillance as a tactic. In this way, we might say that Fort Snelling's history of militarism and surveillance serves as an index for the "vigorous manhood" that Mead and Muller identify as "our twin protectors," specifically with respect to the Minneapolis and St. Paul police and fire departments. Thus, one operation of "vigorous manhood" is to secure protection through police service. Along these lines, the departmentalization of the police force and its transition to a modern institution is bound up with the establishment of policing through militarism in the area exercised through the removal and murder of the Dakota and other Native American tribes, and the dispossession of Native lands through white settlement. The securing of U.S. power in the area that pushed out British and French traders through an ongoing surveillance up and down the waterways also contributes to the development of policing more broadly in the region.

By connecting the history of policing in Minneapolis to a longer history of policing enacted through military power at Fort Snelling illuminates the interplay between military and policing efforts in the process of national expansion. Thus, the Minneapolis Police Department's deployment of the Bertillon system as a strategy visual surveillance is undergirded by a longer history of state and federal practices of surveillance in the area that sutured the Northwest to the Union such as in the case of Fort Snelling. The practice of surveillance that Fort Snelling demonstrates as a military post in its efforts to define early membership and control over the area of the Twin Cities and beyond historically contextualizes the Minneapolis Police Department's

[14] Minnesota Historical Society Fort Snelling Timeline.

use of the Bertillon System of Criminal Identification as a visual strategy that endeavored to catalog and control people through documentation.

In 1877 the Minneapolis police petitioned the city council for a small annual appropriation of $25.00 to fund its efforts to use of photography to aid in arrest.[15] By 1899 the police had instituted a full-fledged "Rogues Gallery" at the Central Station in downtown. The "Rogues Gallery" documents the early use of photography in the context of the Bertillon system.[16] As James D. Doyle, Superintendent of Police, explained in the 1899 Annual Report:

> The Bertillon system of identification of criminals has been introduced, and although this system has not been in operation here long enough to show its workings in their entirety, I am convinced it is bound to become a most valuable adjunct to the workings of the department. In connection with this system of measurement, a photograph gallery has been arranged at the Central Station, and the photographs of criminals arrested here, and whose pictures are considered desirable for the rogues' gallery, are now taken by a member of the department. This has many times proven a great convenience when necessary to send out numbers of photographs wanted on short notice. It is also found much more convenient to photograph them at the station than to take them through the streets to a public gallery. It has also been much more economical, and will result in a considerable saving in the course of the year.[17]

The Rogues Gallery also signaled the police force's increased technical integration of photography into the work of the department. Extending the standardization practices of the Bertillon system to the police's attempt to modernize, Superintendent Doyle describes how the patrol wagons had been fitted with covers so as not to expose people, especially girls, who were arrested to the scrutiny of onlookers: "frequently girls and young persons are placed under arrest and carried to the station in the patrol wagon, and are thus protected from the gaze of the public, has given much satisfaction" (490). Following this point, Doyle requests funds to install

[15] See Augustine Costello's *History of the Fire and Police Departments of Minneapolis* (Minneapolis: The Relief Association Publishing Co.,1890): 256-257.

[16] See Figure 2.1.

[17] See Doyle's "Annual Report Superintendent of Police": 490.

electrical lights in alleyways thereby delineating the intention of the police to control how identification occurred for the purposes of criminalization:

> I would recommend that arrangements be made for the placing of electric lights in all the alleys in the downtown districts. This would be a great assistance to the officers and do considerable to prevent crime in this district, there being no more powerful deterrent of crime than well lighted streets and alleys."[18]

Doyle's request suggests that authority over identification was more and more consigned to the police as they modernized and attempted to control when and where in the city policing would concentrate.

A drawing of the Rogues Gallery included in Costello's study pictures two white women donning hair styles and dress that signal class privilege within Victorian society engage in the process of identification assisted by a detective. As the three stand in front of a gallery installation of photographs the detective who appears the active figure endowed with the authority over identification points at the images of people arrested.[19] The gendering and racialization of criminalization in the drawing of the Rogues Gallery serves as a contrast to the image girls arrested in the patrol wagon that Doyle describes. However, the expressed purpose of the protection of the girls from the "gaze" of onlookers along with the protective role of the detective of the "Rogues Gallery" signal the racialized gendered dimensions of protection that in turn articulate the unprotectability of black women alley workers in the context of their criminalization through identification through the Bertillon system.

If, as Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla have asserted: "the power of empirical observation lies primarily in its ability to render information visible" then the visual strategy of the Bertillon System of Criminal Identification is always already concerned with producing

[18] Doyle, 490.

[19] Refer to Figure 2.1.

standards through which meaning can be rendered seeable for interpretative purposes regardless of form—be it text or image.[20] Almost all of the remaining records of the Minneapolis Bertillon system are descriptive with no images so it is especially critical to account for the system's investment in empiricism in the first instance as a simultaneous investment in the visuality of information as a process that shapes how information is interpreted. In this way, the category "measured by" on the front of every Bertillon system record that contains the signature of the officer or official tasked with completing the arrest booking process reads as evidence of what Terry and Urla refer to as "watching suspiciously with an eye to control and regulate" (10).

It is the practice of "watching" that constitutes the representational visual regime of the Bertillon system establishing measurement and identification as coextensive processes. The Bertillon system record then serves as an index of the encounter between the criminalized, the arresting officer, and the officer at the station who completes the Bertillon identification. The procedure for Bertillon identification relies on measurement as expressed through categorization to organize and manage information about the features of persons arrested. Therefore, categorization as a tool of identification more directly operates as a tool of representation—representation itself describes the process by which meaning is communicated through the use of language (i.e. visual, text, sound, etc.).[21] In addition to identifying the criminalized, the Bertillon system functions as a site of visual representation through the process of categorization.

Bertillon system categorization draws on descriptive representational accounts, such as the identification of Ethel Walters as a dark skin "Negra" as well as Frances McCraven as "one

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[20] See *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture* Eds. Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline L. Urla (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995): 10.

[21] I draw on Stuart Hall's discussion of representation in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997) on page 15.

of the numerous colored women infesting the city and robbing white men in alleys"[22] to direct and to assign judgment. Despite the common understanding of categorization as a politically neutral process that merely assists with information management and organization, its role in the Bertillon system is principally one of utilizing representational language to standardize meaning.

Further, the standardization of meaning through categorization, as alley work exemplifies, generates the structure and the process for Bertillon system criminal identification. In this way, categorization serves as the basis for both the police procedural treatment of information deemed germane to identification, as well as the structural functioning of the system—the police department collects information to categorize it. Bertillon categorization operates as representational in so far as the documentation of alley work produces a set of specific meanings pertaining to black women's social difference. Although the term was sometimes applied to other women in the St. Paul archive, the term "alley work" came to signify black women in particular in the Minneapolis Bertillon system as they are the people consistently identified through its use.[23]

As a process based in the language of identification, Bertillon system categorization operates as a representational schema through its reliance on language. The Bertillon alley work records thus exist as sites where police conceptions of race, gender, class and other forms of difference interact and reveal common sense understandings of black women emerge. Thus, the act of assigning "alley worker" to a person is not only a descriptor of an illicit labor practice, but

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[22] Explain that both visual and textual modes are present in systems that deploy photography as well as in systems that do not have a photographic component.

[23] Black women exclusively account for alley workers in the Bertillon ledger records. This term was used to refer to women who were not black as well, as the example of Mamie Knight demonstrates. However, in the Minneapolis records, the alley workers I was able to locate were also black women, with the exception of Mamie Knight, a Latina alley worker, whose record was held in the St. Paul police mugshots archive.

also operates as a representational visual strategy through its use of categorization to make determinations that account for social and economic difference.

In 1908 Carry King was arrested in Minneapolis and logged into the Bertillon system ledger. Her record states her occupation as: "alley worker" and her crime as grand larceny, or "G.L. robbery." King is described as "dk brown" with "black wavy" hair and "maroon" eyes.[24] According to the officer's description King: "took man in alley and robbed him of $130.00 after the arrest she dropped some money in alley. Where she and the man had been standing." The officer's claim that King "took" the man in the alley along with her identification as an "alley worker" position her as the initiator of the encounter and the alley as the site of her aggressive criminal act.

In the case of King, although the description of the incident does not describe a struggle (i.e. the use of force or a weapon, or a physical altercation), in fact it states innocuously that they were "standing," King's alley work status further renders her inviolable, the man as vulnerable, and the alley as a site for the perpetuation of violent acts by black women. The Bertillon ledger protects the identity of the man, who is positioned as white precisely because he is racially unmarked,[25] his anonymity acting as white privilege. On one of the few occasions in which a white man is identified with regard to an alley work arrest, the officer lists the man's name and address only to make clear his request that any recovered money be returned to him.[26] White male protectability with regard to the Bertillon system accounts of alley work, further underscore black women's unprotectability even as they devise creative strategies of resistance.

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[24] King (#3771), Reg No. 384.

[25] This idea is theorized by David Roediger in *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991) and Cheryl Harris in "Whiteness as Property" *Harvard Law Review* Vol. 106 No. 8 (Jun 1993): 1707-1791.

[26] Carry King's record (#3771) is cataloged in the Minneapolis ledger, 1908.

Alley Work Protest

The only archived "mugshot" photograph taken of a black woman arrested in the Twin Cities during the period of the use of the Bertillon system is of May Moore from Omaha, Nebraska arrested by the St. Paul police on December 11, 1906.[27] In the profile mugshot, May Moore affects a smirk barely discernible, and in the frontal mugshot she sports a deep scowl. Moore's facility at expressive contrast operates as a visual mockery and critique of the scientific air of seriousness of the Bertillon record keeping system, as well as the white male power structure that defined the police as an institution. As Josh Ellenbogen reminds us, for Alphonse Bertillon the profile mugshot photograph was the most valued because of its ability to render visible the lines of a person's facial features.[28] Moore's smirk poses a challenge to the scientific intent of the profile image, as well as the attempt at resemblance through the standard facial expression of "semi-repose" that both Bertillon photographs intend to advance as evidenced by the vast majority of "mugshots" in the St. Paul archive. As the only visual representation of a black woman in the Bertillon system, Moore's protest is aligned with the visual strategies deployed by alley workers in the descriptive Minneapolis Bertillon record ledgers.

Moore's record is housed in the St. Paul police Bertillon mugshot archive along with the records of the only two other women, one Latina and one white. The archive consists of two file boxes, and the three records of women are cataloged in succession at the very end of the second file box, further distinguishing them racially and by gender. The officer who completed Moore's

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[27] May Moore's record (#8761) is at the Minnesota Historical Society in their collection of St. Paul Police Department Bertillon system "mugshots." See Figures 2.2 and 2.3.

[28] In *Reasoned and Unreasoned Images: The Photography of Bertillon, Galton, and Marey* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), Ellenbogen explains that the profile for Bertillon was understood to render a more complete scientific account then the frontal mugshot, because it presented measurable lines, while a person's face changed over years, their profile supposedly remained the same. Ellenbogen interrogates Bertillon's assumption (38-39).

record lists the racialized gendered identification “Negress” in the “Color” category, and “Julia Cunningham” as her alias. Moore’s occupation is bluntly stated as “Prostitute,” which did not become common practice until the years just prior to 1920, while “alley worker” is listed as her crime. The section of the record designated for “Marks, Scars, Moles, Deformities, ETC.” states that Moore has a “small blue mole on L. arm,” and a “curved scar” in the “outer corner L. eye.” Moore’s resistant mugshot can be read alongside the textual and image based visual strategies deployed by alley workers accounted for in the Bertillon system. In particular, Moore’s alias “Julia Cunningham” is one complementary strategy mobilized to disrupt police attempts at name and facial recognition in the alley and on the street more broadly.

The documentation of aliases on the part of many black women arrested for alley work signals their recognition of the power vested in Bertillon system identification. “Mamie” surfaces as the most common name in the Bertillon alley work archive.[29] If considered as an alias, “Mamie” can be understood as a challenge to the methodical attempt to accurately identify black women in an effort to further their criminalization. It is perhaps ironic that the only surviving Minneapolis police Bertillon system mugshot record is of Mamie Knight, a woman born in Mexico who worked in the Twin Cities as an alley worker noted on her record by the abbreviation “A.W.” in the occupation category. Two records almost identical in the information collected for Mamie Knight exist: one housed in the Minneapolis City Hall Tower Archive Bertillon ledger, and the other, a Minneapolis police Bertillon card with a mugshot, held in the St. Paul Police Bertillon archive at the Minnesota Historical Society.[30]

[29] It is perhaps the case that “Mamie” was a common name for black women during this time period. So it is possible that some women arrested were actually named Mamie. However, it remains the case that similar names disrupt attempts at differentiation in Bertillon categorization.

[30] Knight’s mugshot Bertillon card (#8755) is housed in the Bertillon mugshot cards in the St. Paul Bertillon record archive. The other is in the Minneapolis Bertillon ledger book (#3191).

The positionality of Mamie Knight's records in two archives articulates a point of confusion that exists related to the Bertillon system history in the Twin Cities more extensively. The St. Paul Police Department is often understood to have had integrated photography into its Bertillon system through its use of the mugshot, while the Minneapolis department is understood to have used a descriptive Bertillon ledger that did not include photographic mugshots.[31] That Knight's Minneapolis Bertillon "mugshot" card is housed in the St. Paul archive invites several questions that concern issues of archival practice and data accessibility. It also indicates the practice of data sharing between the two police departments, especially on account of her earlier arrest by the St. Paul police as noted on her Minneapolis record.

Although Mamie Knight's "nativity" is listed as Mexico, her name and the designation as alley worker racialize her according to the construction alley work that occurred on and through the bodies of black women, many of whom share the name "Mamie" in the Minneapolis Bertillon ledger.[32] Further, we might articulate Knight's Minneapolis Bertillon record's location in the St. Paul archive and not in Minneapolis as effectively contributing to the vicissitudinal displacement that is characteristic of alley work as a marginal or liminal category of labor, and in this case in the historical record as well. Mamie Knight's record, duplicated and displaced, operates as rare available material evidence of the use of a photographic apparatus in this period by Minneapolis police's Bertillon Criminal Identification Bureau. Knight's record stands as an

[31] This is an anecdotal reference to my experience at various city offices in search of Minneapolis Police Bertillon "mugshots." I was told that there were no Bertillon system photographs for Minneapolis. This was bolstered by the fact that the Minneapolis archive only contained ledger books that were descriptive, and no Bertillon photo records remained in the archive. The existence of Mamie Knight's record serves as material evidence that "mugshots" were in fact taken by the Minneapolis police. A thorough historical investigation of the force would also yield this fact I am certain, but the popular understanding due to the records that are available for public and research purposes is that the Minneapolis system was descriptive and not photographic.

[32] As indicated by Knight's two records: "Nativity" is a category listed in Minneapolis Bertillon ledger, and although the Minneapolis Bertillon "mugshot" record uses the category "Born in" instead the logic of "nativity" is used to designate place of birth in addition to racial and ethnic difference.

ongoing articulation of women of color, and more specifically black women's liminality as alley workers and their position as marginal in the city. Through its displacement and duplicate status in a professed system of order, Knight's Bertillon record functions as a visual protest directed toward the photographic technology of the Bertillon system that left few traces in Minneapolis.[33]

Moreover, the use of aliases and the name "Mamie," a name that was more common than distinguishing, suggests that women who engaged in alley work may have routinely offered up the same fake name as a practice of naming not themselves, but rather the condition of their labor that brought them under the purview of the Bertillon system in the first place. Alley workers engage in a politics of naming that works through the racist and sexist nomenclature that invokes the "black mammy" figure. Thus, by exercising a practice of minoritarian critique that José Esteban Muñoz has described as disidentification, black women work on and against the racialized sexual logics of alley work made present by "Mamie/mammy" to tamper with the Bertillon record taking and keeping process that renders them vulnerable in the sexual labor economy, in Bertillon system documentation, and more broadly.

Further, the "Mamie" naming strategy works "on and against" the process of "misnaming" that as described by Audre Lorde is rooted in the regulatory impulse of social differentiation to create a warped false representation of marginal groups of people to aid in the process of their subjection.[34] By appropriating the Bertillon system's attempt to misname and misuse their actual names, the women's aliases function to disarm the process using its own logic. Mamie emerges as a political device within the Bertillon system that challenges the project of accuracy in identification, and at the same time serves as a reflection of the conditions of alley

[33] See Bertillon record "Mamie" aliases: Mamie Hall (#3190) and alias Mamie Wheeler (#3190), Mamie Tolsen (#3769), Mamie Jones (#3671), Mamie Knight (#8755), and Mayme Wellington.

[34] From Lorde's "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" in *Sister Outsider: Essays & Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984): 115.

work labor that compel the use of aliases in the first place. Accuracy and truth are disarticulated from Bertillon visual identification, and instead mobilized toward the forms of social neglect referenced by alley work that made apparent by the overrepresentation of black women as alley workers in the alley work archive. The liminality of alley work in practice and in documentation then displays evidence of resistance.

Alley Work Enumeration as Liminality

Alley work constitutes a liminal status for black women in so far as it names a transitory or in between and unmediated social and spatial orientation of sexual labor. The Minneapolis Bertillon system's conflation of alley work with black women is a symptom of the way in which alley work is a category through which black gendered and sexual liminality operates. Interrogating the Minneapolis Bertillon system's efforts to position black women as ontologically liminal through alley work requires an examination of city's the sexual labor economy. In conversation with the Bertillon system's use of the term "alley worker," an early Minneapolis Vice Commission Report released in 1911, deploys the categories "alleywalking," "streetwalking," and "clandestine prostitution" to designate related and often overlapping economic and social marginalities that delineate alley work.[35] The Commission's description of street and alley walking as the most marginal form of sexual labor economically and with regard to the approximation to physical vulnerability further explicates this category with regard to black women's position within it. The Vice Commission's report gives meaning to the delineation of alley work as an undervalued class of racialized and gendered sex work.

[35] Report of the Vice Commission of Minneapolis to His Honor, James C. Haynes, mayor. PG. 55 (Minneapolis: Marion D. Shutter, 1911). Heidi Heller also uses the term "alley walking" in reference to the commission's report in a post on Historyapolis: http://historyapolis.com/blog/2014/07/01/minneapolis-alleywalkers-and-the-campaign-to-end-prostitution/.

"Alley worker" was used only to identify women of color, black women in particular in the Bertillon records. Alley work then as an index of black women's social difference as it emerges in the Bertillon system serves the purpose of also identifying the forms of social neglect and the practices of institutional incorporation that surveillance systems like Bertillon produce and extend with regard to marginal populations. The city's implementation of a fine system for the brothel owners during the period of "regulated prostitution" in the 1860s through the 1890s that Penny Petersen describes in her book *Minneapolis: Minneapolis Madams: The Lost History of Prostitution on the Riverfront* (2011) itself perpetuates the increased surveillance and policing of street and alley work. The fine system under "regulated prostitution" largely targeted madams and required that they regularly appear in court to plead guilty to violating the city's anti-vice ordinance and pay a fine. The madams, as Petersen points out would then continue conducting business repeating the process when next cited by the police.

Also, the fine system generated substantial revenue for the city, and also further signaled alley work's marginality as it existed largely outside of the madam managerial structure attributed to prostitution houses. Whereas madams were the primary targets under the regulated prostitution structure serving to some degree as a buffer between workers, clients, the police, and city officials, alley workers were positioned in a direct one-to-one relation to police and to the conditions by which their labor was regulated. Therefore, brothels came under the regulation of the city through a fine system. Public health officials screened brothel "inmates" as this category of sex workers were called for venereal diseases. The vulnerability to which the structure of "regulated prostitution" contributed is apparent in the ways in which city officials and police distinguished between street and alley walking from "disorderly houses" and "houses of ill-fame" used to describe brothels.

The alley was managed outside of the regulated system of prostitution due to its spatial organization not in privatized houses and buildings, but in public space. The category “alley work” indexes the particularity of its criminalization. Black women’s marginalization in the labor force in the city at the time and their sole identification as alley workers in the Bertillon ledgers is an indication of their positionality within the alley work nexus of identification, regulation, and criminalization. Alley work liminality then designates a specific segment of black women’s sexual labor positioned outside of legitimized or as “regulated” categories of prostitution that the city permitted.

To continue, the Bertillon system categorization of alley work functions as the process by which black gendered and racial difference is rendered liminal. This occurs within the actual visual strategies of categorization deployed by the Bertillon system to account for difference, as well as within the social context that circumscribed Bertillon power. The distillation of black women’s personhood as a site of deviance through “alley work” produced not only the language for increased criminalization, but also the interpretive language used by police that was in and of itself culturally mediated. The codification of alley work within the Bertillon ledger occurred within the context of black women’s labor in the state of Minnesota, and in Minneapolis more specifically. Black women’s work in general is largely underdocumented in the state of Minnesota prior to 1920. Significant studies undertaken by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the late 1880s simply did not account for black women as laborers although they account for white and immigrant women.

The early presence of black women in the “free” U.S. labor force is obscured due to statistical data that is limited or too generalized. Susan Carter asserts that census statistics for black people as a group began in 1870, because the previous two census counts referred only to

free men in 1850, and free men and women in 1860.[36] Therefore, black women's existence in data sets have had to be estimated, because their status as a group has been absorbed by statistics that are compiled for black people as a group—men, women, and children. Black women were included in the census data in 1890 and 1900 in its overall accounting for the rise in women's role in the workforce, however there was no distinct category or separate description of the experiences of black women. Black women and black people as a group experienced employment and housing discrimination in Minneapolis.[37]

In 1910 the black population in Minneapolis was small, just 3,743, and there was evidence of employment discrimination as both the 1911 Vice Commission report and later a *Minneapolis Tribune* article detailed.[38] Also, the fact that black people's place in the city was regulated by restrictive covenants meant that housing in addition to job opportunities were limited for black Minneapolitans.[39] A study of women's labor organizing in Minneapolis demonstrates that black women played a role in challenging the conditions of their labor, but these statistics are only available for 1920 and beyond. That black women were not counted because most were enslaved, and then later as free black women were collapsed in the category of "black" or "women" exemplify the particularity of their liminality.

The conflation of black women with alley work extends to the systematic practice and process of accounting for and making Blackness apparent in the Bertillon system. For example,

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[36] "Labor Force for Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition." *University of California Project on the Historical Statistics of the United States* (Riverside: Center for Social and Economic Policy Studies Institute, 2003).

[37] "Survey for Benefit of Colored Women," by David Vassar Taylor published in *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (14 May 1919).

[38] "Survey for Benefit of Colored Women," by David Vassar Taylor published in *Minneapolis Morning Tribune* (14 May 1919).

[39] "Labor, Politics, and African American Identity in Minneapolis, 1930-50" by Jennifer Delton in *Minnesota History* published by the Minnesota Historical Society Winter (2001-2002). Delton details the ways in which housing and employment discrimination shaped African American participation in labor organizing.

the penultimate ledger, the only one to include a list index of all the people, accounts for 1,006 total. There are 116 people in this ledger identified as "colored" and 38 of them are black women accounting for 33% of the total arrests. This means that from August 31, 1916 to August 27, 1918 with specific reference only to this Bertillon ledger black people account for approximately 8.7% of the arrest records.[40]

For instance, Mamie Hall, alias Mamie Wheeler and Hazel Hall, was "found in a disorderly house" and sentenced to 40 days in the Workhouse on March 1, 1907. She is described as a "laundress" from Kentucky with a "florid," "lt octoroon" complexion and the "back seven" of her teeth missing.[41] Due to the fact that terms like "lt," "dk," "florid" are also used for white people and immigrants, the officers often also designate Blackness through the abbreviation "Col" for "colored." The effort to make Blackness apparent is part of the work that renders it liminal. In the case of Hall, U.S. race and gender history come together as structures that demonstrate her positionality in the Bertillon record. The work to make Blackness apparent in the record assists in the consolidation of race as a category that is dispersed throughout the record rather than concentrated in one category thereby further establishing categorization within a broader strategy of Bertillon standardization. The Bertillon system's treatment of alley work points to the societal processes and practices through which race and gender difference in particular are reified.

Black women's presence in the Bertillon system archive almost entirely as alley workers, and the relative anonymity afforded white heterosexual male alley work patrons, (i.e. Ethel Walters: "suspected of having robbed a man") index the work of the Bertillon system's

[40] From city workhouse records and the arrest and disposition records: See Ledger 14947 (Oct 1916) Minneapolis City Hall Tower Archives. The city kept simultaneous record keeping systems as they invested in the use of the Bertillon system, a more sustained analysis might cross-reference the Bertillon system records with these others catalogs.

[41] Mamie Hall (#3190), Reg. No. 48. Minneapolis City Hall Tower Archives.

purportedly objective gaze as it rationalizes black women as deviant even as it simultaneously valorizes white male protectability. The implicit concern for the preservation of white male status in the burgeoning Twin Cities was explicated by Mead and Muller in their 1899 study:

> "The government of the municipality is largely the work of the Police and Fire Departments . . . but without a written record or history, which should present tangible evidence of the important duties which he performs, he is almost forgotten in the great drama of life in a large city . . . In the early days the volunteers were the most important men in the community; they were leaders in business, social and political circles, and now in old age they are justly proud of the protection which they afforded the infant cities in days of vigorous manhood" (5-6).[42]

The "vigorous manhood" of the volunteer police and firefighters of the past secures its own legacy, whereas the evolution of the police and fire department into a paid department requires a historical record to preserve it. The volume's engravings of officers further legitimize the departmentalization of police and fire service. Engraving after engraving of stern faced and uniformed white men often with distinct mustaches people the pages of the biographical sections that tell us biographical details of each man with regard to their childhood, marital status, children, in addition to their social and political affiliations and their address. While some of the schemas of accounting for the biographical in Mead and Muller's study of the police are indexed in the categorization processes of the Bertillon system, the Bertillon system's purpose is to create a criminal profile. However, the articulation of white masculine service and vigor by Mead and Muller of police officers as "steady," possessing "hardy strength," "reliable," and "brave," create an important point of contrast in the consideration of black women arrested for alley work by Minneapolis police.

Black women's alley work as a category of informal labor contains within it a palpable concern over the security of white men's place in society and for their physical safety as

[42] Muller and Mead, 5-6. On the title page the authors state that the volume's function lies in: "Describing and illustrating the systems, the officers and the men, and the effectiveness of these powers, including a history of each city with reminiscences of the past and a vast fund of valuable information."

expressed by officer Jones in his description of Frances McRaven and by Mead and Muller. This discourse of security is one that demands a visible recognition and perhaps a reappearance of a once more tactile white male power as "vigor." The demand for historical documentation, for a form of power that can be seen and that leaves a tangible "truthful" record unwittingly upsets the taken for granted assumption of white male supremacy. The Bertillon system anticipates the undoing of the artifice of naturalized notions of white male power that Mead and Muller trace to acts of "vigor" on the part of police and fireman in particular. It then ameliorates this social anxiety over white masculinity through its attempt to reinstate power through a measurable system of accounting.

Thus, white male protectability emerges as a way to repair the notion of white male power as natural. Immigration, migration, and economic recession in tandem with the phenomenon of alley work regulation indexed a crisis in white masculinity in the late nineteenth-century that Mead and Muller articulate. That black women working as alley workers were mostly arrested for robbing white men calls into question white male superiority as they continued to be "lured into alleys," robbed, and outsmarted by black women.

The Bertillon system attempts to explicitly identify race with respect to Blackness every time it surfaces, and on a few occasions sex. Gender remains sutured to categories of labor and pronoun usage in the police report, while "female," is used a handful of times to delineate white women.[43] In the case of Charles or "Chas" Johnson who was arrested a few weeks prior to Ethel Walters, the officer wrote "Dk Brown (Col)" to describe the complexion of his skin and his racial identity. The use of "Col" to designate a person as "colored" is one way the record produces a visual language to articulate and manage Blackness. All nine ledgers available at City

[43] Minneapolis City Hall Tower Archives Bertillon ledger records.

Hall, including the 1908-1909 ledger in which the prior two records discussed are held retain a practice of articulating a visual representation of black racial and gendered difference.[44] In this way Blackness as an identifying sign (i.e. Col) bolsters the representation process of the Bertillon system. This perhaps best registers in Bertillon ledger No. 9 that I have previously referenced. In it the names are listed in rough alphabetical order according to the date the record was created. This ledger holds records from 1916 to 1918, and each black person is identified by the signifier "Col" in the index. The name of the person arrested and "Col" generate a racialized and gendered representational structure in the first instance of encounter in the ledger. "Col," like the person's name, operates as a primary form of identification, rather than secondary.

While "Swede," "German," "Russian Jew," and state of birth or official residence classifications in the "Nativity" category serve to identify white immigrants and those who "became white" later in the twentieth-century as David Roediger has argued, it also served to demonstrate the variegated capacious make-up of the record's category "Nativity" that could name a place, ethnicity, or race.[45] The act of not identifying other racially and ethnically marginal people in the same way as "Col" pin points its difference. The twin identification of "Col" and "alley worker" produce the visual language that allow them to function separately in the record—"Col" as a descriptor, while alley worker functions as a determiner, both designating Blackness as a liminal ontological category through visual representation and categorization.

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[44] See "Minneapolis Police Records: Part I Findings," Tower Archives, accessed Spring 2015, finding aid compiled by Kate McManus; McManus points out that Ledger 5 is missing from the archive.

[45] See David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).

Anne Harriss, an alley worker in her late twenties is described as having black "wavy" hair, a dark "brown skin" complexion, "maroon" eyes, and a deep rooted nose.[46] Harriss was arrested August 1, 1908 and her charge is: "vagrancy first class alley worker." The officer reports that Harriss held up a man two years earlier, and that this man "had gone" by the time that she was arrested. In the case of Harriss, alley worker, is her occupational designation and vagrancy her crime. This is one of the few cases where it appears the actions of the man involved came to bear on the articulation of alley work, his position therefore implicated, although he was not criminalized as a participant in alley work. Although the charge of robbery, did not hold up, because he fled, it functions here to articulate the inconsistent renderings of alley work during this period when illicit sexual labor had become increasingly criminalized in the post-regulated prostitution years. The categorization of alley work as vagrancy also renders clear its connection to a spatial politics of regulation that connected the alley to other outdoor public areas.

The context for the Bertillon system's construction of black women's social difference rests in the city's attitudes toward sexuality, race, and gender difference in its broader regulation of sexual labor. In the same 1911 Minneapolis Vice Commission report in which street and alley walking are deemed most vulnerable categories of sex work, the commissioners propose the construction of a public carceral institution solely dedicated to reforming "fallen women." Although the report makes no mention of "colored," "mulatto," or negro women, racial categorization terminology used for black and women of color at the time; they instead use statements such as the "commingling of classes," "clandestine" prostitute, and other terms that loosely designate "social difference" to which black women were indexed—thereby demonstrating the Bertillon ledger's practice of dispersal of the characteristics that reference race and other categories of difference. These categories are signal multiple forms of difference, and

[46] Harriss (#3770), Reg. No 446. Minneapolis City Hall Tower Archives.

perhaps also used to identify women of color who were not black. However, many emerge out of the racist and gendered logics of slavery a categorization system charged with designating Black women's social difference.

Further, the detention facility for "fallen women" that the commissioners recommend would institute a system of entry and discharge organized around "indeterminate" sentencing. Thus, bestowing reformers with absolute power with regard to release. The commissioners argue that a mandate of "indeterminate sentencing" is the only way that women engaged in sex work can truly be reformed. It is significant that while the Vice Commission understands streetwalking and by extension alley work, and all categories of prostitution for that matter, as signaling the need for reform, they also make clear that this public reform institution would not facilitate the mixing of "social classes" of women. Thus, the facility would practice segregation with regard to race and ethnicity at least, and perhaps class as well. This demonstrates the importance of social difference categorization as a part of the structures of reform that were coterminous with the Bertillon system.

The Vice Commission report paints a dismal picture for girls in the city naming waged labor as the culprit for their "delinquency." The report identifies Minneapolis as third in the nation for its large population of girls "living out of home." The commissioners express their concern for the "alarming" rise in young single migrant girls "without proper escorts" in the downtown area of the city. They blame wage labor due to the way in which it made migration a possibility thereby enticing girls to relocate the city. Although, the report makes the point that it is not a fair assumption to make that all of the migrant women were prostitutes, they create the justification for gendered regulation through their construction of the women and girls as "innocent," in need of protection, and likely to be on the "edge of falling from decency" without the city's supervision. That black women are not explicitly named in the report, but register

through their existence in the Bertillon arrest record ledger suggest that they were among the most regulated due to the increase in vice reform and vigilance.

According to the Bertillon ledgers, black women were by in large arrested for the same categories of offenses. Most are arrested for petit and grand larceny from white men, reflecting the judgment of the officer who completed the Bertillon card for Francis McCraven. The cultural mediation of alley work representation is grounded in black women's subjection within paid labor more broadly. The migration patterns of black women from the south to Midwest and East coast cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries generated new regional constructions of black work and black sexual labor. The construction of black women as wage laborers during this time period coincided with the further constitution of black women into personhood through formal and informal wage earnings and through sexualization. Black personhood had depended on a legal designation in free states, so it was especially significant when personhood transitioned away officially from spatial allocation to a recognition though contested embodied.

The arrest of Madam Hertogs in 1889 for allowing a black woman to work in a white prostitution house, as Penny Petersen affirms: "Bordellos were strictly segregated" (125) further supports this claim. Therefore, prostitution and sexual labor more broadly conferred race, gender, and sexual social difference. However, this process sometimes manifested itself in conflicting ways. As an 1888 article published in the *Western Appeal*, an African American newspaper based out of Chicago, St. Paul, and Minneapolis explains that black men's social difference is conditioned by white supremacy and patriarchy. The writer claims that one indignity that black men experience comes from their exclusion from houses of prostitution that employ a "whites only" policy:

> What a difference there is between the feelings of the black man toward the whites, and the white man toward the blacks. The whites boast of their superiority, meaning thereby,

> that they are superior from a christian, humane, or moral standpoint . . . Their humanity seldom prompts them to accord to their black brothers a free and fair show in the battle of life, and to judge them by their capabilities and worth without regard to the color of their skin. While their idea of morals is that the blighting results of any infraction of the moral law must fall upon the blacks mainly, wherever the two races are in any way connected in the infraction. In Christianity, humanity and morals they admit that the blacks have a place, but inconsistently and unjustly designate that place somewhere below the plane, they themselves occupy. They think it all right for white men to be missionaries, preachers, evangelists etc., etc . . . and labor for the salvation of black men's souls, but not for black men to fill the same office for them, though they give every evidence of being christians, and possess undesputed ability. They believe it is right for white doctors, white lawyers, white merchants etc., etc., to administer to the needs of black men, but seldom return the compliment. They show their interest in the morals of the black men, by shutting their eyes to the fact that gambling is carried on by them, the same as if no law against gambling existed and license houses of prostitution for black women, with a provision that black men are not to be permitted to visit them. In all their institutions of whatever nature, all peoples are made welcome on equal terms excepting the black man. On the other hand, there is absolutely nothing over which the black man has control, that is so high, so sacred or so law, that his white brother will not be accorded an equal chance with himself, in the race for its possession.[47]

The *Western Appeal* writer is clear about the social difference of black men that is produced by the denial of institutional access (i.e. prostitution houses) exclusion that anti-black racism and white supremacist patriarchy create. Social difference emerges here in the categorization of blackness through the restriction of access to social institutions, specifically prostitution. As a social institution prostitution designates social difference for men on the basis of race and class, and sexual labor as a process of conferred vulnerability as it facilitates entry into legitimized masculinity through the social differentiation entailed through sexual labor, and a general institutionalized sexual and social access to women.

Cynthia Blair describes vulnerability with regard to the concentration of black women in street and alley work within the prostitution economy in her groundbreaking study of black

[47] Vol 3, No 40 *Western Appeal*, Ed. J.Q. Adams, Chicago Northwest Publishing Company: St. Paul, Minneapolis and Chicago (3 Mar 1888). Author not listed.

women's sexual labor *I've Got to Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (2010). Blair argues:

> Yet even if street work did not represent black women's isolation within the sex economy, the necessity of street work did demonstrate the economic vulnerability of individual black women and the financial instability of the black brothels, bawdy saloons, and other leisure establishments supporting black street workers. Streetwalking demonstrates the various ways that black women simultaneously exploited opportunities within the sex trade and worked to redefine the limits that they faced within the Levee's sex economy.[48]

Blair's description provides both a counter position to the overall understanding of black women as vulnerable and therefore without agency, at the same time she accounts for the vulnerability established by alley work. Relatedly, as Minneapolis' brothel and alley work economies elucidate, prostitution designates a form of labor intimately tied to the location of the work site. As Petersen describes, working in a brothel or a bordello was more socially valued then street or alley work as is reflected in its higher on average rate of remuneration. The spatial location and organization of sex work designates the value of the work performed, and in turn the social value conferred onto those who perform it.

The social devaluation of alley and street work that the Vice Commission report confirms plays a role in the overall understanding and construction of the distinction between different categories of sex work. If what the officer who arrested McCraven said is at all a reliable indication of the perception of black women in the city we might deduce that even though their population was small they constituted a large number of women on the streets doing alley work (Costa and Tate). Thus, black women's location in a socially devalued sector of prostitution serves as an example of the way in which alley work as a category both confers and extinguishes social value of women black women. The vulnerability of alley work is noted by the Vice

[48] Blair, 55.

Commission's report with regard to: life expectancy, risk, workhouse time, and confrontations with the police.

Further, one strident critique of the 1911 Minneapolis Vice Commission report came from Dr. Geo. F. Butler of Chicago.[49] Butler charged that the commission due to its naivety and ignorance recommended sexual repression. Butler reasons that the institution of marriage actually creates a category of men who are left out of sexual intimacy, because they cannot materially afford the financial dependency created by marriage, and therefore have no access to state sanctioned sexual relationships.[50] He goes on to argue that the social impulse toward marriage also produces the necessity for prostitution, sexual access to women being a material need and a right for men thereby confirming prostitution as a social institution that both reifies social difference through sexual access to women.[51]

The Bertillon record of Ethel Walters, as I discuss at the beginning of the chapter, exemplifies the tendency toward absence with regard to the Bertillon system's approach to criminal categorization due to its primary focus on the identification of social difference.[52] The record states: "Suspected of having robbed a man of his pocket book and contents no conviction man had left the city could not get complaint she had also robbed a man of $110.00 last summer and with the same results at that time." For instance, we do not know the name of the person who apparently accused Walters of robbery, but we do know that Walters is a black woman or as the complexion category states: "dk brown skin negra." We also know that her "occupation" is "CP/WP & alley worker," and regarding peculiarities of appearance that her face is " . . . covered

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[49] From "The Report of the Minneapolis Vice Commission" by Geo. R. Butler, M.D. in *Journal of American Public Health Association* Vol. 1 No. 12 (Dec 1911): 897-898.

[50] Butler, 897.

[51] Butler, 898.

[52] Walters (#2935), Reg. No 558. Minneapolis City Hall Tower Archives. See Figures 2.4 and 2.5.

with black dots," but we do not know where the robbery took place. Regarding the man that she was "suspected" of robbing he: "left the city could not get complaint."

Walters' record fails to legitimize the cause of arrest, and instead presents details that beg the question why she was arrested in the first place. The record states that she was "suspected" of robbing a man, and although the man that she was "suspected" of robbing had already left the city and had not actually filed an official complaint she was still arrested. The record also states that the case was "dismissed" and that Walters had committed this same crime the previous year with no specific details regarding the previous arrest. That there is no official account from the accuser illustrates that the purpose of Walters' record is not to document criminality, but rather to bolster the process of collecting identifying information to serve the process of defining criminality and codifying criminalized acts. Walters was not convicted of a crime nor did she have charges pressed against her, but she has a criminal record.

Further, that Walters' Bertillon record exists at all signals her liminality as an alley worker as it serves the primary purpose of further establishing the Bertillon system as a legitimate mechanism for the criminal identification by contributing to the bank of data available. There is no section included on the Bertillon card where a statement is taken from the perspective of the person arrested that describes what happened from the perspective of the "alley workers," such as Walters, thus leaving us to wonder if women arrested were actually taking back money they were denied, or if they were in fact being robbed and in that case defending themselves.

The Bertillon records that deploy the term "alley worker" the racialized and gendering terminology of the time that signal black women's social difference are also mobilized: "colored," "negra," "octoroon," or "mulatto." The dispersal of social difference characteristics across a number of categories in the Bertillon system is noted in the case of both race and gender

for instance. The Minneapolis record collects information categorically regarding: "Forehead (Incln, Hght, Wdth, Pecul), Nose (ridge, base, root, lgth, project, breadth, pecul), Color of Left Eye (circle, periph, pecul), Age, Nativity, Occupation, Weight, Chin, Beard, Hair" and "Comp" for complexion." The practice of dispersing social difference across a number of categories serves the purpose of unintentionally denaturalizing difference revealing its social construction. What this reveals is not that race, gender, and sex were not a part of the observable characteristics listed, but rather that the social meaning of race, gender, and sexuality cohere across a number of categories.

Furthermore, neither system lists a separate category for gender nor do they for sex, nor was there a separate ledger book for people of different gender identities. The records list a host of physical characteristics that have come to define gender identity: "beard, color of left eye, bridge of nose, hair, shoulders, gate, hair." None of the records contain all requested information, which indicates the information that was most important to officers. The record does not assume there are two separate types of gendered subjects, men and women, they assume that there are human body parts and gender classification comes through the process of identification that assigns people using social characteristics. Gender is noted systemically by the person's name, possibly the type of work they do, and their location within the record system. With regard to race, the categories: "nativity, hair, left and right eye color," and "comp." for complexion operate explicitly as categories of racialization. Also, categories such as "work," and "address" might also situate subjects within particular racial categories due to racial covenants and leasing laws. "Nativity" comes to define state, city, and other places of residence within the United States and other countries as well.

Alley Work: an Archive of The Disappeared

Saidiya Hartman's interrogation of the archive of transatlantic slavery provides an

important assessment of the work of history and the work of the archive of the disappeared. Hartman reminds us in reference to her own treatment of records of enslavement: "The intent of this practice is not to give voice to the slave, but rather to imagine what cannot be verified, a realm of experience which is situated between two zones of death—social and corporeal death—and to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance."[53] Hartman's articulation of the difficulty, and perhaps the impossibility of giving voice to lives and experiences that disappear in the archive without also reproducing the power and the violence of the archive, offers an important connection here to the Minneapolis Police Department's Bertillon System documentation of alley work.

Hartman's assertion of the history of violence that the archive of transatlantic slavery enacts as a violence that among many things functions through the systematic disappearance of black subjects provides an articulation of the visual dimension of race, gender, and sexual of what Hartman refers to as social and corporeal death. Disappearance then is a form of brute violence that simultaneously manifests in the archival record designed to offer a window into the past. The Bertillon system engages in a practice of renarration of the details of an arrest, an act that disappears the full account. Alley work arrests are articulated only through the voice of the police officer thereby foreclosing space for the women arrested to speak through the record with the understanding that speech in this context is a contested site. Thus, the exchanges between the police and the women that occasioned the descriptions of the crimes in the first place only register from the perspective of the police.

Moreover, the Bertillon record does not possess a section where people who are arrested can make a statement, instead the perspective and voice of the officer is privileged as a form of structural foreclosure that attempts to keep out the voices of the people who are arrested. Thus,

[53] See Hartman's "Venus in Two Acts" *Small Axe* No. 26 Vol. 12 No. 2 (June 2008): 11.

reading challenges to the Bertillon system occur in the moments where the system collapses in on itself through its redundancies, through its inconsistent practices of documentation. A consideration of the practice of taking on aliases by alley workers is one site to assess resistance to visual language of documentation of Bertillon. Also, as May Moore's "mugshot" photograph protest exemplifies the Bertillon practice of foreclosure was challenged.

Thus, the narrative that I want to tell regarding the Bertillon records is impossible from the outset. Examining the documentation of alley work through the arrest records already indexes the erasure of the experience of the women who were designated alley workers. Hartman's demonstration that reading against the grain of history is one place, perhaps the only place, to engage the experience of the oppressed as an intervention into history. In this way, alley work serves as a counter-narrative of the Bertillon system as it puts forth an official account of Minneapolis criminalization. Alley work reveals this history to be incomplete and violent as it points to the interpretive fiction that accompanies any history.

Conclusion

Black women's alley work charts a rich history of challenge to the Bertillon System of Criminal Identification credited with ushering in modern policing tactics through the introduction of a standardized process for cataloging information about people arrested. The designation of alley work as a devalued form of gendered and sexual labor racialized largely as black facilitated the further criminalization of black women. Alley work also serves as a categorical reminder of the integration of photographic technology into Minneapolis police work through the Bertillon system and the work this category did to institute a visual regime of black women's capture and precarity. Finally, as a form of sexual labor gendered as feminized "alley work" constitutes a broader designation of Blackness as liminal in the American Midwest. This chapter has advanced an interrogation of the visual capture of Blackness through the

consideration of black women's Bertillon system alley work records. The alley work police records document the coming together of photography, surveillance, and police work as part of a broader project of the modernization of policing through the standardization of criminal identification through the Bertillon System of Criminal Identification.

Figures

Figure 2.1
Image from *History of The Fire and Police Departments of Minneapolis* (1890) by Augustine Costello (p. 254). "The Rogues Gallery" was located at the Central police station in downtown Minneapolis according to an 1899 Annual Report written by the Superintendent of Police.

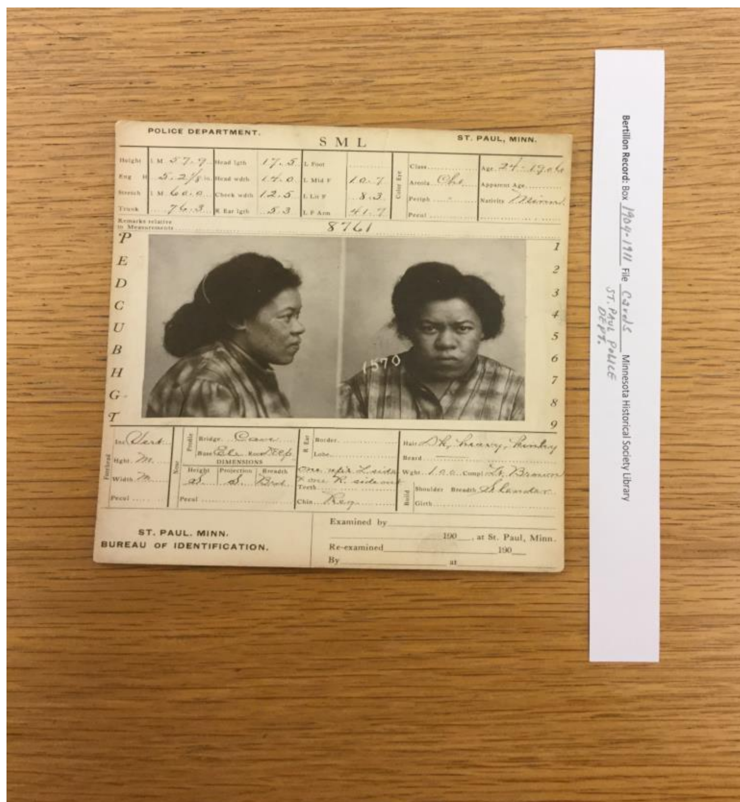
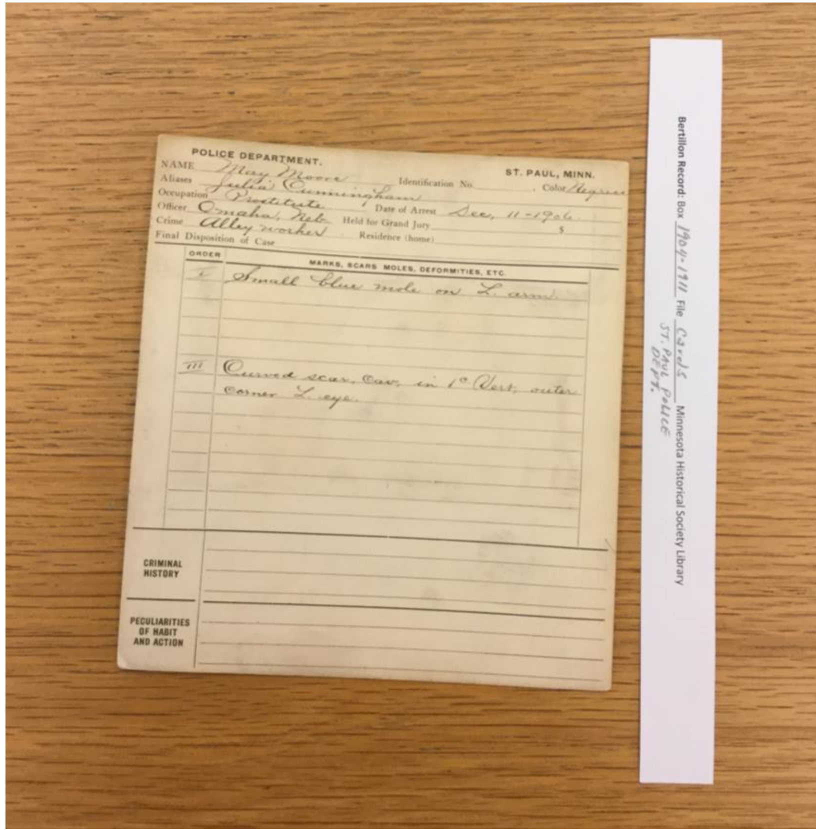


Figure 2.2
May Moore
Bertillon Mugshot #8761 (front)
Gale Family Library
Minnesota Historical Society



POLICE DEPARTMENT. ST. PAUL, MINN.

NAME May Moore Identification No. ______, Color Negress

Aliases Julia Cunningham

Occupation Prostitute Date of Arrest Dec. 11-1906.

Officer Omaha, Neb. Held for Grand Jury ______ $

Crime Alley worker Residence (home) ______

Final Disposition of Case ______

ORDER	MARKS, SCARS, MOLES, DEFORMITIES, ETC.
I	Small blue mole on L. arm.
III	Curved scar, Oav. in 1° Vert. outer corner L. eye.

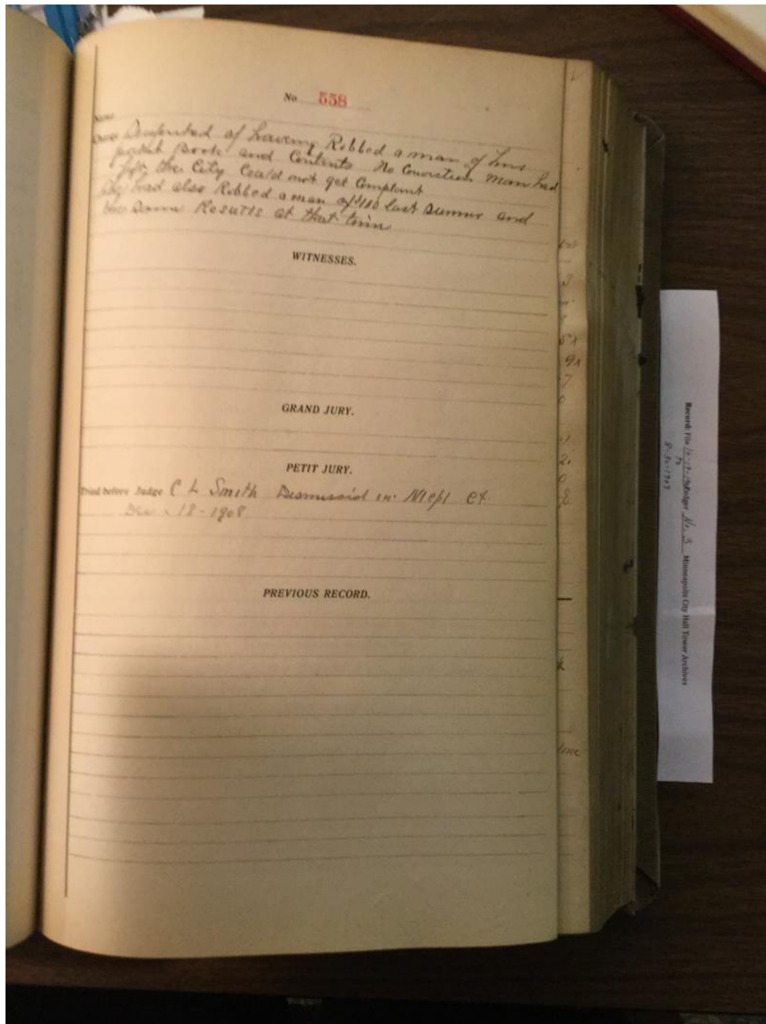
CRIMINAL HISTORY

PECULIARITIES OF HABIT AND ACTION

Bertillon Record: Box 1904-1911 File Cards St. Paul Police Dept. Minnesota Historical Society Library

Figure 2.3
May Moore
Bertillon Mugshot #8761 (back)
Gale Family Library
Minnesota Historical Society

Figure 2.4
Ethel Walters
Bertillon Record #2935 (Reg. 558)
(front)
Tower Archives
Minneapolis City Hall



No 558

Note: [illegible] Suspected of having Robbed a man of his pocket Book and Contents No Conviction man had left the City Could not get Complaint [illegible] had also Robbed a man of $110 last Summer and [illegible] Results at that time

WITNESSES.

GRAND JURY.

PETIT JURY.

Tried before Judge C L Smith Dismissed in Mpls Ct Dec 18-1908

PREVIOUS RECORD.

Figure 2.5
Ethel Walters
Bertillon record #2935 (Reg. 558)
(back)
Gale Family Library
Minnesota Historical Society

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Chapter Three

Ruth Ellis and the Sociality of Black Queer Longevity in Detroit

"I don't know . . . Who would want to read a book of my life? I'm nobody. I'm just Ruth."

—Ruth Ellis[1]

Introduction

A black screen and the sound of a dial tone open the film *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100* an independent biographical documentary by Yvonne Welbon released in 1999. As its title indicates, the film offers a close portrait of Ruth Ellis, a black lesbian centenarian who lived in Detroit, Michigan for most of her life. In the opening sequence of the film, we first hear Ellis' voice as she introduces herself to the person with whom she chats casually on the phone: "This is Ruth Ellis from Detroit, Michigan," the camera captures her in a medium close-up from head to midriff as she sits at a dining room table while in the background someone works busily in the kitchen. Ellis then playfully reveals to the person on the phone that it is difficult to meet up with her in person: "I may not be in my room. I'm hard to catch. The only time to catch me is late at night, then sometimes I'm out dancing."

As the opening sequence exemplifies, *Living with Pride* establishes sociality and everyday practices of living in shared and distinct ways as central to black queer living. I argue that the film offers an understanding of longevity that challenges the common tendency to frame it as an exceptional individual achievement. I detail the ways in which the exceptional longevity framework is rooted in American exceptionalism as an ideology that positions the United States as successful and unique in its ability to balance the values of a democratic political system with

[1] From an interview in the opening sequence of *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100* (1999) by Yvonne Welbon.

the demands of a capitalist economy.[2] The contradiction inherent in the concept of capitalist democracy is resolved through the centrality of individualism to the American political project. I assert that the exceptional longevity framework functions to erase the importance of collectivity and relationality to the process of sustaining and extending life. This chapter turns to *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100* in order to advance a theory of black queer longevity grounded in shared struggle and the social relationships of the everyday that challenge exceptionalism.

The film *Living with Pride* is organized roughly into five parts beginning with an introduction to Ruth Ellis as a person and a cultural figure as she lives in the present time of the film, it then moves on to her early years growing up in Springfield, Illinois (1899-1919), young adult years in Springfield (1919-1937), early Detroit years (1937-1974), and ends just as it started, with a depiction of her everyday life in Detroit. The last scene of the film displays a caption that reveals Ruth Ellis' death on October 5, 2000 at 101 years old.

Living with Pride draws on the traditional visual narrative techniques of biographical documentary filmmaking such as sitting-interviews, close-ups, period reenactments, historical footage, photographs, music, and sound recordings to create a visually dynamic lens through which to interpret the life of Ruth Ellis and tell her story. It was at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in 1996 that Yvonne Welbon met Ellis, and decided she had to make a film about her. Ellis was at that time 97 years old, living independently, and part of a vibrant Detroit LGBTQ community. This captivated Welbon. Ellis as a person and her life in its totality, rather than any single event prompted Welbon to make a documentary with her as the subject.[3]

In her remarks at the Detroit premiere of *Living with Pride* in July of 1999, Yvonne Welbon explains that her drive to document everyday life comes from the practice

[2] From David Noble's *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

[3] Yvonne Welbon's opening remarks on July 22, 1999 at the Detroit Premiere of *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100*. Ruth Ellis attended.

of retelling the events of each day at school to her family in the evening when she arrived home. Welbon explains: "If no one knew the stories of my life, than it would be like my life never happened . . . I was compelled to document the 100 years of Ruth's life, I felt that her story was one that had to be shared, and never forgotten. The story of her life involves all of you."[4] The practice of storytelling rooted in Welbon's youthful enactment of subjectivity as an interdependent process anticipates the fear of disappearance and erasure that circumscribes black histories of gendered and sexual difference in particular.[5] Ellis also gives voice to this fear in *Living with Pride* when she states in reference to gay identity and culture: "Everything was real secret like" even as she declares in the next breath, "I was never in what you call it . . . closet." Welbon's approach to filmmaking serves as a touchstone for the role that relationality plays in the film in its representation of everyday life and longevity as processes grounded in both the life affirming and precarious elements wrought by and through black sociality.

Sociality and the Everyday as Practices of Longevity

In the first four minutes of the film *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100* we are introduced to Ruth Ellis not once, but several times. In our first encounter with Ellis she introduces herself to someone while talking on the phone. This opening sequence first creates intimacy by allowing us, the audience, to listen in on Ellis' conversation just as the person in the kitchen in the background appears to be doing. As the audience, we are positioned not as eavesdroppers, but as witnesses and perhaps even participants in Ellis' practice of social engagement. It is as if we are sitting on the other side of the dining room table from her. The opening moment invites us into the sociality of the everyday produced through the film's mise-

[4] Welbon's remarks on July 22, 1999 at the Detroit premiere of *Living with Pride*. Also, I refer to Michael Bronski's *A Queer History of the United States (ReVisioning American History)* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011).

[5] Here I am referring to Cathy Cohen's *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), and insights related to black lesbian historical erasure and the need to create history that Cheryl Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman* (1997) part of the new queer cinema film movement raises.

en-scène. Immediately following the phone conversation, the film transitions to a brief shot of Ellis dancing in a party dress, and then quickly shifts to interviews with Leona McElvene, Dr. Kofi Adoma, Torrena Dye, and Carolyn Lejuste all several decades Ruth Ellis' junior who tell us that they met her while out dancing at parties and at bars. McElvene asserts with a smile: "I met Ruth at a party at a bar, and she was surrounded with a lot of women."

Thus, the opening sequence interviews reintroduce Ruth Ellis to us through several of her friends who all confirm her participation in women-centered, lesbian, and African American social engagements that involve dancing. Dancing comes to register Ellis' engagement in community life at the intersection of race, sexuality, and gender. The camera intercuts the interviews with footage of Ellis dancing and socializing. The film's use of a visually layered narrative structure to account for the way in which social relationships circumscribe Ellis as she lives her life through them, and generates a context for sociality as essential to the film representation of her life. Our final opening introduction to Ellis occurs after this sequence as the film transitions to a focus on her early life. She sits in a rocking chair angled slightly to the left, the camera zooms in for a medium close-up from the waist up, as she tells us directly: "I am Ruth Ellis, born in 1899, in Springfield, Illinois. The capital of Illinois." The multiple informal introductions that precede this direct and more formal encounter with Ellis together create the narrative structure of the film that visually articulates sociality with an intricate care and relatability as constitutive of Ellis' enactment of identity and everyday life.

Just as sociality is important as the firm visual placement of Ellis within connection and relationships details, the mundane aspects of everyday life also significantly situate Ellis. Following Dr. Kofi Adoma's statements regarding meeting Ellis, Adoma lists key details of Ellis' life: "She was a businesswoman, someone who experienced triple oppression—black, woman, and lesbian. She was in relationship with a woman for over thirty years, and her house

was the central gathering place for Detroit lesbians and gays." As Adoma speaks, the film cuts to a close-up of Ellis getting something out of the refrigerator, and overlays Adoma's voiceover. This scene's narration functions visually to position the everyday on a par with the fact that Ellis "experienced triple oppression," was a self-employed print typesetter for more than twenty years, and "was in a relationship with a woman for over thirty-years." By splicing these moments the film illustrates sociality (i.e. Adoma commenting on Ellis) and the everyday (i.e. Ellis at the refrigerator) as defining aspects of Ellis' representation. This sequence also works to demonstrate the film's main focus as equally concerned with major life events as well as what might be categorized as the mundane trifles of everyday life.

After the close-up of Ellis at the refrigerator, Adoma's voiceover continues to narrate as the film quickly cuts to a photograph of Ellis working at an old printing press, to an image of Ellis' long-term partner Babe Franklin, archival footage of police brutality against black women perhaps during the 1950s or 1960s, and a reenactment of dancing at a black gay and lesbian house party. This sequence, Adoma's voiceover, and the scene of Ellis engaged in ordinary household activities visually present the constitutive components of everyday relationality and collective struggle as significant to engaging with Ruth Ellis as a figure. Further by introducing moments and figures that do not explicitly include Ellis she is strongly positioned within a sociality drawn from her experience, and those of others with whom the film identifies her as sharing an experience.[6]

Ellis' entry into sociality as a source of knowledge production is best articulated in a memory she describes of her mother taking her to see the Wright brothers' airplane fly when she was four: "I didn't know what I was looking for—I had never seen an airplane before. But they say that's the airplane, so it must have been." This experience serves as an index of the ways in

[6] Here I refer to the historical footage of the Civil Rights Movement and dance party reenactment in the film.

which both ideology and common sense understandings of the world are socially transmitted as meaningful in the life of young Ruth.[7] While sociality is consistently engaged, attention to the everyday functions as a bookend to the opening and concluding segments of the film providing a point of connection to the engagement with the subject of living itself on the level of the quotidian and more explicitly to longevity by the end of the film. Sociality and the everyday merge in a voiceover by Ruth Ellis: "Who would want to read a book of my life, I'm nobody, I'm just Ruth." Here she positions the events of her life as well as herself within the domain of the ordinary. The deployment of the register of the ordinary here by Ellis, in contrast to the way in which the refrigerator and Adoma's voiceover do the work to draw a connection between the everyday and sociality, narratively approximates the everyday to her own self-image as well as her modest understanding of how others already perceive, or perhaps should perceive her.

Ruth Ellis' participation in the Detroit LGBT community social relationships can be traced to her coming into consciousness with regard to sexuality and race while growing up in Springfield, Illinois. The first part of *Living with Pride* depicts Ellis' early years in Springfield from her birth in 1899 until she graduates from high school in 1919. Ellis describes her family's experience of the violence that engulfed the city during the Springfield Riot of 1908. Ellis was 9 years old at the time. The riot started after a white woman falsely accused a black handyman of assault. Ellis describes how a mob of white men attacked black people in Springfield. Black homes and businesses were looted and burned. Ellis explains that in the case of the integrated neighborhoods: "they told the white people to put a sheet in their windows, and their homes wouldn't be burned. They were just going to burn the Colored people's homes." One of the lynching victims was an 80 year-old black man who was married for thirty-two years to a white woman. This act of violence articulates the unprotectability and disregard for black life and

[7] Stuart Hall has argued this point about ideology in his seminal essay "Encoding/Decoding" (1973) in *The Cultural Studies Reader* Ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 1993).

longevity more broadly, and brings Springfield into conversation with a longer history of anti-black racism and terrorism in the region and nationally. As Ellis recounts these events, the camera's close-up reveals her matter-of-fact and despondent disposition. Almost cut out of the shot is Ellis' hand as it rests on the arm of the rocking chair clasping the hand of an unidentified person. This act of solidarity and friendship creates a bridge between the everyday and the visual representation of the event grounded in Ellis' personal memory. She describes how her father had an old sword and her brothers held "brick-bats" as they sat in the doorway to protect the house. Ellis tells us that the mob did not make it to their house. A sound recording of a riot, archival photographs of the violence and destruction caused by white men during the riot, along with photographs of the tree where a black man was lynched portray this moment in Ellis' life.

Ruth's tone becomes more direct in the next sequence when asked about her elementary school education in Springfield: "I was a loner," she states definitively as the camera closes in on her face. Ruth does not talk about how the racism she experienced made her feel, she talks about the condition of the experience as a whole. Although she articulates herself as a "loner" she goes on to explain how her isolation was in fact an effect of racism, sexism, and classism. She states: "Sometimes I would be the only one." Instead of merely serving as an example of the strength and resilience of her personal character, this admission points back to the forms of oppression that circumscribe her experience. Her father was the first black mail carrier in Illinois, and one source lists housewife as her mother's occupation. Her family was poor. She reveals that being a "loner" was not by choice:

> When children start to school something happens. The whites go with the whites, and the blacks go with the blacks . . . There was another black girl on my block, but her father owned a grocery store so she thought she was a little better than I. I was a poor person so she wouldn't play with me.

Again, rather than highlighting the strength of her personal character, the exceptional nature of her being "the only one" or the "loner," who "didn't have anyone to play with," reveals

the isolation that exceptionalist narratives demand as they operate through existing forms of racism, classism, and sexism. As an instrumental version of "America the Beautiful" plays the interview with Ellis is intercut with historical footage of black girls in integrated schools. The overlay of Ellis' interview voiceover in relation to the school footage effectively communicates her transcendence of the space of institutionalized isolation that the school imposes. In so doing, the everyday practice of going to school is revealed as part of the broader condition of life under de facto racial segregation, and the ongoing brutality that extended beyond the riot of 1908. These institutional forms of exclusion enacted in the school and the riot are particular, and signify the shared experiences of oppression that anti-black racism and classism produced. The song "America the Beautiful" in this segment paradoxically sutures the particularity of the erasure Ellis experienced in school growing up working class in the Midwest to these same institutions and tactics of oppression as they were deployed nationally.

In the next segment, Ellis goes on to talk about how her high school gym teacher Lola, "a Portuguese woman" took an interest in her as a student and would step in and hold her hand when the white girls would refuse to during gym activities. She mentions that Lola was her first crush. This experience is narrated in relation to racism in public space more broadly in the city. She explains: "Well, the city was prejudice so there weren't a lot of places you could go. We weren't allowed in restaurants . . . At the theaters you had to sit in the back . . . 'peanut heaven' is what it was called." Her first crush on a woman is narratively disarticulated from the film segment in which she explicitly discusses her sexuality that is positioned narratively in the years following high school. As she details her experiences in school and in the city more broadly with regard to race, gender, and class, the camera performs one of the closet close-ups in the entire film of Ellis' face only. This organization of the narrative positions earlier moments of racial violence, intimidation, and institutional segregation in school and in public places in the

city as the substantively situate her intersectionally as a black gay woman.

Further, Ellis' narrative of coming into knowledge about sexuality occurs at a point in the film where her manner of storytelling and the complexity of the details of her experience of social relationships merge with the film's layered narrative structure. She begins by discussing how she never knew for sure, but how she suspected that her brother Dr. Harry Ellis was gay. Of her three brothers, Harry was the one with whom she was closest. She describes how at his medical practice: "He had an 'office boy' named Howard, and that was his main boyfriend." She simultaneously expresses the fact that Harry never identified himself to her as gay, nor his relationship with Howard as romantic, with her own experience of the two of them as boyfriends. This move allows her to relationally.

Following her discussion of Harry and Howard, Ellis tells us: "Everything was kinda hush hush and secret like. I didn't know nothing about lesbians. We called them women lovers." She then mentions that she read Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and it gave her some understanding of lesbianism. To apply her knowledge she attempted to engage sex workers on the topic of lesbianism: "I tried to get 'sportin' women' to show me what they did, but they just laughed at me." She then describes how her father warned that if she got pregnant she would be out on her own: "pregnant women were ostracized back then . . . I think he was happy that I didn't take up with the boys."[8] She then discusses her one-night affairs with women: "If I saw somebody that I liked, and they liked me, I went home with them, but that was it." One night at a dance she met Ceciline "Babe" Franklin, and Babe followed her home. Ruth was reluctant to date her due to Babe being ten years younger, at the time she was in her twenties. However they

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[8] This moment from the film interview speaks to Ruth's response regarding her father's approach to sex education in an interview for *Curve* magazine in which she talks about the time when her father brought home a book about female reproduction and left it on his desk. Ruth studied the book, and it contributed to her knowledge regarding sexuality and reproduction. Her father never talked to her about it, he simply took it away after a period of time: "After he figured I'd had enough of it." From "Portrait of a 100-Year-Old Lesbian" by Kathleen Wilkinson in *Curve* 9.5 (Nov 1999): www.curvemagazine. com/Detailed/70.html.

began a romance, which continued for over thirty years after they both relocated to Detroit, Michigan in 1937. The diverse situations and people that contributed to Ellis' narrative of coming to understand herself as a gay person are a testament to her intersectional identity. This is one moment where the precarity of sociality as expressed through racial, gender, and sexual vulnerability operates through and in conjunction with sociality as a process of shared experience and identity.

Ruth and Babe bought a house together in Detroit for $5,000 in the 1940s, and lived there until the city demolished the house to use the space for urban renewal in 1971. Their house was referred to as "the gay spot" as the film indicates. Rochella Thorpe has described the way in which, Ruth Ellis and Babe Franklin were part of a generation of black lesbians in the 1940s and 1950s in Detroit who hosted house parties that were vital to black gay community life and sociality. Black people were often subjected to a combination of racial, gendered, and class oppressions that made it difficult, if not impossible to own their own bars and other establishments, and to secure liquor licenses and other appropriate permits.[9]

Additionally, black people were often not allowed in white gay bars, and going out to bars at all added levels of vulnerability with regard to interactions with police, white gay bar attendees, and homophobic attacks outside the bars.[10] The black gay and lesbian house party scene offered a level of privacy and safety in the context of the hostile city. The house party also served as a site of collectivity and mutual aid, with the house itself in the case of Babe and Ruth serving as a place of refuge for gay people new to the city or attempting to get back on their feet. Although, they had meager earnings they also did what they could to financially assist black gay students to finish school. Ruth explains in *Living with Pride*: "We helped 'em a little. It wasn't

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[9] See Rochella Thorpe's "'A house where queers go": African-American Lesbian Nightlife in Detroit, 1940-1975" in *Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America* Ed. Ellen Lewin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996): 61.

[10] Thorpe, 57-58.

much cause we didn't have much back then, but we helped 'em a little." In addition to school tuition, Babe and Ruth let people stay at their house, and helped introduce them to the community.

Moreover, house parties brought gay men and women into contact, and demonstrated the bonds and connections between them. Just as Ellis' brother Harry's relationship with Howard served as formative during her construction of identity as a black gay woman. Babe and Ruth's parties hosted black people from different class backgrounds and cities. Further, Thorpe points out that the focus on bars as public expressions of gay and lesbian life within gay and lesbian social history actually eclipses the vibrant history of black lesbian and gay sociality embedded in house party traditions that were distinctly African American. The house and "rent party" tradition created a sociality and mechanism of community and mutual aid as exemplified by Ruth's description of the way in which she and Babe used their house as a source of support for black lesbian and gay people.

With no photographs or documentation of the actual parties perhaps due to the informal code of privacy, the film uses reenactment scenes to portray the party culture at Babe and Ruth's house. Activities at the house included: dancing, fights, drinking, eating, and general socializing. A sitting interview with Ruth is interspersed with the reenactments, which is in turn overlaid with a voiceover from her interview. Ruth appears as herself in the house party reenactment dressed up and smiling. The camera zooms in on her, and pauses further suturing her presence to the time period and her contribution to the Detroit house party subcultural formation.

The film transitions from black gay subcultural life to accounting for events of historical note in Detroit. Ellis identifies the 1963 Walk to Freedom in Detroit where Martin Luther King, Jr. presented an early version of his "I Have A Dream" speech as the most important event she ever attended. In a later moment, she playfully names "joining the lesbians" as her

proudest moment. Although, Ellis also explains that she had never met a white lesbian before 1984 when Jaye Spiro taught her self defense at her senior citizen's building: "I didn't know much about them . . . didn't have any contact with them." Thus, articulating the segregation within the gay community, and the historic exclusion of black gay people from gay community spaces. These are the only two experiences that she attaches a distinction to, and by doing so they serve as the most explicit vocal articulations of her engagement with social movements. For instance, on the first day of the 1967 Detroit Riot, that started after an act of police brutality. Ruth says she: "had no idea what was happening." It erupted on her birthday and she was at her birthday party when it started. She describes how there was no news report and thus limited information on the riot.

With the exception of the 1963 March, Ellis does not speak explicitly in the film about the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power Movement, the Women's Movement, the Anti-War Movement, or any other 1960s social movement during the film. In fact she does not draw on the available terms of the movements to refer to her own identity or to power relations in society such as "feminism," "classism," or "black nationalist." At the end of the film Ellis states: "I'm just a common ordinary person, who has enjoyed life, never had a lot of money, never had lot of nice clothes and things, but I just been happy, being poor I've been happy."

In her description of coming into sexuality while in Springfield, Ellis refuses to identify with the logic of "the closet" or "coming out," thereby challenging the modern understanding of gay identity that was articulated as the most salient model of interpreting gay oppression during the Gay Rights Movement. She asserts: "I was never in—What you call it? . . . closet." She explains that she did not hide her sexuality from her mother, and she had never heard her dad or her brothers say anything about her being gay. The only experience related to sexuality that came up for her occurred while she was still living with her father. One time she and her

girlfriend, “made a little too much noise,” and her dad threatened to put her out if they made that much noise again. Thus, being in “the closet,” for her named how others see you and how they engage with you, and did not only refer to the actions of an individual hiding their true identity. Thus, “the closet,” constituted a relational and a social phenomena rather than merely the consequence of individual secrecy and duplicity.[11]

The musical shift to “Green Onions” (1962) by Booker T. and the MGs, an instrumental R&B and rock & roll classic provides the soundtrack to the film’s narration of social movements of the 1960s through photographs, newspaper clippings of the Stonewall Riot, archival film footage of Black Panther Party member, Angela Davis, as well as the first meeting of the National Organization of Women. The film moves between movement representations to photographs of Ruth Ellis’ as she travels to Mexico City, Niagara Falls, and other cities during the 1960s. We also see photographs of Ellis as she plays guitar in a living room, bowling, and standing outside of her house. The film again uses the layering of narrative structure to create a point of contact between Ruth and 1960s social movements.

In the absence of an established point of participatory connection between Ruth and social movements, the film visually produces one in order to co-articulate race, class, gender, and sexuality-based social struggles that addressed intersectional oppressions as part of the genealogy of her life experiences. This visual montage also puts pressure on canonical understandings of the movements of the 60s that do not recognize subcultural spaces such as gay house parties of the 1940s and 1950s in which Ellis participated as related and contributory formations. One way to interpret the house party here is as a productive site of collective sociality and social critique that found further expression during the movements of the

[11] C. Riley Snorton describes this process in *Nobody is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the Down Low* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

1960s and 1970s (Baldwin and Bailey).[12]

Further, the film achieves an advancement of the mundane or the everyday by situating Ruth's photographs alongside footage and photographs of the social movements through which she lived, giving importance to Ellis experience playing guitar as Angela Davis is filmed standing on the street. Rather than use reenactment or voiceover to attempt a more legitimate approximation, the film visually positions Ruth in relation to the social movements from within the actual modes of engagement that she deployed. This strategy of visual articulation allows the level of everyday life and community building to be positioned within the struggles that movements express as they too evidence a radical tradition that exceeds the recognized terms and categories of life experienced through race, gender, class, and sexuality-based difference.

Black Queer Longevity and the Everyday

After the film *Living with Pride* sutures the social relation between Ellis and 1960s social movements, it returns to relational sociality enacted by Ellis and her community in the final segment of the film. As Ellis details the day that Babe Franklin died from a heart attack while on her way to work in 1975, the film cuts to Ellis walking alone into Full Truth Unity Fellowship Church. As Ruth walks to church we hear Nevada Noland singing a solo in the tradition of a soulful dirge that sonically channels the funeral that Babe Franklin did not actually have.[13] Ruth's walk to church effectively catches the narrative up to her everyday life as she lives it in Detroit. Through the content of the sermon and the engagement of the congregation, it is immediately apparent that Full Truth Fellowship is a black gay church. The camera cuts to Shelly Parker, a woman interviewed at earlier moments in the film, as she discusses the

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[12] See James Baldwin's essay "The Price of the Ticket" in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's Press) and Marlon Bailey's *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013).

[13] In the film, Ellis mentions that Babe Franklin's funeral took place in the undertaking parlor, and that she did not have a traditional ceremony.

significance of the message “Your people will be my people” from the Bible’s Book of Ruth and encourages congregants to point those who condemn them to the Book of Ruth because it is “God’s word too.” The camera pans to Ruth Ellis as Shelly Parker speaks.

In many of the interviews, Ruth sits with friends and members of her social and care community as they discuss their relationship to her. For example, Audrey Jones, a younger senior citizen sits with Ruth and declares: “She’s somebody that we can have in our lives . . . to go into longevity. Even though we’re seniors too, we can look at what she’s doing in her years now.” Jones is the only person in the film to outright say the word longevity. Further, Jones talks about longevity as something other people will at some point experience, rather than something that Ruth alone is fortunate enough to experience. Following this interview, Ruth advises:

> Keep living. You live till you die. Just keep living. I didn’t know I could live this long. I didn’t even think I could get to 65. But I passed 65, 75, 85, and 95. The only thing I can say is pay attention to your health. Live so that you don’t injure your health. Have a good atmosphere about yourself. Be kind. Not cranky. I think that helps.

Amy Park, a social worker, sits with Ruth as she points out: “She’s still active and together, growing old doesn’t mean growing out, or being lonely.” Ellis’ status as a black centenarian has been lauded as an achievement, as her recognition by the Mayor of Detroit during her 98th year as well as other state and community-based offices and institutions attest. Relatedly, an article written about Ellis’ first visit to Springfield in sixty-one years at age 98 states: “As for the secret to her healthy longevity, she says it’s simple. ‘“I walk every day, even if it’s just around the block for some fresh air . . . And I drink eight glasses of water a day. And sometimes wine. They say its good for old people.”’[14] In this interview, Ellis positions longevity as accessible and available, instead of as enigmatic, or something that she achieved on her own. Ellis asserts: “I’m nobody. I’m just Ruth,” further situating longevity outside of the logic of

[14] See “Homecoming: Witness to 1908 Race Riots Returns to Springfield to Remember, be Recognized” by Lesley Rogers in *State Journal Register* (12 May 1998).

individual achievement. This signals the film's resistance to the idea that longevity is exceptional. "I'm nobody" at this juncture, narrates black queer longevity as an everyday practice of mutual aid and collectivity, rather than as an exceptional individual triumph.

We learn in the final segment of the film that Ellis outlived all of her immediate and extended family by decades. Reading longevity in relation to the everyday here brings into focus the film's acknowledgment of the many friends and community members who for years visited Ellis, helped her around the house, took her to the grocery store and to run other errands, picked her up to go out to eat, party, bar hop, and most importantly, as expressed by her, took her dancing. The journal entries, letters, and birthday cards in the Ruth Ellis archive from which many of the materials for the film are drawn detail these happenings, errands, and occasions as life-affirming, or as Ellis describes it in the film: "These girls make me have this energy. They're just nice to me. They come and pick me up."[15]

The representation of the everyday in *Living with Pride* emerges not only from documenting Ellis' life as she lived it in her last years, but also based from the materials in her archival collection. In particular, the journal entries, letters, and birthday cards in the Ruth Ellis archive help to advance the idea of longevity as a collective practice rather than an individualist achievement in the context of precarious odds. The archive puts forth an articulation of longevity as a collective practice. *Living with Pride's* critique of longevity as exceptional occurs through its invocation of longevity as relational. Relationality is established through the film's visual construction of Ellis' everyday practices of sociality.

The Detroit-based and extended LGBTQ community attention to Ellis' long life accounts for her as an elder and a leader, even as it indexes the trauma of the expectation of premature death for black gender and sexually marginal people. In an interview Beth Singer states

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[15] These materials are in the Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

emotionally, "What's is happening for Ruth is great . . . but I don't know that it would happen for all of us." Singer's statement signals the social and structural dynamics that produce the conditions that inhibit other queer people from having the kind of social connectivity and support that Ruth is able to access. It also points to the fact that there exists a societal expectation of premature death for marginal populations, and isolation in the aging process. The production of this expectation is the precondition for diminished life chances for black gendered and sexually marginal subjects. However, it is the expectation of premature death that also accounts for the complexity and the fullness of Ellis' life as she engages in sociality as an everyday practice of longevity. People in the film refer to Ruth coming into the lesbian community, primarily narrated through the Michigan Womyn's Musical Festival, as an accident. Ruth is articulated as someone who filled a void, and someone for whom the lesbian community yearned although it did not realize it. In the film, Sarah Uhle states that that Ruth reminded the lesbian community of things they did not know. The Detroit gay community that Ruth is a part of indexes the importance of place and location with regard to black longevity by further articulating race, gender, sexuality, class, and place as sites of difference that interact and inform locationality.

A critical examination of discourses of longevity and life expectancy as they come into contact with blackness reveal the ways in which American national culture continues to be addicted to the structural perpetuation of black premature death.[16] The film *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100* resists reproducing the dominant cultural tendency to account for black life in the first instance as transcendent of death and precarity. Social scientific and public health perspectives on longevity have attributed it the result: of good hygiene and health, of

[16] This claim draws on *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007) by Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Amadu Jacky Kaba's "Life Expectancy, Death Rates, Geography, and Black People" in the *Journal of Black Studies* 39.3 (2009): 337-47.

unexplainable good fortune, or as the accumulation of social, economic, and cultural privilege.[17]

Some scholars have argued that black life itself is incommensurate with contemporary U.S. society and culture.[18] Circumscribed by a mass culture that is steeped in structures of regulation, surveillance, and deadly force, black living and life pose a critical challenge to a national culture that reproduces black premature death.[19] The film *Living with Pride* offers an alternative to existing discourses of life expectancy, and demands attentiveness to the everyday ways that black people reproduce life. For instance, a study by Amadu Jacky Kaba demonstrates that although black Americans have been designated as having low life expectancies, more black Americans live to be 100 than white Americans.[20] Amadu asserts that while geographic location matters in determining life expectancy and death rates, Jamaica and other countries that are poorer than the U.S. have black populations that live longer than black Americans in the U.S. Also, black immigrants have a higher life expectancy in the U.S. than U.S. born and raised black people.[21]

Amadu's perspectives are in conversation with the study "Inequality in Life Expectancy,

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[17] Hahn and Eberhardt's study "Life expectancy in four U.S. racial/ethnic populations: 1990"offers three important observations: that the higher rates of life expectancies among Asian American/Pacific Islander populations can be results of healthier people immigrating, people emigrating from the U.S. to die in countries of birth or transnational identification outside of the U.S., and also that there is less reliability among the ages reported by next of kin of black and American Indian people who pass away. This is over 60% inaccurate. The study relies on a number of assumptions that make its conclusions at times hard to accept or to understand. For example, it does not adjust for gender difference, but instead assumes that gender differences are negligible. Its observations regarding race, immigration, and life expectancy are helpful. See Hahn, R. and S. Eberhardt's "Life expectancy in four U.S. racial/ethnic populations: 1990" in *Epidemiology* Jul 6 (4) (1995): 350-5.

[18] Here I refer to *Red, White, & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) by Frank B. Wilderson, III and *Amalgamation Schemes Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) by Jared Sexton.

[19] See *Raising the Dead: Readings of (Black Subjectivity)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) by Sharon Holland, Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation (2012) by Beth Richie, and Wahneema Lubiano's "Affect and Rearticulating the Racial "Un-sayables." *Cultural Anthropology*, 28, (2013): 540-543.

[20] Kaba, 342.

[21] Amadu argues that this is because 1) healthy immigrants migrate and 2) many argue that black immigrants tend to live in white areas more often than black people born and raised solely in the United States.

Functional Status, and Active Life Expectancy across Selected Black and White Populations in the United States" which offers a statistical analysis of the issue of black life expectancy, or as the authors refer to it: functional and active life expectancy.[22] The authors conclude that even when black residents who participated in their study lived longer, these constituted "inactive" years regardless of wealth. Their results reveal that black people disproportionately suffer from precarity (i.e. poor health, violence, premature death) and as a result have a shorter "active" life expectancy. Ellis' engagement in sociality and everyday life can be characterized as "active" according to the framework of the Geronimus, et al. study, while at the same time her representation challenges the totalizing logic of "active" measured by and through "expectancy." Ellis is visually articulated as a figure on the move from the time we meet her in *Living with Pride*, thus establishing the activity of her everyday life as a practice of sociality in motion: "I may not be in my room. I'm hard to catch. The only time to catch me is late at night, then sometimes I'm out dancing."

In conversation with Ellis' enactment of a practice of sociality in motion, José Esteban Muñoz has argued that queer of color history and cultural practices are best articulated as ephemeral, while Kara Keeling has offered the concept "in flight."[23] Further, Keeling importantly insists that the black femme as a political formation does not invite the mobilization of her positionality of erasure as a justification for more political visibility or even more rights.

[22] Refer to Arline T. Geronimus, John Bound, Timothy A. Waidmann, Cynthia G. Colen, and Dianne Steffick "Inequality in Life Expectancy, Functional Status, and Active Life Expectancy across Selected Black and White Populations in the United States" in *Demography* Vol. 38-No. 1 (May 2001): 227-251. The authors also show that in some cases class privilege elevated exposure to racism, or that upper class black people reported higher incidents of racism than their urban poor counterparts. This indicates the cleaving of racism and classism even as they intersect and depend on one another, we are able to see that people are positioned in different ways with regard to them. The kind of racism experienced systemically for urban black populations might shift for upper class black people, but that does not mean that structural or relational forms of racism disappear in cases of what might be considered reduced forms of systemic racial inequities.

[23] See Kara Keelings' *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) and José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

Keeling asserts the role of the black femme is to offer a fundamental shift to how alternatives to the status quo are imagined: "Many common-sense considerations of the existence of black lesbian butch-femme are forced to admit that several of the categories on which those common senses rely to rationalize the reality they (re)produce are open and fluid, not static and closed" (144). Moreover, the black femme is presented as an active figure illuminating the regulatory discourse and visuality of what Keeling refers to as cinematic reality:

> My point in attempting to make the black femme visible to certain of the common senses that (in)form black studies, lesbian and gay studies, women's studies, and film studies is not to inaugurate another identity-based project or movement, but to interrogate the common senses that animate each of those categories, when exploded or made problematic, might harbor alternatives based on what within the category remains unassimilated into hegemonic common senses and thus into the racist, sexist, and homophobic forms of sociality those common senses rationalize. Some of those alternatives still might be excavated within cinematic reality. Pointing to an outside beyond each set of what appears as black, as woman, and as lesbian, and even beyond cinematic reality itself, the black femme might restore a critical belief in the world by revealing that alternatives persist within it.[24]

Keeling and Muñoz put forth an understanding of queer of color lives and life making practices as at once liminal and transitory with regard to cultural practice and official methods of documentation. Ellis' practice of sociality enables an understanding of longevity in particular as a collective process based on fleeting and long-standing day-to-day encounters. The idea of the everyday, as Martin Manalansan describes for queer diasporic and queer of color subjects in particular manifests itself in ways that are at once "contradictory and ambivalent" even as they present a rich terrain through which to challenge normative cultural erasures.[25]

To continue, Manalansan states: "In other words, the focus on the quotidian life unveils the veneer of the ordinary and the commonplace to lay bare the intricate and difficult hybrid negotiations and struggles between hegemonic social forces and voices from below" (146). In

[24] Keeling, 145.

[25] See Martin Manalansan's "Migrancy, Modernity, Mobility: Quotidian Struggles and Queer Diasporic Intimacy" in *Queer Migrations Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* Eds. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

accord with this articulation of queer of color cultural practice, *Living with Pride* posits the quotidian as a way to narrate and record black lesbian and queer history and longevity. The quotidian here operates as a conjunctural point allowing for the everyday minutiae of black queer lives to surface as significant sites of critique and articulation. An understanding of black queer longevity that advances from this place accounts for everyday sociality and mundane daily practices as necessary to understanding how long life is rendered possible—for instance, Ellis' journal includes several lists of what she ate, as well as descriptions of her trips to the grocery store, and who gave her a ride.[26]

Living with Pride resists exceptionalizing Ruth Ellis' life and her longevity, and in doing so creates the opportunity for an alternative narrative of black queer life and longevity to emerge and to be acknowledged. Thus, the quotidian operates from within sociality, and it is here that exceptionalism is revealed as a practice that functions to erase collective struggle and to reproduce oppression. *Living with Pride's* treatment of sociality as central to the articulation of black queer longevity serves as an illustration of what Cedric Robinson has referred to as the "ontological totality"—a tradition generated out of the shared social and political struggles of black people working to collectively preserve life.[27]

It is through the film's ability to enact the quotidian as a resistant cultural practice that a much-needed assertion of black queer longevity grounded in the everyday emerges. The representation of the everyday as a practice that produces longevity suggests that unremarkable day-to-day processes and practices of living constitute sites of affirmation and resistance. Further, by resisting exceptionalism as a way to register life and longevity, *Living with Pride* demonstrates that it is possible to challenge exceptionalism more expansively as a foundational

[26] Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

[27] See Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

American political ideology. David Noble has described American exceptionalism as the notion that the United States is unique and even extraordinary in its ability to manage liberal democractic equality with the demands of a capitalist economic system dependent on hierarchy and differentiation as explicated by the legacy of the political rhetoric that extended from the American founding that I discuss more closely in the next section.[28] *Living with Pride*'s incisive critique of the logic of exceptionalism in its articulation of black queer longevity as distinctly relational rather than individualistic goes to the heart of a critique of American national identity.

Unseating Exceptionalism: Black Queer Life in Detroit

The film *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100* challenges the idea that living a long life is an exceptional individual achievement. As I have mentioned, Ruth Ellis' status as a black centenarian and a person best known for her status as an elder has been constructed as an achievement, as her recognition by the mayor of Detroit in honor of her 98th year as well as other certificates of appreciation from state and city authorities and offices attest.[29] An article titled "Homecoming: Witness to 1908 race riots returns to Springfield to remember, be recognized" published in *The State Journal Register* that among other things accounts for the "secrets" of Ellis' longevity states: "Last year the city of Detroit issued a certificate of appreciation to Ellis, but the activist asked that the award be given to her on the Capitol steps in Springfield."[30] This article points to Ellis' practice of black queer longevity as a relational process as she creates a connection across the two cities based on her biographical experiences that position her within black historical struggles in Springfield and Detroit. Ellis' trip to Springfield to accept the Detroit mayor's award, presented to her by the assistant to the Detroit City Clerk, enacts

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[28] See the introduction to David Noble's *Death of a Nation: American Culture and the End of Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

[29] Refer to Ruth Ellis' certificates of appreciation in the Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

[30] Rogers, 1.

longevity as relational even as it adds a spatial designation that draws the two cities into conversation and connection through Ellis.[31] The very act of returning to Springfield to receive an award bestowed upon her by mayoral offices in Detroit designates black queer longevity as a transitory formation as it registers Ellis' experience as a black person who lived through the Springfield race riot of 1908. The mayor's office of Detroit's effort to award Ellis acknowledges her activism as a black lesbian elder, and it is through this occurrence that her historical tie to the city of Springfield as a survivor of the 1908 race riot is also recognized.

Further, the mayor's award of appreciation is rooted firmly on the fact of Ellis' longevity and thus engages in a process of the exceptionalization of life as it measures some lives as outstanding and therefore valuable through the attachment of achievement to longevity. Even as Ellis continues to resist the articulation of her longevity as an achievement for instance when she humbly insists in the opening sequence of *Living with Pride:* "I'm nobody" and in an interview with Jason Michael for *Kick Magazine*: "Why are you making such a fuss over me."[32] Longevity frames Ellis' awards of appreciation in the context of her life experience and activism in the black gay community in Detroit. Thus, the logic of exceptional longevity produces the possibility for the broader acknowledgment of her achievements.

The *Kick Magazine* interview traces both the exceptionalist logic that undergirds the recognition of Ellis foremost for her longevity, as well as her attempt to decenter the individualizing function of the Detroit Mayor's award of appreciation: "Why are you making a fuss over me." As she decenters the limiting function of individual appreciation, by expanding the award to account not only for her time in Detroit, but her life in Springfield that surfaces in

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[31] Rogers, 3.

[32] See "A Century of Ruth" by Jason Michael *Kick Magazine* (June 1999).

relation to her experience as a survivor of the Springfield 1908 race riot.[33] Bringing Detroit and Springfield into meaningful connection challenges the individualizing function of the award, while insisting on the primacy of shared black struggles to survive with respect to living through the riot that circumscribe and actually condition her recognition as a race riot survivor. Ellis' insistence on the public recognition of her identity as a black lesbian living in Detroit and as a survivor of the 1908 race riot in Springfield allows for the simultaneous expression of both experiences she embodies one and travels across state lines to revisit the other thus articulating for us a black queer practice of longevity that is constituted through sociality and movement.

Relatedly, the robust critique of exceptionalism that is implicitly opened up by the film *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100's* representation of black queer longevity as collective rather than exceptional is rendered explicit by the Detroit Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays in their declaration that "every last Friday in February" be recognized as Ruth Ellis Day in "Detroit, Michigan."[34] The declaration closely illustrates the way in which black queer life serves to challenge exceptionalism:

> . . . in acknowledgement of Black History/Herstory Month and as a tribute to our sister Ruth Ellis, a Detroiter who is a living reminder of our struggle to survive for the sake of our future generations and of the importance of handing down our existence to upcoming black lesbians and gay men who follow us. And for representing to us, a symbol of our heritage, to remind us that the knowledge of where we come from and where we have been helps us to give direction in our quest for total liberation and for giving black gay women and men the inspiration to live their lives loving whom they please and never giving up one's natural preference in the face of societal pressures that we have had to endure all of our lives. And for never letting us forget that we have a responsibility to take care of our own and not wait for others to take up our strivings for human dignity and human rights as a people. In the spirit of our black gay ancestors such as James Baldwin, Harriet Tubman, Bayard Rustin and countless others who went before us, we hereby declare unto you, this day in honor of our standing 'Monument of Endurance' . . . . Ruth Ellis Day.[35]

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[33] Rogers, 1.

[34] See "Ruth Ellis Day" Certificate of Declaration collected at the Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Ruth Ellis Day, Feb 26, 1988 (conferred) on behalf of the Detroit Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays. "Signed Co-chairs of the Detroit Coalition of Detroit Black Lesbian and Gays."

[35] "Ruth Ellis Day" Certificate of Declaration.

The ellipses at the end of the Ruth Ellis Day declaration, three sets and one lone period, we might say invoke the historical figures and narrative accounts the writers know intimately, while the one additional period designates subjects and events the author's know exist, but recognize their inability to explicitly acknowledge. Although the coalition explicitly states the existence of "countless others," the elliptical designation performs a utility as a citational homage to those who came before that the inclusion of the reference to "countless others" cannot register. The members of the Detroit Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays make clear that their purpose is to account for Ruth Ellis' community activism and significance in Detroit's black gay and lesbian community specifically within the broader context of Black History Month, or as they refer to it "Black History/Herstory Month."

The Ruth Ellis Day declaration affirms black queer life through the assertion: "In the spirit of our black gay ancestors such as James Baldwin, Harriet Tubman, Bayard Rustin and countless others," thereby firmly instituting Ruth Ellis Day as an account of intersectional black gay experience and history connected to a broader struggle that occasioned its emergence. The declaration documents black queer life as still in formation, or in motion as it is articulated through figures revered within black queer history such as James Baldwin side by side with figures more common in African American or women's history such as Harriet Tubman also known as "Black Moses."

Moreover, the Detroit coalition's embrace of Tubman alerts us to the contestation over historical figures such as she who possess multiple identity locations, thus signaling the ways in which they have not been able to be situated properly in one dominant historical narrative. For example, Roderick Ferguson details this process with regard to women of color feminism's challenge to dominant discourses of national liberation and cultural struggle that required race, gender, and sexual regulation in ways that erased or were oppressive to women of color

participating in black, gay, or women's liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Following this line of critique, the Detroit Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays' work to position Tubman as a black queer figure occurs principally through an interpretation of her across multiple intersecting categories of social and political difference: race, gender, enslaved, and free.[36]

Through this lens Tubman emerges as a figure who moves across categories, as a black queer figure, actively working to extend black life. Tubman concurrently surfaces as a figure of fugitive movement who trespasses across state lines guiding former slaves to freedom, literally setting in motion challenges to legal constructions of personhood and captivity. More specifically, Tubman's work as a spy for the Union Army during the American Civil War registers her incitement to movement.[37] Guided by her knowledge of the terrain, and the information she gained from fugitive slaves she led the 1863 Raid at Combahee Ferry.[38] A raid commemorated eponymously by the black feminists of the Combahee River Collective as they theorized the multiplicity of race, gender, sexuality, and class as social locations in order to account for figures as they explicate: "Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E.W. Harper, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell Tubman," in the context of the experiences of black and women of color feminisms more broadly.[39]

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[36] See Roderick Ferguson's chapter four "Something Else to Be" in the section "To Periodize Women of Color Feminism" in *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

[37] In Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978). Foucault argues that power through sexuality does not occur through repression, but through an incitement to discourse. I extend Foucault's claim to account for an incitement to movement in the case of the black queer fugitive status of Tubman.

[38] "Harriet Tubman (Senate March 10, 2016)" 114th Congress, 2nd Session Issue: Vol. 162, No. 39 (10 Mar 2016): https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2016/3/10/senate-section/article/S1436-1. Also I refer to "Combahee River Raid" (June 2, 1863)": http://www.blackpast.org/aah/combahee-river-raid-june-2-1863.

[39] See "A Black Feminist Statement" by the Combahee River Collective (1974) in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory* Ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Further, in its invocation of Tubman as a "black gay ancestor," the declaration claims her fugitive slave status and her facility as an abolitionist leader of escape from slavery as the conditions that principally render her nonnormative with regard to race, gender, and sexuality. Further, the act of claiming Tubman stages the nonnormativity of black women more broadly as constitutive of black intergenerational survival and queerness. The declaration articulates Ruth Ellis as a "symbol of our heritage" which points us to the black collective "struggle to survive." Like the film *Living with Pride*, the Ruth Ellis Day declaration articulates black queer longevity as a result of sociality in its challenge to life as a dimension of exceptional individual experience that exists a part from shared or collective struggle. In its citation of black queer struggles as intergenerational and tied to black struggles against the conditions of enslavement and anti-black racism, homophobia, and heterosexism, the Ruth Ellis Day declaration creates the opening for an understanding of resistance rooted in shared movements to resist captivity and regulation.

Moreover, the designation of Ruth Ellis Day in February during "Black History/Herstory Month" instead of on Ellis' birthday July 23rd, which is common practice for the designation of days to commemorate presidents and other political figures, serves as a connected example of black queer longevity not as exceptional, but relational as the broader black American history creates the context for Ruth Ellis Day. Relatedly, the previously referenced "Homecoming" article states Ellis' birthday July 23rd as Ruth Ellis Day in Detroit and in doing so actually does not create a discrepancy, but rather reifies the informal observance of Ellis' birthday also as Ellis Day in Detroit. The double celebration of Ellis Day duplicates and extends the reach of the February 26, 1988 official declaration of Ruth Ellis Day by the Detroit Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays and the broader black queer community.[40] The duplication of Ruth Ellis Day

[40] Rogers, 1.

in February and in July is unbefitting of the process of official exceptional commemoration as represented for example by the transition of Washington's Birthday to President's Day.

The Ruth Ellis Day declaration was signed Friday, February 26, 1988 shortly after the traditional celebration of President George Washington's Birthday. Washington's Birthday, a former national holiday celebrated on February 22nd and Abraham Lincoln's birthday on February 12th also widely observed are now nationally accounted for on President's Day the third Monday of February. President's Day was created in 1968 as part of the Uniform Monday Holiday Act[41] in an attempt to impact "the spiritual and economic" enrichment of the country by instituting more three-day weekends for workers, and also through the recognition of the lives of past presidents. President's Day, perhaps best illustrates the American exceptionalist articulation of life by way of the commemoration of the political contributions, birthdays, and lives of men in the highest rank of government. The Ruth Ellis Day declaration stages a reclaiming of February from its attribution to presidential commemoration through the explication of Ruth Ellis Day as part of "Black History/Herstory Month."

Further, the coalition's insistence that Ruth Ellis Day be observed "every last Friday" expressively iterates Ruth Ellis Day as implying an observance of black queer life and history as a repetitive practice of critique. The declaration does not explicitly demand for instance that the last Friday of February be designated Ruth Ellis Day, thereby leaving open the possibility for the substitution of "last" for "single," thus implicitly referencing a common way of making clear that the effects of a decision or a situation will be shared although attributed individually. In this way, the expressive insistence on "every last Friday" of February might be also thought of as a

[41] From CRS Report for Congress, "Federal Holidays: Evolution and Application" February 8, 1999 by Stephen W. Stathis, Specialist in American National Government, Government Division "The Monday Holiday Law of 1968 shifted Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, and Veterans Day from their traditional dates to Mondays, and established an additional holiday in honor of Christopher Columbus. Observing these holidays on Mondays, it was felt, would substantially benefit the nation's spiritual and economic life. By commemorating Christopher Columbus's remarkable voyage, the nation honored the courage and determination of generation after generation of immigrants seeking freedom and opportunity in America."

demand for Ruth Ellis Day to be observed every single Friday in February. Rereading the Ruth Ellis Day declaration offers an additional framework through which to make sense of its capacity to challenge exceptionalism already present in the way in which it firmly contextualizes Ruth Ellis Day within "Black History/Herstory Month." The assertion of every last Friday in February as Ruth Ellis Day during "Black History/Herstory Month" makes black queer life and longevity matter within the context of black collective struggle.

The Ruth Ellis Day declaration, in its invocation of February as an index of black collective struggle, narrates an articulation of life not enshrined in, and actually antagonistic to the meaning of President's Day as a day set aside for presidential commemoration in February. In its disloyalty to the tradition of proper exceptionalism of notable political and social figures, the Ruth Ellis Day declaration stages a deeper challenge to exceptionalism as a dimension of the universalism embedded in American democratic notions of citizenship articulated for example in the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence's often touted opening, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" functions as an articulation of the American universalist construction of national belonging in which its principles of liberal democratic governance are grounded. The universal "We" in the Declaration of Independence actively erases black and minority collective struggles in the service of undifferentiated national belonging. The black history cited by the "Our" of the Ruth Ellis Day declaration reveals the contradictions embedded in the "We" of the Declaration of Independence as well as its creed of equality that ongoing minority struggles have revealed as fraught and in need of interrogation.

One primary analysis of the logic of exceptionalism as it was advanced as a strategy of national expansion can be traced to notable University of Wisconsin historian Frederick Jackson

Turner's 1893 paper "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893) given during the World Columbian Exposition at American Historical Association meeting in Chicago:

> Up to our own day American history has been in large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.[42]

Turner discusses American exceptionalism as a manifestation of a series of ethnically heterogeneous migrations fueled by individualism, of which he later positions the states of the "Middle region" of the United States as particularly representative. The perceived unique individualism that fueled the rhetorical justification for the construction of an understanding of American exceptionalism served to distinguish the United States from Europe, the Old World. Ian Tyrrell asserts: "The United States avoided the class conflicts, revolutionary upheaval, and authoritarian government of 'Europe'" (1).[43] Thus, American exceptionalism is the basis for the operation of exceptional longevity and the assessment of black queer longevity as a cultural practice of shared sociality and labor that is localized and particular operates as an alternative formation. Further, the forms of abuse and violence that national expansion required against Native Americans and black people at the moment of the founding only help to assist American exceptionalism as a program of colonial land appropriation that transforms white settlers into citizens according to Turner's narration of manifest destiny.[44]

Just as the Ruth Ellis Day declaration narrates an alternative articulation of black life not enshrined in the meaning of President's Day, the history it reveals brings Detroit into contact with African American figures who signal collective defiance of institutional and structural violence that traverse states, national, and international boundaries. The declaration deploys a

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[42] Turner, 1.

[43] From Ian Tyrrell's "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History" in *The American Historical Review* Vol. 96, No. 4 (Oct., 1991): 1031-1055.

[44] Turner, 3. See his discussion of the formation of American national identity.

localized conceptualization of black struggle in Detroit, Michigan outward through the figure of Ruth Ellis. Tiya Miles describes the history of the Upper Midwest and the Great Lakes region of the American Midwest of which Michigan is a part as possessing a history characterized by black fugitivity and escape from slavery.[45] Miles' description of enactments of freedom on the part of fugitive slaves in the Upper Midwest accounts for challenges to capture on the part of Federal Marshalls, bounty hunters, and slave masters as they attempt to curtail black insurgent movement and to engender the stasis through the act of capture.

In a short story by black science fiction writer Nisi Shawl "Little Horses," Miles' delineation of the history of Detroit as a site of black fugitive movement is further illuminated.[46] Shawl's protagonist Leora, a black domestic worker for the wealthy white McGinniss family in Detroit and caretaker to their young son Kevin McGinniss, accompanies the son on a limousine ride to Belle Isle across from the shore of Ontario, Canada: " . . . between the waters of Lake Tacoma and the Detroit River" (69). The family's new southern white limo driver named Farmer reveals himself to be collaborating with kidnappers who want to hold Kevin McGinniss for ransom. As the limo crosses the "Ambassador Bridge" that connects Detroit to Ontario, Canada, the narration reveals:

> Slaves had crossed all along here. In winter the water froze and they walked to freedom. In the darkness, on the ice, they ran over the river to the land they'd been so long dreaming of . . . Leora loved that freedom, the kind that came only in your sleep.[47]

Leora attempts an instructive distinction between northern and southern race relations that historically was shaped by the the free and slave state dichotomy when she explains to

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[45] From Tiya Miles' essay "Of Waterways and Runaways: Reflections on the Great Lakes in Underground Railroad History" in Michigan Quarterly Review (11 Oct 2011) and also refer to Tiya Miles' *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

[46] Nisi Shawl's "Little Horses," in *Detroit Noir* Eds. E.J. Olsen and John C. Hocking (New York: Akashic Books, 2007).

[47] Shawl, 87.

Farmer after he refers to her as a mammy: "I ain't his mammy . . . Mammies is southern. I'm Kevin's nanny."[48] Her internal dialogue with herself further cites her light skin, beauty, and education as forms of social capital that further distinguish her position in Detroit from the figure of the black mammy in the South. As the figure of the mammy is cited as distinctly southern, fugitive slaves crossing the ice of Belle Isle to freedom in Ontario during the Midwestern bitterly cold winter indexes the locational positionality of Detroit.[49]

Relatedly, Ruth Ellis' photo archive yields pictures of her on her 95th birthday at Belle Isle taking in the scenery and in so doing referencing the history of escape that traversed Belle Isle, an island park of 982 acres in the Detroit River that separates the U.S. from Canada.[50] Thus, it is through the broader refusal of capture as stasis that escaped slaves instrumentally deploy movement out of conditions of captivity. Thus, the grammar of insurgent movement that registers terms such as "fugitive," "at large," or "on the move" importantly situate black histories of struggle in the Midwest and more extensively. Although Miles and Shawl invoke a history of black fugitive movement that connects Detroit to other cities in the Upper Midwest, James Shortridge has noted the spatial constitution of the Midwest centrally as pastoral, which has privileged rurality, and disappeared urban industrial histories such as that of Detroit.[51] Further,

The declaration for Ruth Ellis Day conversely enacts a critique of spatial exceptionalism through its insistence on localized attention to Detroit within a broader national collective black struggle that extends to *Living with Pride's* critique of exceptionalism through its attention to Ruth Ellis. The history of fugitive movement in the Great Lakes region testifies to black defiance

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[48] Shawl, 71.

[49] See Katherine McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

[50] "About Belle Isle" by Belle Isle Conservancy: http://www.belleisleconservancy.org/#!about-belle-isle/nalif.

[51] James Shortridge's *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

of the conditions of enslavement and captivity. The Ruth Ellis Day declaration cites this history and positions Detroit as a site of occurrence and transmission. The declaration's reference to "Black History/Herstory Month" articulates the efforts of black historian Carter G. Woodson and his collaborators to formally acknowledge the practices of celebration of Frederick Douglass' birthday on February 14th and Abraham Lincoln's on the 12th of February in which black communities nationally engaged after the Civil War and throughout the early twentieth-century. Woodson's work in Chicago assisting with the founding of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915 and Negro History Week in February of 1926, the precursor to Black History Month, further situate "Black History/Herstory Month" in relation to Ruth Ellis Day.[52]

Ellis' experiences growing up in Springfield, Illinois, as noted in *Living with Pride* situate her, her family, and the black community in which they lived within local and national struggles against anti-black racism, police brutality, and political neglect with regard to the Springfield riot of 1908, and in her adult life the Detroit riots of 1943 and 1967. These riots can be thought of as regional enactments of black collective struggle localized in the Midwest that shaped national politics. For example, after the Springfield riot of 1908, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was created.

Black fugitivity in the Upper Midwest and specifically in Detroit as noted by the Ruth Ellis Day declaration points to a tradition of movement and struggle that invites attention to the connection between regional and national power. Black survival in the midst of institutional racism in the Midwest, as illustrated for example by Ellis' family's experience of the Springfield Riot of 1908 and indexed by the Ruth Ellis Day declaration reflects back to us a longer history of

[52] See "The Association for the Study of African American Life and History: A Brief History": http://www.blackpast.org/perspectives/association-study-african-american-life-and-history-brief-history#sthash.nf4DQORJ.dpuf.

struggle for black life and livelihood that has endured in the Midwest and nationally.[53] Ellis details her early years in Springfield and in the process illuminates black struggle in the Midwest as constitutive of national and southern histories of racial terror in particular:

> When I was about 10 years old, Springfield had a race riot. I lived in a mixed neighborhood. They had all the white people to put sheets up in their yards—they were going to burn the black people's homes. They were after the black men who married white women. After many were killed, the riot died down. There was prejudice in that city. We couldn't go to the movies, to the Y, to the churches—except Catholic. A couple black people went to the Catholic church supposed to be the home/house of Abraham Lincoln. My dad was a Republican in those days. We moved to 3 or 4 different homes, and I went to all different schools. I guess my dad didn't pay rent. To me, those were happy times—I didn't know the difference.[54]

Ellis' description in the biographical sketch above of the articulation of the Catholic Church in Springfield's as the "house of Abraham Lincoln." The Catholic Church was the only predominantly white church in Springfield in the early twentieth-century that allowed black people to attend. This fact serves to contextualize and distinguish Lincoln's Birthday with regard to Ruth Ellis Day. Lincoln's Birthday, although never a federal holiday, still remains a state holiday in Ellis' birth state of Illinois, the state in which Lincoln built his political career with Springfield serving as a touchstone. Lincoln's political presence in Springfield serves as one point of national identification with the city, and the Springfield Riot of 1908 with which Ellis is associated another.

Further, Ellis notes in the biographical sketch above the accusation of the rape of white women applied to an elderly black handyman, this same rhetorical strategy was often used to justify the lynching of black men. The association of lynching and the barbaric racism with the

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[53] Here I refer to the history of lynching in Duluth, Minnesota along with the survival of Dr. James Cameron of a lynching in Marion, Indiana in the context of racist violence in the Midwest in connection with Ellis' experience in Springfield, Illinois.

[54] I refer here to Ellis' biographical sketch in the Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

American South is thus expanded to the Midwest.[55] Ellis points to the way in which the myth of the black rapist is used to discipline and violate black men married to white women in Springfield, thereby detailing the expansiveness of anti-black racism as it intersects with gender and sexual regulation. In fact the traffic across southern and Midwest understandings of black male relations with white woman materialized in the passing of the Mann Act in 1910 due to the efforts of Congressman James Robert Mann of Illinois.[56] Ellis was eleven at the time that the law was passed, just two years after the race riot. Ellis's discussion of the riot in Springfield unseats the discursive practice that positions the American Midwest as the bastion of liberal racial attitudes that is in contrast to the pathological and terroristic racial violence, and "enduring racism" that is supposedly characteristic of the American South.[57]

As I discuss in chapter one, the articulation of the Midwest as racially liberal that undergirds the construction of whiteness in the region occurred as part of the process that established the region as a collection of free states through the disarticulation of black status from enslavement. In particular, white liberalism can be cited within the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 that made slavery illegal in the territories of the Northwest now the Midwest as well as the Three-Fifths Compromise also of 1787 that counted slaves as three-fifths of a human for the purposes of electoral population distribution. I have referred to the fractional logic that undergirds the Three-Fifths Compromise as the site of articulation of black liminality. With regard to the regional construction of the Midwest, The Northwest Ordinance indexes black

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[55] Ida B. Wells Barnett's *The Red Record* and Jacqueline Goldby's *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature.*

[56] As Kevin Mumford's *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (1997) and Pamela Haag's *Consent: Sexual Rights and The Transformation of American Liberalism* (1999) have interrogated with regard to the regulation of interracial sexual intimacy.

[57] I refer to *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia* Eds. Andrew R. L. Cayton, Richard Sisson, Chris Zacher (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006): 245. See the text of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 for an articulation of white liberal personhood.

liminality as an economic, ontological, and spatial site of precarity for black subjects forced to endure the political and representational dichotomy that distinguished slave states from free states. It is the trafficking through and around full personhood and humanity status that the context of fugitive movement out of slavery as an institution of capture. Thus, the liberal doctrine of the Northwest Ordinance in addition to its consolidation of stolen lands required black political and ontological liminality even as it forbade slavery in the Midwest.

Further, I delineate black liminality in chapter one in a discussion of Joshua Glover who escaped slavery in Missouri, moved to Wisconsin, and was taken into custody by Federal Marshalls under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Considering Glover's arrest allows for an understanding of the way in which slave and free states exercised power in ways that were coterminous rather than distinct. For example, Wisconsin's Supreme Court's decision in 1854, the first and only state high court to declare the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 unconstitutional, was hinged on Glover's liminal personhood as expressed through the decision's claim that the Act constituted an infringement of the rights of the white abolitionists who freed Glover. This discursive strategy disappears Glover as a subject from the narrative of the decision, while the dangerous instability of his personhood and life create the grounds for the state's defiance of federal law. With reference to Glover, black liminality operates as a structure of power and a state of transience that renders black life precarious even as it creates the conditions for shared experience and struggle. Black liminality therefore characterizes transition in and out of states of being, not quite here, nor there. From this point, black liminality surfaces as an interaction between regional and national political decision-making powers that overlay the contradictions posed by black enslavement and fractional personhood as integral to the installation of American exceptionalism as a political imaginary.

Thus, black liminality attached black subjects to a physical and economic condition of

precarity as a strategy of political compromise as it worked to spatially constitute the Old Northwest, now the American Midwest as distinct from the American South and East. Ellis' description of growing up in Springfield depicts the effects of black liminality as a structure of power constituted by the particularity of black racialization through the formation of the American Midwest within the context of the broader delineation of black queer longevity as a relational practice.

Historian Andrew Cayton has referred to the Midwest as the "anti-region."[58] Cayton's articulation suggests that the Midwest poses a challenge to the logic of national belonging premised on an intimacy with nature that naturalizes colonization and land ownership for settlers. Cayton's position speaks to the way in which David Noble has explicated American exceptionalism as the result of a perceived unique relationship to the state of nature on the part of the American founders that he refers to as white male "rational maturity."[59] The ideology of "rational maturity" associated with the 1789 founding and the discourse of equality that emerged as most central to its formation positioned women, Native Americans, and African Americans as in need of white male paternalism and leadership. The rationally mature subject was the subject of governance and rights within the logic of American exceptionalism, as Noble explains. The Americanization of the white male founding fathers of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson's generation purported a direct and rational relationship to the land and the state.

Embedded in the logic of exceptionalism that emerged out of the American founding as the Declaration of Independence attests is the promise of not only life, but a chance at a better

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[58] Cayton's essay "The Anti-region: Place and identity in the History of the American Middle West" in *The Identity of the American Midwest Essays on Regional History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), Eds. Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray. Cayton argues that the lack, and even the refusal of a uniform regional identity positions the Midwest as the "anti-region."

[59] Noble, xxiv.

life as represented by the proclamation "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."[60] The Declaration offers up access to life not circumscribed by the limits of inequality and hierarchy that characterized the Old World. Noble explains that the Old World/New World divide was one conceptual formulation that allowed men of "rational maturity," the American founders to distinguish the United States the land of opportunity and freedom, the New World form Europe, the land of imperial power and plagued by social distinction and institutional hierarchy, the Old World. If equality and freedom characterize the New World, and the exceptionalism that adheres to it only extends to marginal subjects by way of their relation to land owning white men, then the film representation of Ruth Ellis as a figure who practices a critical practice of disassociation from exceptionalism through the exercise of a politics of sociality with other marginal subjects performs a challenge to "rational maturity" as central to the individualism that exceptionalim on which exceptionalism depended.

As Noble describes the rhetoric of American exceptionalism explicated a commitment to the eradication of birthright requirements for political service, further distinguishing the founders from their European counterparts. Brenda Weber has described how the challenge to birthright requirements undergirded the ideology of the "self-made" man rooted in the construction of Abraham Lincoln and male political figures of his generation.[61] The logic of the self-made man was bolstered by that of the rationally mature man, together they positioned the land owning white male as best fit for political and economic leadership. This tradition of what Dana Nelson

[60] Sara Ahmed discusses the "pursuit of happiness" as an origin for what she refers to as the promise of happiness in her book *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

[61] See Brenda Weber's "What Makes the Man? Television Makeovers, Made-Over Masculinity, and Male Body Image" in the *International Journal of Men's Health* Vol. 5 No. 3 (2006): 287-306.

refers to as “national manhood” articulated the quintessential subject of American liberal democracy.[62]

Further, Noble explains that the New World/Old World divide that the American founders adopted to distinguish the United States can be traced to the earlier distinction that was made between the middle ages and modern Europe. We might also understand the free state/slave state divide in this register through an understanding of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 as an attempt to categorize the Midwest as a collection of free states, from the slave-owning South. The stoppage placed on the extension of slavery into the newly conquered territories was motivated principally by economic factors, although there was a moral concern for black personhood it was not a primary factor.[63] As the first installment of American western expansion the Northwest Ordinance constitutes the first operation of the American Constitution with regard to national expansion, actually preceding its ratification. In this way, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 activates the conception of freedom expressed in the founding documents, as its articulation of the region we might say rhetorically comes to embody the nation’s creed of liberty and freedom in a way that the South increasingly indicated it was at odds with or at least struggling against due to its investment in the institution of slavery.

Thus, the production of American exceptionalism required a settler-colonial spatial conceptualization of the United States as vast and empty land (Smith, 2005; Noble, 2002; Shortridge, 1990). This understanding of wide open space through which the American Midwest was constituted as the first regional manifestation of the doctrine of westward expansion establishes the law of the land through the consolidation of the region. Thus, Cayton’s “anti-region” thesis articulates the Midwest as a critique to the spatial assumption of American

[62] From Dana Nelson’s *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

[63] W.E.B. Du Bois discusses this in his polemical work *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1935).

exceptionalism grounded in the natural accordance of inherent belonging as a condition of citizenship, a natural outgrowth of white male "rational maturity." Although, the anti-region understanding of the Midwest points to the absence of a singular agreeable regional narrative construction, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 effectively recites the regional capitulation to national belonging and by extension to the creed of American exceptionalism defined by economic and political expansion guided by liberal democratic individualism.

The Midwest's regional construction that emerges out of the Northwest Ordinance as the first iteration of the region best demonstrates the contradiction in the idea that the U.S. has been exceptional in its ability to successfully manage both democracy and capitalism. The Northwest Ordinance itself demonstrates the dependency of slave and free states on one another through its attempt to outlaw slavery, but through its political complicity in the refusal of full black humanity. The Three-Fifths Compromise came to bear on the passage of the Northwest Ordinance as they both operated through the perpetuation of fractional black humanity, or black liminality. In the case of the Northwest Ordinance it was this fractional logic that assisted the political process that codified the region opening it up to racially distinct settlement. Black liminality sited in the construction of the Midwest as a region then produces the necessary denied and devalued surplus labor that enables capitalist democracy as a project of expansion, captivity, and regulation. In this way, the Midwest functions as an effective site to capture and move forward the living tensions that exist between American liberal democracy and capitalism, specifically with regard to free personhood and enslavement.

In *Liberalism and The Limits of Power* (2015), Juliet Williams delineates the shift in the understanding of limited government in the U.S. from the doctrine of legislative supremacy dating to the nation's founding to the more recent approach what she refers to as the "line-

drawing approach" to the power over the legislature (9).[64] As Williams points out, liberal political philosopher John Locke believed that "a supreme legislature could also be a limited one," and this belief was supported by Locke's unwavering position that those in political office would without question possess a reverence for the Law of Nature, God's Law, or the preservation of humankind, as they themselves would have emerged from a civil society that also fundamentally beheld the Law of Nature out of the will to preserve Mankind (10). Williams asserts that the idea of legislative supremacy conditioned American colonial self-understanding as the founders came to see "themselves as the true champions of the noble principles for which the Glorious Revolution had been fought. Indicting the British Parliament for turning its back on the principle of popular sovereignty, the colonists hoped to redeem the corrupted ideal of self-rule" (13).

Moreover, the idea of legislative supremacy, and its eventual replacement with the limited understanding of government together speak to the ideology of "rational maturity" that Noble explains gave distinction to the American founders. The American founders distinguished the New World from the Old World of Europe by revitalizing the principle of self-rule through the exercise of their "rational maturity" which in turn provided them with the ability to rule themselves and, by their own logic, those incapable of self-rule, those they deemed irrational, feebleminded, childlike, ignorant, savage.[65] Therefore, the ability to self-rule extended to the power to limit government when legislative supremacy was deemed impractical and incapable of self-regulation. Williams traces the emergence of the line-drawing approach to limited government the contention between the Bill of Rights' inclusion in the U.S. Constitution during the ratification debates in the fall of 1787, the Northwest Ordinance passed a few months earlier

[64] Williams asserts that "Locke's view on limited government rests on belief that moral and cultural limits are sufficient as constraints on legislatures, and that provision for more rigorous institutional limits are unnecessary" (11). See *Liberalism and the Limits of Power* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

[65] David Noble describes this in the first chapter of Death of a Nation: American Culture and the end of exceptionalism, and W.E.B. Du Bois describes the dehumanization of black people through the refusal to see them as capable of self-rule in *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903).

in July, one year earlier than the constitutional ratification during the summer of 1788, and almost two years earlier than the beginning of government under the Constitution which occurred in March of 1789.

It is the unmediated relationship between the state of nature and the citizen subject that undergirds American liberal democracy, and serves as the basis for the rationally mature subject that Noble argues is characteristic of the American founders as they assert themselves as citizens fit to govern. The position of "rational maturity" rests on a separation between public government and private rights. Feminist scholar Carole Pateman points out that the idea of the social contract enshrined in liberal conceptions of government whereby the subjects contract in to civil society in exchange for protection and support from a governing body relied on the obscured sexual contract that fundamentally created a distinction between public and private domains.[66] The private domain was governed by the racialized and classed logic of domesticity that established the home as the proper place for women, and public life defined by political representation, labor, and occupations that of men. As Evelynn Hammonds notes, domesticity advances the heteropatriarchal ideology of the "Cult of True Womanhood" that centrally positioned white middle class women as virtuous and pure, and subsequently positioned black women outside of the category of womanhood. Black women's sexual exploitation during slavery shaped their perception as hypersexual, and thus always already sexually available.[67]

That the domestic space of the home was sited as the place for women, although it ultimately was under the direction of the man of the house, demonstrates that the spatial locale of the domestic space of the home worked in tandem with the American exceptionalist directive to

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[66] From *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988) by Carole Pateman.

[67]Here I refer to Evelynn Hammonds' "Toward A Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence" in *Feminist Genealogies: Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* Eds. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpalde Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997): 170-82.

control land. The spatial colonization west that American manifest destiny justified extended to the spatial power over the domestic space of the home that conditioned the social relations necessary to complete colonization and sustain captivity. It was through the manifestation of American exceptionalism as a program of land expansion and the domestic regulation of the space of the home that the American founders as the quintessential liberal middle class subject accessed legitimacy and belonging through shared national identification.

The regulation of black women through the domesticity as a racialized, gendered, and classed structure of power points to the way in which American national expansion relied on the perpetuation of normative gender roles, as the ideology of "rational maturity" also attests. Relatedly, domesticity's demand for the normative adherence to gender roles exercised over the private sphere of the home was rooted both in enslavement and colonialism. Andrea Smith argues in *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (2005) that the demand to adopt dominant gender roles functioned as a regime of colonial control that attached regulation over the domestic living practices of American Indians to the project of colonization. Therefore, the violent process of reconstituting the most intimate of American Indian social relations and culture was central to establishing colonial rule. From this vantage point, black fugitive movement as noted by Tiya Miles functioned as a dual challenge to captivity and coloniality as it defied the logic that equated slave life with property, while domestic expansion as a process of national consolidation hinged on Native American dispossession.

Thus, American exceptionalism functioned as a spatial iteration of national political control over lands already inhabited by Native Americans, as it simultaneously relied on the home as a site for the production of legitimate national belonging. Thus, the home like black liminality emerges as a shelter and a site for the operation of the inherent contradiction in the universal notion of liberty asserted by the American founders. This contradiction existed

simultaneous with the rearticulation of limited government in order under the guise of safeguarding the private sphere from unregulated government control paramount among these protections was the space of the home as a site of individual privacy, and as Kimberlé Crenshaw has argued contributes to the perpetuation of the home as a site of violence, particularly for women on the margins.[68]

In conversation with the notion that American national identity has been intimately tied to land ownership, expansion, and appropriation, Grace Hong has argued that the possessive individual, a concept that refers to self-ownership or being "self-possessed," constituted the prevailing understanding of national subjectivity and citizenship in reference to the early construction of American identity to the contemporary moment. The notion of the possessive individual provides an embodied articulation of American exceptionalism as a spatial logic exercised over land and home. Hong describes the way in which the heterogeneous processes through which the extraction of labor for racialized groups further positioned them outside the terms of the possessive individual. Drawing on Lisa Lowe's delineation of the "abstract citizen" that operated in tandem with Marx's notion of "abstract labor" Hong argues:

> . . . subjectivity in this era is defined by the ability to own, and what the subject primarily owns is the self. That he 'owns' himself, or in other words, is self possessed and self determining, is demonstrated through the exercise of will. This subject is the propertied subject, the citizen-subject of the nation-state. The possessive individual mediated the contradictions inherent in American democracies as it externalized these contestations situating them in, on, and through the bodies of racially marginal subjects.[69]

As Hong asserts the inability for racialized subjects "to own" extended from property to self ownership: "This condition of social death is what 'dispossession' means—not only the actual denial or lack of property, wealth, or assists, which is certainly the case, but the

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[68] Crenshaw makes this claim in her seminal essay "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color" (1991).

[69] See Grace Kyungwon Hong's *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): 3.

fundamental condition of not being able to own that is both produced by and legitimates the denial or lack of actual property" (8). Dispossession then serves as critical to the formulation of American national identity. Relatedly, the dispossession of Native American land claims that Smith identifies advances American exceptionalism not only as a policy of expansion, but also a cultural formation grounded in the privileged status of white power and supremacy. The dispossession of home is a site for the execution of social power that operates through processes of social differentiation.[70]

In conversation with Nelson's discussion of the features of "national manhood," the "possessive individual," for Hong, emerges within the context of the construction of a "national manhood" predicated on the accumulation of ownership status that was intimately tied to the racialized gendering processes designed to assign value to citizens. Dispossession of the self extends to the dispossession of home, which as Hong makes clear "denial of property rights to African Americans was orchestrated through denial to middle-class domesticity, and which created domesticity as white" (45). With regard to the construction of the Midwest and its reliance on the iterative capaciousness of black liminality for regional consolidation, the relationship between a dispossession of self with regard to black slaves is crystallized with regard to national regulation of the domestic sphere. More specifically, the extension of early American national attempts at land and human property control is sited in the burgeoning tax structure. In particular, one early exercise of the power of the Three-Fifths Compromise, a legal decision that shared the contextual articulation of the Northwest Ordinance that structured the Midwest regionally, occurred in the context of the assignation of what was referred to as a "direct tax" on slaves and "dwelling houses:"

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[70] From *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and The Culture of Immigrant Labor* (2006)

> The taxes that the Three-Fifths Compromise dealt with were 'direct' taxes, as opposed to excise or import taxes. It was not until 1798 that Congress imposed the first genuine direct taxes in American history: a tax on dwelling-houses and a tax on slaves aged 12 to 50.[71]

The direct tax on slaves and dwelling houses demonstrates the congressional extension of the spatial power of American exceptionalism with regard to the regulation of home as distinguished by the public and private spheres and the plantation. The taxes placed on slaves and those placed on dwelling-houses connect the capital associated with domestic relations to those applied to human captivity. Tax on property owners fittingly crystallizes the monetary co-constitution between human property and domesticity. Thus, the enumeration of black subjects for the purposes of political representation under the Three-Fifths Compromise occurred within the context of the imposition of the "direct" tax structure first deployed in 1798 by Congress. The fractional status of "three-fifths" in its ability to account for southern political power and the power to levy taxes on southern slave holders, further rendered black subjects liminal as it reified the distinctions between slave and free state power through tax imposition. As a consequence black liminal status was rooted in its enumeration for the purpose of commodification and the political representation of white southerners established through a racial and spatial order.

To continue, the Three-Fifths Compromise advances black liminality as spatial as it is tied to southern political representation, and the state boundary threshold that enjoins the distinction between slave and free states and the position of black subjects as liminal. Thus, black liminality contains a spatial dimension due to captivity's spatial measure in the dichotomy that separates slave and free state as enshrined in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. The Midwest emerges as the site that best registers at once the history of black enumerated, ontological, and spatial liminality. Relatedly, the constitution of blackness within and outside of personhood vis-

[71] "The Three-Fifth Compromise" Annotation on Digital History: http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=163. This document distinguishes between direct, excise, and import taxes.

à-vis discourses of liberty and capital provides the context for the suturing of national power to Midwest regional power through liminality. Thus, black liminality as a status that rendered possible the legal decisions the Northwest Ordinance and Three-Fifths Compromise also operated as a spatial designation of blackness defining, black life as measurable within the context of the free and slave state distinction. Further, black liminality operates as a nuanced form of national power that attempts to actively regulate through capture black gender and sexual difference through the rhetorical construction of the American Midwest.

The consideration of the colonial and captive roots of domesticity invites the consideration of the construction of home as site of violence and terror for slaves who resisted the machinations of black liminality through their domesticated precarity landed on the plantation. In her heralded essay the "The Role of the Black Woman in the Community of Slaves" (1975) Angela Davis points out the ways that domesticity operates as a regulatory regime for black women, and the way in which they mobilize resistant structures to preserve their own lives and their communities. Davis points out that national belonging relies on a construction of home in the domestic sphere that has consequences for black women with regard to labor and sexual exploitation even as they usurp this power through black cultural resistance. Davis' argument allows for the recognition of the forms of attachment and solidarity that emerged simultaneously from the space of the house as noted by the historicity of the "safe house" as a site of resistance through the Underground Railroad.

Moreover, the articulation of home as an extension of national belonging is further explicated in the same biographical sketch in which Ruth Ellis discusses the 1908 riot. Ellis shares that she and her family moved to "3 or 4 different homes" in Springfield and attributes this to her father's inability to pay rent at times although he worked as the first black mail carrier in Springfield, Illinois, a profession now considered solidly middle class. As a consequence of

moving Ellis and her brothers had to attend different schools. Regarding her father, Charles Ellis, Sr., Ruth states in an interview with Terri Jewell that he was "a stately-looking man," as she adds "like what I would call a Black Colonel, I favor him.[72] Ellis asserts: "My Daddy was a well-built man and black-skinned, very proud."[73] Charles Ellis, Sr. was a part of a cohort of black postal workers that increased the numbers of black mail carriers and other postal workers in the years following the American Civil War. As Congress had previously banned black people in 1802 from the postal carrying workforce, the increase in the number of black postal workers in the late nineteenth-century was unprecedented.

The racial exclusion of black people from mail carrying established postal work as a labor site subject to direct governmental regulation and in this way assisted in reifying black liminal status through its articulation outside of citizenship rights.[74] One might argue that the precedent that this exclusion set worked alongside the logic of "rational maturity," to stitch together national systems of communication through the delivery and institutionalization of mail. The logical extension of the idea that the mail constituted the formation of the nation, we might say assisted in producing the promise that a city job, such as postal work, would offer the ability to provide adequately for a family that was extended to white middle class workers.[75] Ellis' father's entry into mail carrying as a black man was premised on black exclusion through the 1802 congressional ban which further situates his poverty as a mail carrier in the context of the

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[72] See Terri Jewell's "Miss Ruth" in *Does Your Mama Know?: An Anthology of Black Lesbian Coming Out Stories* (Washington D.C.: Redbone Press, 1997). 189-194. I found this interview also published in "Piece of My Heart" in a publication called *Sister to Sister* (pp.149-154). I was unable to find more details about this publication.

[73] Jewell, 149.

[74] From "The United States Postal Service: An American history: 1775-2006" a publication of The United States Postal Service and the article "African-American Postal Workers in the 20th Century."

[75] "African-American Postal Workers in the 20th Century" in *Historian* (Washington D.C.: United States Postal Service, 2012): https://about.usps.com/who-we-are/postal-history/african-american-workers-20thc.pdf.

denial on the basis of race and class difference of the promise of a living wage that stable city work would or should provide.

Ellis' father is pictured as the only black person in a group of white mail carriers in Springfield in a news article that begins: "These were the men who delivered our mail 'rain or shine' in 1898."[76] The heading above the article ironically reads: "The Family Album," and provides an interesting segue to a consideration of mail carrying as an expression of national belonging and homemaking.[77] The door-to-door demands of the work of Ellis' father juxtaposed with the family's moves to different houses due to their inability to pay rent and because as Ellis states "there was prejudice in that city" serves as a point of contact for Ellis' family's experience with local patterns of class and racialization that contributed to the Springfield Riots of 1908, and the national attention the riot received afterwards from activists and policymakers, again one outcome was the establishment of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Moreover, "The Family Album" in which Ellis' father is pictured indexes his poverty through employment, and the form of displacement attached to it as indicated by the family's multiple moves to different houses. The practice of dislocation experienced in Springfield by the Ellis family extends to the white liberal racial power advanced by the white terrorism of mob violence that targeted black people and black homes in particular during the riot of 1908: "They had all the white people to put sheets up in their yards—they were going to burn the black people's homes," as Ellis describes. Ellis's statement regarding violence targeted at black homes gives meaning to this dual understanding of American exceptionalism as constituted through the regional construction of the Midwest, and through the management of home as a spatial and

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[76] I refer here to the article "Springfield Mail Carriers 55 Years Ago" the source is listed as possibly the *Illinois Tradesman* (circa 1956) at Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

[77] "Springfield Mail Carriers 55 Years Ago" (circa 1956).

relational register. Further, Ellis' description the practice of lynching during the Springfield 1908 riot, and her family's struggle to live through it indexes the spatial configuration of the race relations that produced these relations. Just as the ability to work does not necessarily bear on the ability to keep a home or house as Ellis' father's situation exemplifies—respectable blackness was not the exception in the case of the Ellis family they experienced poverty and the approximation and threat of racially motivated violence like other black people in Springfield.

Further, the burning of homes during the Springfield riot and other race riots is a direct expression of the fact that the ideology of national belonging grounded in American exceptionalism is not only mobilized through the process of colonial spatial expansion as the Midwest regional construction exemplifies, but also through the exercise over the spatial constitution of domestic life. White mob violence against black homes in Springfield functioned not in contrast, but co-terminously with the crystallization of American exceptionalism that reminded black people that they did not have unconditional access to the promises of exceptionalism, at best their access was mediated or conditional. For instance, the spatial exceptionalism that created the liberal Midwest that the 1802 ban of black people from mail carrying occurred precisely through the denial of access to a spatial exceptionalism that would shelter Ellis' family from the effects of the riot due to her father's job as a mail carrier. Thus, the space of the home is therefore an expression of national belonging, and as a consequence the construction of blackness within the context of an American exceptional identity rooted in the history of colonialism and enslavement has had a specific relationship to the home as an extension of dominant social and political relations with respect to race, class, gender, and citizenship, in particular.

In her highly influential essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Hortense Spillers delineates home as a contested site for black subjects held in captivity in the context of the

disciplining of black women with regard to domesticity.[78] Spillers discusses home in the context of challenging it ideologically as a site for the perpetuation of the structure of the family. By centering a consideration of home for the enslaved, or the captive subject, Spillers challenges the notion of home as an already formulated construction that connotes safety and belonging. Relatedly, Spiller's discussion of the construction of family is hinged on a discussion of the ways in which black women are positioned at a distance to paternity and property inheritance position women and black women in particular at a distance form property ownership. Thus, "home" serves as a conceptual site that shelters the violence and displacement of the transatlantic slave trade and by extension the social relations under captivity that I have been arguing engender black liminality.

Black fugitive struggles for freedom that figures such as Harriet Tubman and Joshua Glover represent constitute a refusal of captivity and the space of the plantation and simultaneously the space of the master's house as a domestic permutation of the commodification of land as property. Fugitive struggle also challenges captivity through movement out of enslavement as a process that rests on the commodification of black bodies as flesh, as Spillers argues. I am interested in movement indexed by black liminal power that challenges American exceptionalism as a spatial logic of national belonging as it propertizes and renders land controllable, and through the regulation of the relations of the home as an expression of the gendered, sexualized, and racialized social relations that condition national belonging. Attention to black liminality as a form of power that produces black precarity both through a spatial constitution of the Midwest as it deployed a parallel understanding of domesticity that housed the liberal logic of white male "rational maturity" as espoused by the American founders.

[78] See Hortense J. Spillers' "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" *Diacritics* Vol. 17, No. 2 (Summer, 1987): 64-81.

The crossing of state and national boundaries as noted by the fugitive journey of many slaves testifies to the definitional power of the spatial dimension of black liminality. The power attached to the liminality of Blackness functioned through a spatio-economic ontology the control of black existence, ontology, and spatially site for the regulation of black personhood in addition to being and space through the economic practices it designated. Thus, as the history of black fugitive movement demonstrates as challenge to the logic of black liminality, movement out of conditions of spatial and ontological control, or capture require an insistence on motion as a mode of challenge, and through this motion alternative ways of being are established. Just as the spatial dimension of black liminality defined black captivity on the plantation and black personhood in the free states, it also conditioned the available forms of resistance out of captivity.

In a provocative, but rarely cited paper entitled "Ethno or Socio Poetics" (1976) Sylvia Wynter demonstrates captivity and coloniality as enjoined processes in her theorization of the emergence of the category ethnicity.[79] Wynter offers a genealogy of the production of Western understandings of self and Man that begins with the transition of meaning and use of the concept of ethnic from the Bible, feudal Europe, to colonialization. She advances an understanding of ethnic that signifies "Us" even as it constitutes "Other." Wynter asserts that "nowhere else has the concept of group culture been so thoroughly distorted and denied than in the case of black people" (80). She argues that out of conditions of captivity and precarity black people have produced a notion of We that does not require the subsequent production of an Other. We might read Spillers' understanding of captive flesh and body as fundamentally undoing the terms that have come to constitute home as in the tradition of challenging the production of Other that has been central to the process of colonization, enslavement that provided the conditions wherein

[79] Sylvia Wynter's "Ethno or Socio Poetics" was presented as part of A First International Symposium Eds. Benamou and Rothenberg Alcheringa/Boston University in *New Series* Vol. 2 No. 2 (1976): 78-95.

exceptionalism could be perceived as a reality for some. The resistance to otherization connects to black challenges to black liminality as a structure of power designed to constrain movement, to capture and to domesticate the resistant impulse that produces the black fugitive movement, returning the fugitive subject back to captivity on the plantation.

Moreover, captive flesh and body indexes the enumeration of blackness that the Three-Fifths Compromise produces through its numerical rendering of black body into flesh, commodity, and fractional being. The history of black fugitive movement is history of resistant movement out of the conditions that perpetuate captivity and pursuit. Ruth Ellis playfully conjures precisely the history of black challenge to the conditions of capture sited through the home at the beginning of the film *Living with Pride* when she states: "I may not be in my room. I'm hard to catch. The only time to catch me is late at night, then sometimes I'm out dancing." Ellis' practice of dancing as central to the enactment of black queer longevity as a practice, I argue serves as a challenge to normative conceptions of home and domesticity.

Along these lines, the practice "I'm hard to catch" exists as part of the history of resistance to black liminality and to the conditions of precarity it requires. As I have demonstrated, black fugitivity names a shared condition that cannot be detached from the history of struggle in which it is produced, and in this way actively challenges exceptionalism. I assert that in its capacity to disarm American exceptionalism through a refusal of normative domesticity, "hard to catch" conjures up a practice of black queer fleeting movement that extends the history of challenge to black liminality within which black fugitive movement in the Midwest is indexed even as it departs from it. Fittingly, Ellis' elaboration of "I'm hard to catch" functions simultaneously as a disarticulation from the domestic space of the home, "I might not be in my room," as the deploys fleeting movement, "then sometimes I'm out dancing." Ellis conjures through black queer dancing as a practice of longevity the history of motion that

undergirds challenges to black liminality that condition and renders specific fugitive and fleeting movement.

Ruth Ellis and Dancing as Black Queer Fleeting Movement in Detroit

> How do I know that my youth is all spent? Well, my get up and go has got up and went. But in spite of it all I am able to grin when I recall where my get up has been . . .
> When I was young, my slippers were red, I could kick up my heels right over my head. When I grew older, my slippers were blue, but still I could dance the whole night through.[80]

In one of the many dance sequences featured in the film *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100* by Yvonne Welbon, Ruth Ellis does the electric slide as part of a group of mostly women. She grins as she faces the camera and moves her hips to anchor herself as she performs the necessary turns, moving to the beat. In *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (2013) Marlon Bailey argues that dancing and ballroom culture more broadly have been central to black queer sociality and community structure in Detroit. The film *Living with Pride's* attention to dancing serves as one expression of the critical place of sociality as a means to create the conditions and possibility for longevity, and at the same time it indexes movement's role and capacity as a life giving force in the history of black struggles for self-determination and survival.

In a different dance sequence staged as a reenactment of the 1940s house party dance scene that emerged in Detroit in which Ellis and long time partner Babe Franklin were key figures, an actress plays a younger Ellis, and at the end of the sequence Ellis appears in the living room as herself and engages with the period actors. The space of the house as the site for dance parties in her early years in the Detroit gay community serves as the precursor to Ellis' practice

[80] This poem, one of Ellis' newspaper clippings, is catalogued with the rest of her materials at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. A note on the clipping states that the poem was read by Charles Henry at the Retirees Club Christmas Party and reprinted in the newspaper *Advocate*. Although Pete Seeger sang this poem as a song, and has at times been mistakenly identified as the poem's author Seeger's *Pete Seeger in His Own Words* (New York: Routledge, 2015) lists the author of "My Get Up and Go" as anonymous. I was directed to the biography by Rev. Joe Horn's Personal Website.

of movement out of the house and into the clubs and bars where she met people on the dance floor and socializing. As she confirms: "That's how I met people, dancing." In fact, Ellis met her long-time partner at a dance in Springfield, Babe Franklin. Babe was ten years younger than Ellis, and Ellis refused to date her, this led to Babe following Ruth home on the night they met, shortly after they began dating.

After they had been dating for a while, Ruth moved to Detroit to live with Babe and seeking more work opportunities. The two bought a house together for $5,000 in the 1940s, and lived there until the city demolished it in 1971 to use the space for urban renewal. The demolition of their house recalls the burning of black people's homes by white mobs during the 1908 Springfield riot in Ellis' early years. Also, Ellis' early memory of moving to "3 or 4 different homes" while living with her family in Springfield serves as a point of connection for her approach as an adult to home-making as a process of movement, networking, and community building categorized by gatherings, parties, dances, happenings, and mutual aid resource sharing. The practice of movement that emerged out of the house in Ellis' early years in Detroit produced social movement and interactions that extended beyond Ruth and Babe's primary relationship. Babe and Ruth's house in Detroit was referred to as "the gay spot" amongst the black gay community in Detroit as the film indicates.

Rochella Thorpe, in "A house where queers go': African-American Lesbian Nightlife in Detroit, 1940-1975," describes the ways in which dancing in public dance halls and clubs in the 1940s and 1950s operated as a site wherein social power was enacted. For instance, Thorpe explains how it could be dangerous for women to refuse to dance with men while out in straight clubs. The gendered and sexual relations that circumscribed dancing, especially in public spaces demanded compliance with racialized heteronormative gender roles. Thus, to possess the ability to control over when and with whom you danced for marginal communities carried meaning.

Ruth Ellis and Babe Franklin were part of a generation of black lesbians in 1940s and 50s Detroit who hosted house parties that were vital to black gay community life, sociality, and practices of mutual aid. The hosting of gay dance parties was a reclamation of dancing, rendering it a process of self and group expression that rendered a collective identity, through the rearticulation of the space of home. Along these lines, the demolition of Ruth and Babe's house by the city reveals the racism, classism, and homophobia of urban renewal, and at the same time functions as a metaphor to lay bare the complexity of black queer practices of sociality that disavow normative constructions of home articulated through the single family house.

Thorpe's analysis demonstrates the ways in which the notion of the public is challenged with regard to lesbian community spaces, because at this time many businesses although public, operated as if they were underground due to the policing of same sex desire. In this way, they did not advertise through official channels, but instead relied on word of mouth primarily. The practice of lesbian public culture in this regard opens up the distinction between public and private on which the notion domesticity relies, as it is articulated through the private space of the home.

Ellis' assertion at the beginning of *Living with Pride*: "I may not be in my room. I'm hard to catch. The only time to catch me is late at night, then sometimes I'm out dancing," serves as an articulation of the social shift she makes out of the space of the home into social hubs in the city prompted by problems in her relationship with Babe. Ellis begins to search outside of the sociality of the house to expand her social life soon after walking in on Babe with a man in their bedroom during one of their house parties. The house represents a site of mutual aid in *Living with Pride*, and thus the site through which to advance a critique of normative domesticity. Even as it also functions as the site of the disintegration of Ruth and Babe's romantic partnership, the monogamous ideal even though they are a lesbian couple, the couple remains the cornerstone of

domestic life. Their black queer practice of decentering domestic partnership and engaging actively in community life that is socially productive points to the limits of domesticity as a privileged position in society, and in particular with reference to the sustainability of black queer life. Simultaneously, the critique of domesticity presented through the figures of Ellis and Franklin by extension account for black women's struggles to challenge their marginality through the logic of domesticity.

Ironically, the house assists in the reinforcement of their partnership through their mutual residential dependency even as it remains the site for the dismantling of the romantic partnership. For instance, Ruth explains that she did not have anywhere else to go so she kept living in the house and cohabitating with Babe: "She was so mean to me . . . It got so I got hobbies of my own." Ruth says after detailing the ways in which their partnership unraveled beginning with Babe's secondary relationships and trysts. Although Ruth refers to Babe as her partner, "I lived with one woman for over thirty years," it is quite possible that this romantic designation would have shifted were it not for co-ownership of the house, and Ruth's printing business, Ellis and Franklin Printing Co., located in the lower level of the house. The situation at home for Ruth also prompted her own one-night stands, hobbies, and active attendance at clubs and bars to dance primarily, because she did not drink alcohol.

Ellis' focus on social life also signaled the changing of times—whereas in earlier decades the house party thrived in part due to black gay exclusion from clubs and bars, the increase in black gay establishments, and shifts in race relations in the club scene meant that Ellis could find community by practicing a sociality that decentered the space of the home in favor of bars, clubs, bowling, and other activities not without their challenges. Although those activities were not without their internal exclusionary practices, for instance, Ruth describes winning a city bowling championship, and though it was customary to throw a party for the winner, that year the city

refused to throw a party for her and the other winner who was a black man: "It kind of hurt our feelings, but what could we do?" As I discussed earlier with regard to the social movements of the 1960s and the photos taken of Ellis' varying activities, these same images detail the transition in black gay life in Detroit and in other cities that moved back and forth between the home, clubs, bars, and dance halls. Thus, the social life outside of the domestic space of the house that Ellis through which dancing emerges was able to create for herself rested on a series of challenges to dominant constructions, the household as a political institution just one of them.

As Welbon describes in an interview: "I saw this woman dancing and I was wondering how old she was. I got tired and sat down, she was still dancing, I got some water, and she was still dancing . . . Then I found out she was 97."[81] Dancing emerges as part of that tradition of black queer fleeting movement established in the film *Living with Pride*. The localized and institutional structures of racism, sexism, heterosexism and violence that Ellis lives through and with which she is confronted directly are constitutive of the conditions that regulate social life for her more broadly. These conditions render conversations about sexuality "hush, hush" for instance as she explains in an interview. The instantiation of black queer longevity is made possible through acts of noncompliance, being "hard to catch" is a structure of fleeting acts of movement. Fleeting movement in this instance takes as its point of departure the space of the home and the ideology of domesticity.

Angela Davis and Bonnie Thornton Dill articulate the ways in which the home has been a site of labor and sexual exploitation for black women who work for white people as domestic workers. In *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (2011) Angela Davis draws on black feminist thought to point out the ways that domesticity operates as a regulatory regime for black women. Davis demonstrates that national

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[81] Rogers, 3.

belonging relies on a construction of home in the domestic sphere that produces particular consequences for black women with regard to labor and sexual exploitation. Davis explains that the blues served as a black cultural form through which black domestic workers usurped the power over them that the logic of domesticity attempted to exercise. Bonnie Thornton Dill has offered a history of the ways in which black women domestic workers participate in strikes in order to reorganize their labor around their own households.[82] Black women's efforts to preserve family and community survival serve as direct challenges to dominant constructions of domesticity that advance the nuclear family construction of primary partnership as an uncontested site of institutional regeneration.

The history of gendered labor exploitation is evident in black women's practice of "customary appropriations," a term that black domestic workers used to refer to the goods they took home from their employers houses as Tera Hunter describes in *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (1997). This was common practice due to the fact that white employers grossly underpaid black women domestic workers. The history that Hunter carefully delineates affirms black women's strategies of resistance to regulation through domestic work, and in this way also generate a critique to domesticity as a logic that assisted in the production of their relationship to domestic work as racialized and gender minorities. Through this history, "I'm hard to catch" registers Ellis' resistance to domesticity, it also indexes black women's ongoing push back against the normative effects of domesticity that have positioned them as marginal. In this way, "I'm hard to catch," registers as connected to black women's long-standing challenges to the place of the home as a site of exploitation, that Davis also outlines in "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" (1972) in reference to black women who were slaves who challenged the

[82] Here I refer to Bonnie Thornton Dill's *Across the Boundaries of Race and Class: An Exploration of Work and family Among Black Female Domestic Servants* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1994).

conditions of captivity under which they lived, and in doing so challenged domesticity as a logic of capture.[83] If we situate the house as a site of domestic capture, "I'm hard catch," deploys a resistant practice of black queer fleeting movement that draws on the history of black fugitive movement out of capture, and as a response to pursuit.

Further, through its emergence out of black queer resistance to domestic capture, "I'm hard to catch," extends an active and long-standing tradition of black resistance to capture more broadly as a logic that attempts to regulate movement. In *Entanglements or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* (2012), Rey Chow asserts that although capture is understood most prevalently as a discourse of containment and apprehension, it is also one of familiarity and even intimacy. Since capture is defined as a mode of attachment by Chow, we might assess it with regard to domesticity as a logic of capture rooted in colonization and enslavement that produces the social relations that engender black liminality. If capture is not only a practice of forced disconnection from social relations, but also a form of attachment as Chow argues, then we might say that the desertion of the conditions of domestic capture that "I'm hard to catch" signals the explicit exercise of a black queer fleeting movement challenge to domesticity as a mode of capture defined by its long-standing regulation of black women's labor and relationships.

At the same time, the relations of capture condition the forms of sociality and attachment that emerge with regard to the black queer community and other communities in Detroit in which Ellis circulates. Attachment then is two fold with regard to conditions of capture, its directionality flowing from the site of oppression to the oppressed, and also bringing those who experience oppression into shared relationality. For instance, the collectivity produced through engaging in dancing at Ellis and Babe's house parties challenged the conditions of domesticity as a logic capture centered on the a limited understanding of romantic partnership and nuclear

[83] See Angela Davis' "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" in *The Massachusetts Review* Vol. 13, No. 1/2, Woman: An Issue (Winter - Spring, 1972): 81-100.

family. As Ellis' house party scene serves to iterate through dancing as a shared practice of critique of domesticity. Thus, "I'm hard to catch" critiques domesticity and in so doing performs a simultaneous challenge to the space of the house as a site of capture. Even as Ellis' house serves as a source of mutual aid and support, with respect to "I'm hard to catch, the house is the site that is vacated in favor of public social gathering, places where dancing happens. As many of Ellis' friends featured in the film confirm that they met her while out dancing at clubs, bars, and parties.

A consideration of capture as a discourse of attachment creates the opportunity to account for the shared forms of relationality produced out of conditions of domestic capture of which "I'm hard to catch" registers. Ellis challenges the logic of domesticity in multiple ways, for instance when she and Babe buy their house as they use it as a site for mutual aid and house parties, instead as a space to principally to reproduce their domestic partnership. Further, Ellis' articulation of "hard to catch" as black queer fleeting movement establishes a connection to fugitive movement rooted in the history of challenges to black liminality that surfaces in the Upper Midwest as I have argued. Additionally, the critique of domesticity expressed by "I'm hard to catch" provides the point of reference for an alternative articulation of home and life for black queer subjects.

Just as Spillers accounts for the space of the home in her delineation of the process by which black embodiment was rendered into flesh, she also contends that it was captivity that created the conditions through which African American and black diasporic culture and social relations generated a tradition of resistance, or fugitive movement, and with reference to Ellis a practice of movement as fleeting with regard to her challenge to domesticity. While fugitive movement is incited out of the fact of pursuit, fleeting movement, as explicated through "I'm hard to catch," identifies black resistance out of conditions of domestic spatial capture where no

explicit threat of pursuit exists, but rather the ideology of normative understandings of belonging and household formations are at work. In its capacity to both designate the history of black struggles for freedom and self-determination, "I'm hard to catch . . . then sometimes I'm out dancing" designates a way of being in the world, an ontology that is always already set in relation to others. As I previously demonstrated Sylvia Wynter argues that black diasporic cultural traditions produce a collective We that does not depend on nor anticipate the production of an Other.[84] In this way, dancing's manifestation as productive of sociality and a collectivity in *Living with Pride* articulates black queer longevity as a practice of fleeting movement.

As I have pointed out, dancing as a practice of black queer fleeting movement as represented in *Living with Pride* demonstrates the relationship between an engagement in social practices that might be categorized as ephemeral or transient more extensively. For example, Ellis tells us that she prefers, "one-night stands." The fleeting intimacies in which Ellis engages from dancing to her one-night stands are visually represented in the film through actual dancing, and through a few photographs of past lovers.

While the first two chapters of this project offer a discussion of photographic visual practices of capture and stasis, this chapter illuminates movement as a visual practice that is central to the construction of the figure of Ruth Ellis in the film *Living with Pride*. Through a discussion of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the invention of the photographic stroboflash, chapter one offers a theory of visuality as a regime of capture designed to achieve stasis. Chapter two's engagement with emergence of photography in police work through the arrest records of black women alley workers in downtown Minneapolis identifies the Bertillon System of

[84] Thanks to Katerina Gonzalez Seligmann for introducing me to the piece "Ethno Socio Poetics," by Sylvia Wynter, and for articulating and being in conversation about the article's conception of black popular culture with regard to We and Other.

Criminal Identification as a visual practice of surveillance that attempts to ontologically capture black women through the regulation of the category of alley work.

This chapter engages film as a visual practice that creates an understanding of black queer longevity with dancing emerging as one site that indexes the social relationships produced out of black fleeting encounters. While chapters one and two, advance an understanding of challenges to black liminality through fugitive movement and disorderly conduct both posing direct challenges to white male "rational maturity." These two chapters demonstrate a defiance of technological and institutional capture--based in slavery and photographic surveillance and documentation, black fleeting movement in *Living with Pride* as dancing attends more directly to the constitutive dimensions of African American cultural practice that is both an effect of collective struggle, and a form of waging struggle in its own right as it continues to resist the domesticity as a logic of capture designed to place a limit on black queer life and by extension longevity.

Ellis' practice of "being hard to catch" speaks to being on the move that functions as an enactment of the history of black fleeting movement in Detroit, as she attempts to find belonging and rearticulate home. Being "hard to catch" indexes the long history of black movement through Detroit black liminality has structured. *Living with Pride* puts forth a construction of black queer life in Detroit rendered possible through the sociality that circumscribes dancing. In this way, dancing as fleeting movement and sociality challenges the stasis of exceptionalism enshrined in the domesticity central to legitimate exceptional citizenship. As Welbon stated with regard to Ellis' endurance on the dance floor, outlasting decades younger than she serves to reference the sociality made possible through dancing and the exercise of black queer life as an everyday relational practice.

“I’m hard to catch” draws on the defiance of dominant spatial relationships, and deploys an anti-exceptionalist approach to sociality through dancing that references the history of black movement out of capture in defiance of black liminal precarity. Dancing, and more specifically being “hard to catch” constitutes a way of being in motion that openly defies the reverence for legitimacy through domesticity that is the cornerstone of exceptional and self-oriented liberal citizenship. In its capacity to escape domestic capture, “I’m hard to catch” points us to a tradition of black fleeting movement that institutes a refusal to stay put, or to accept the status quo of normative social relations.

Just as black queer longevity was constituted through sociality that created the conditions whereby Ellis could enact a resistant practice of fleeting movement, it was through the practice of movement that home was rearticulated. This construction of home is a disavowal of domesticity, and like longevity challenged exceptionalism, Ellis’ rearticulation of home and her resistance to dominant notions of domesticity serve as a challenge to the spatial logic of American exceptionalism that relies on controlling both the space and the living and social relations that create home.

As the narrative of Ruth Ellis’ life unfolds in *Living with Pride*, the notion of home is further disarticulated away from its conflation with house, and instead comes to name the ephemeral and even fleeting forms of sociality in which Ellis participates with regard to dancing, one-night affairs, community events, and festivals. As she ages, Ellis resists the expectation of an elder stasis that the understanding of home as domesticity signifies, in favor of movement and dancing in particular, or as she asserts in the opening sequence of the film, “I may not be in my room. I’m hard to catch. The only time to catch me is late at night, then sometimes I’m out dancing.” The fleeting movement of “I’m hard to catch” signals the criticality of a notion of home that can only emerge on the dance floor, or in the house after the party begins, a notion of

home that sustains beyond the demolition of Ellis' actual home. This transient enactment of home through dancing extends outward from Detroit to index historic and present black struggles for self-determination and "collective preservation" as Cedric Robinson has articulated.[85]

In its emergence through the everyday practices of queer sociality, fleeting movement signals the ephemeral dimension of black queer history. Its "in flightness" notes as imperative everyday errands and care, shared meals, and the sociality of dancing are positioned as central to fleeting movement as constitutive of black queer longevity.[86] It is in the rearticulation of home revealed through pre-demolition and post-demolition that a practice of sociality characterized by itinerancy, the shared labor (i.e. Ruth's friends her grocery shopping, and out dancing, etc.) until the end that reactivates the relations of care and mutual aid that sustain black queer fleeting movement. In a context where locationality matters, and belonging registers as trackable and traceable through a relationship to land and by extension the private space of the home that is perceived as natural as Noble explains was consistent with American exceptionalism, what does an insistence on being "hard to catch" offer as a strategy of intervention? We might say that Ellis' articulation of black longevity functions simultaneously as an insistence on life as movement, rather than life as stasis defined by the accumulation of privilege tied to recognition as identification.

Further, the American Midwest has created a spatial designation for the ongoing ontological contestations over black personhood through the concept of black liminality. In this way, fleeting movement possesses the capacity to disarm domesticity as a logic that bolsters

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[85] I refer here to Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

[86] Here I am drawing Kara Keeling's analysis of the black femme's function in *The Witch's Flight: The Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2007), José Esteban Muñoz's discussion of queer history as ephemeral in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), and Ann Cvetkovich's discussion of the lesbian archive in *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

legitimate American liberal subjectivity and in so doing exceptionalism as an ideology that undergirds that American liberal subject. *Living with Pride's* refusal to frame Ellis' longevity through a narrative of exceptional individual achievement over precarious odds effectively challenges the discourse of exceptionalism at its core as a uniquely American ideal of national belonging. *Living with Pride* instead opts for an articulation of black queer longevity sutured to the politics of the everyday and the practice of collectivity deeply intertwined with Ellis' Detroit LGBTQ community.

Conclusion

In 1997, almost ten years after the Ruth Ellis Day Declaration, the Audre Lorde Collective of Detroit bestowed upon Ruth Ellis an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humanities. It states:

> To all who may read these letters: greetings. Hereby, it is certified that upon the recommendation of the African American lesbian and gay community in the city of Detroit, Michigan and the Regents of the University of Life has conferred upon Ruth Ellis in recognition of the satisfactory fulfillment of the prescribed requirements of the honorary degree of humanities with all the rights, privileges, and honors thereto pertaining here and elsewhere this Twenty-Third day of February. Nineteen Ninety Seven.[87]

In the text of the honorary degree life emerges as not only a fact, but as an epistemological qualifier of expertise in the humanities, as it is "The University of Life" governed by a speculative body "the Regents," and the actual community within which Ellis actively participates, "the African American lesbian and gay community in the city of Detroit, Michigan." The "prescribed requirements" for this degree is her life and by extension her longevity. In its recognition of Ellis not for a specific action, but for living the collective points to the precarity the circumscribes black life, and black queer life in particular, and at the same time the ability for sociality in which Ellis engaged in community: dancing, bar hopping, one-night stands, starting a

[87] See Ellis' Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humanities, signed by the Audre Lorde Collective in the Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

printing business, inviting people into her home are the terms of articulation of a black queer relational construction of life that defies exceptionalism.

The honorary degree bestowed upon Ellis by the Audre Lorde Collective of Detroit provides an important illustration of the challenge to exceptionalism and through it affirms black queer life and longevity. The honorary degree invokes *Living with Pride's* resistance to exceptionalism more expansively as it asserts black queer longevity as a practice of sociality and a challenge to domesticity through an illustration of black queer movement and life-making practices as fleeting. Additionally, *Living With Pride's* refusal of exceptionalism as it opposes domesticity signals a challenge to the idea that the Midwest is unmarked by the racism and white supremacy of the South, thereby exposing the region's own genealogy of racism and white supremacy embedded in its founding documents, primarily the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. It does this through a focus on the life experiences of Ruth Ellis and through these experiences is able to position black queer longevity and sociality as a significant practice of critique of the logic of exceptionalism. Thus, dancing is enacted as a practice of black queer movement against the regulatory conditions of black liminality as expressed through domesticity as an ideology of exceptional citizenship. The honorary degree by virtue of its reference to black collective struggle challenges the power of black liminality. *Living with Pride* enacts through the critique of domesticity, the history of black fleeting movement out of conditions of capture as a way to register longevity as a process of collective history and struggle as represented by the figure of Ruth Ellis.

I have been arguing that the film *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100* critiques the individualism embedded in exceptionalist logics through its depiction of black sociality through dancing as a challenge to domesticity. It is through practices of social engagement that are fleeting rather than constant. It is through the process of engaging dancing as a sociality of the

everyday that Ellis extends a practice of black queer fleeting movement as central to the politics of longevity, or as Ellis asserts in the opening sequence: "Who would want to read a book of my life? I'm nobody, I'm just Ruth," signaling her refusal to identify herself as distinct from a relational identity. Ellis' invocation of her name: "I'm just Ruth," in place of allowing a personal pronoun alone to designate self-identification further positions sociality as a central site for self-naming and self-making. *Living with Pride* frames Ellis' relational identity within the history of black collective struggle more broadly. It is this history that references her longevity as a black lesbian elder.

The film *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100* envisions longevity through a representation of Ruth Ellis' enactment of everyday sociality and ordinary personhood. Referred to by many as the oldest "out" African American lesbian, Ruth Ellis was a pillar of the Detroit gay community who lived to be 101 years old.[88] Welbon's film articulates the everyday as a practice of longevity offers a lens through which to understand unremarkable day-to-day processes and practices of life as sites of resistance and affirmation in their own right. The film's construction of longevity as possible through the mundane and the relational identify black queer longevity not only as accessible, but actualized. Life and longevity are therefore further situated within the context of collective struggle in the film. Just as the Ruth Ellis Day declaration of Ruth Ellis Day is not rooted in the extension of life as a "self-evident truth" or even an "inalienable right," but rather life as a process that serves as an entry point to the past "a living reminder of our struggle," the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humanities serves as an understanding of black queer longevity as a collective practice of resistance.

[88] Ruth Ellis resisted identification with the concept of "coming out" although this is a designation that has been applied to her. In some interviews Ellis references being out, but as she states in *Living with Pride*: "I was never in . . . What you call it? . . . Closet."

Figures

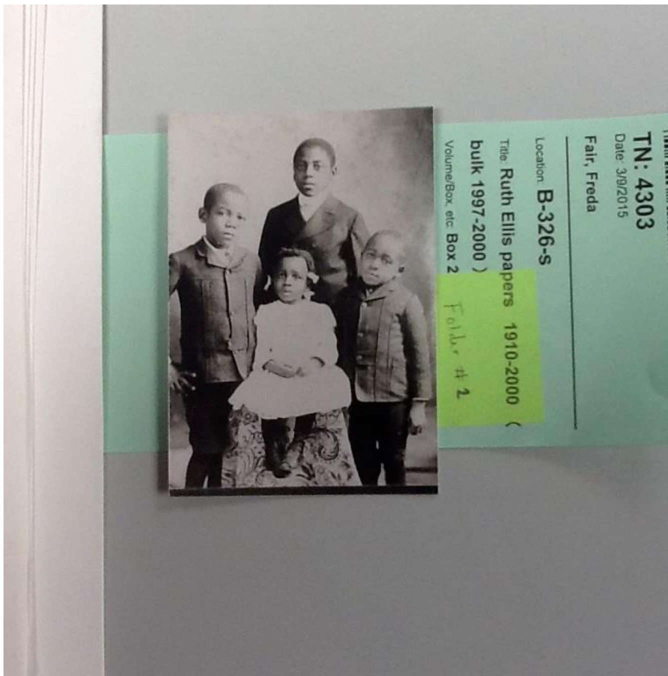


Figure 3.1: Ruth Ellis and her brothers
Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

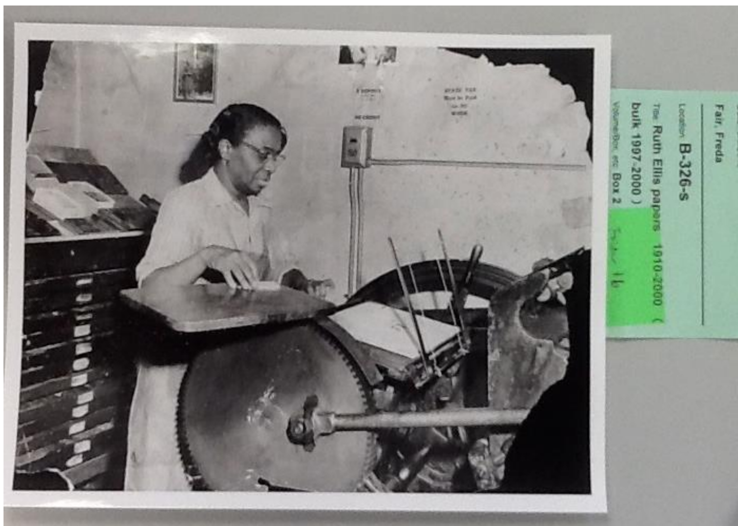


Figure 3.2: Ruth working at the printing press
Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

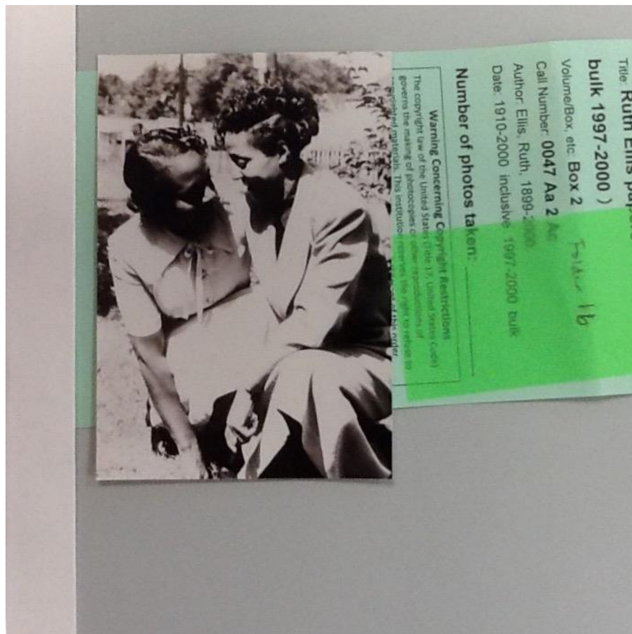


Figure 3.3: Ellis and friend
Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

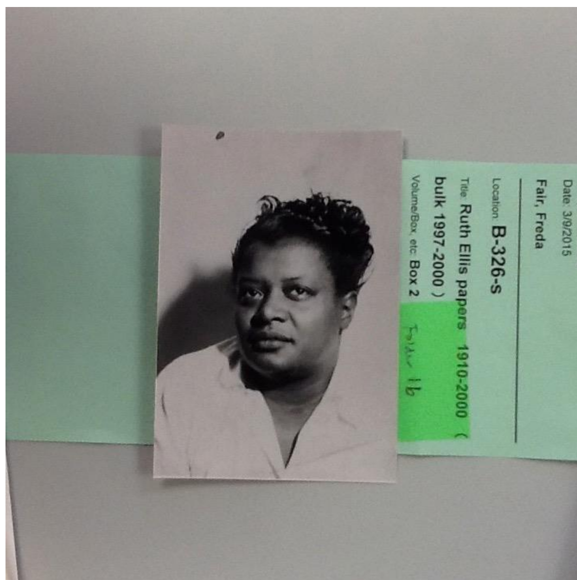


Figure 3.4: Babe Franklin, Ellis' long-term partner
Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

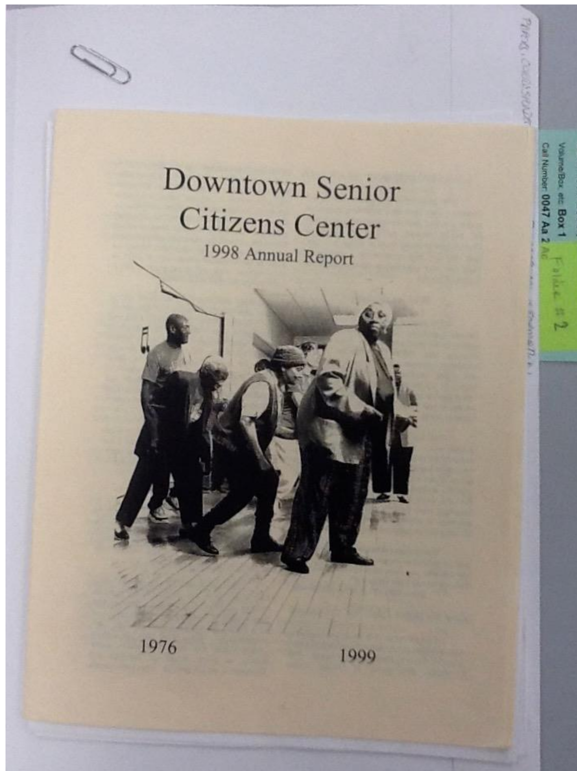


Figure 3.5: Ellis (front left), featured in Senior Center Annual Report dancing with other seniors
Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

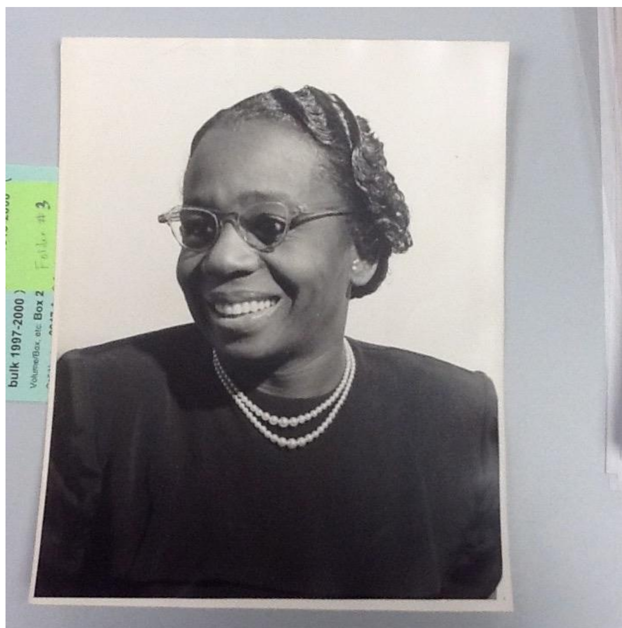


Figure 3.6: Ruth Ellis portrait
Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

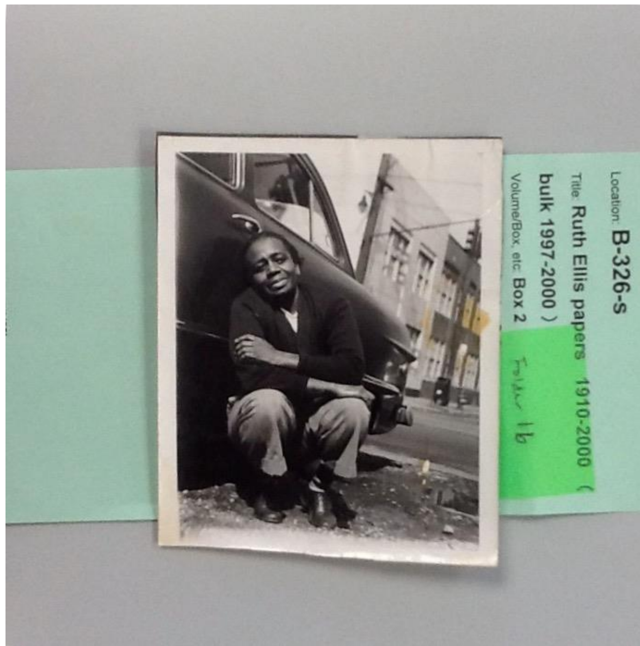


Figure 3.7: Ellis in front of car
Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

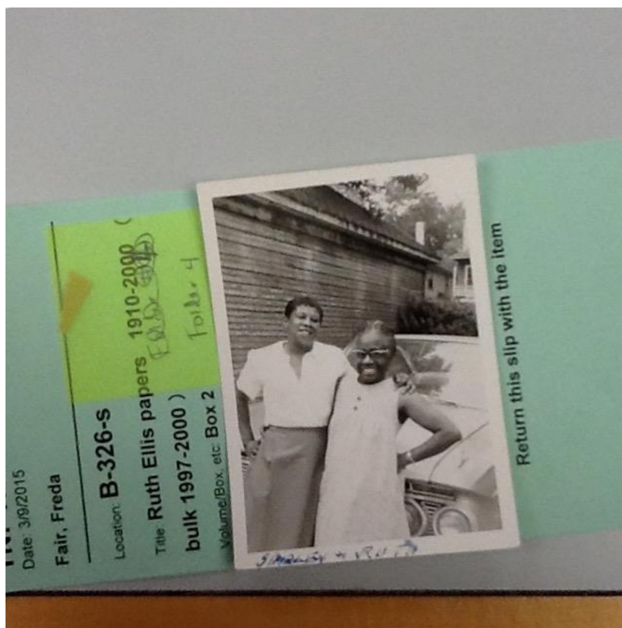
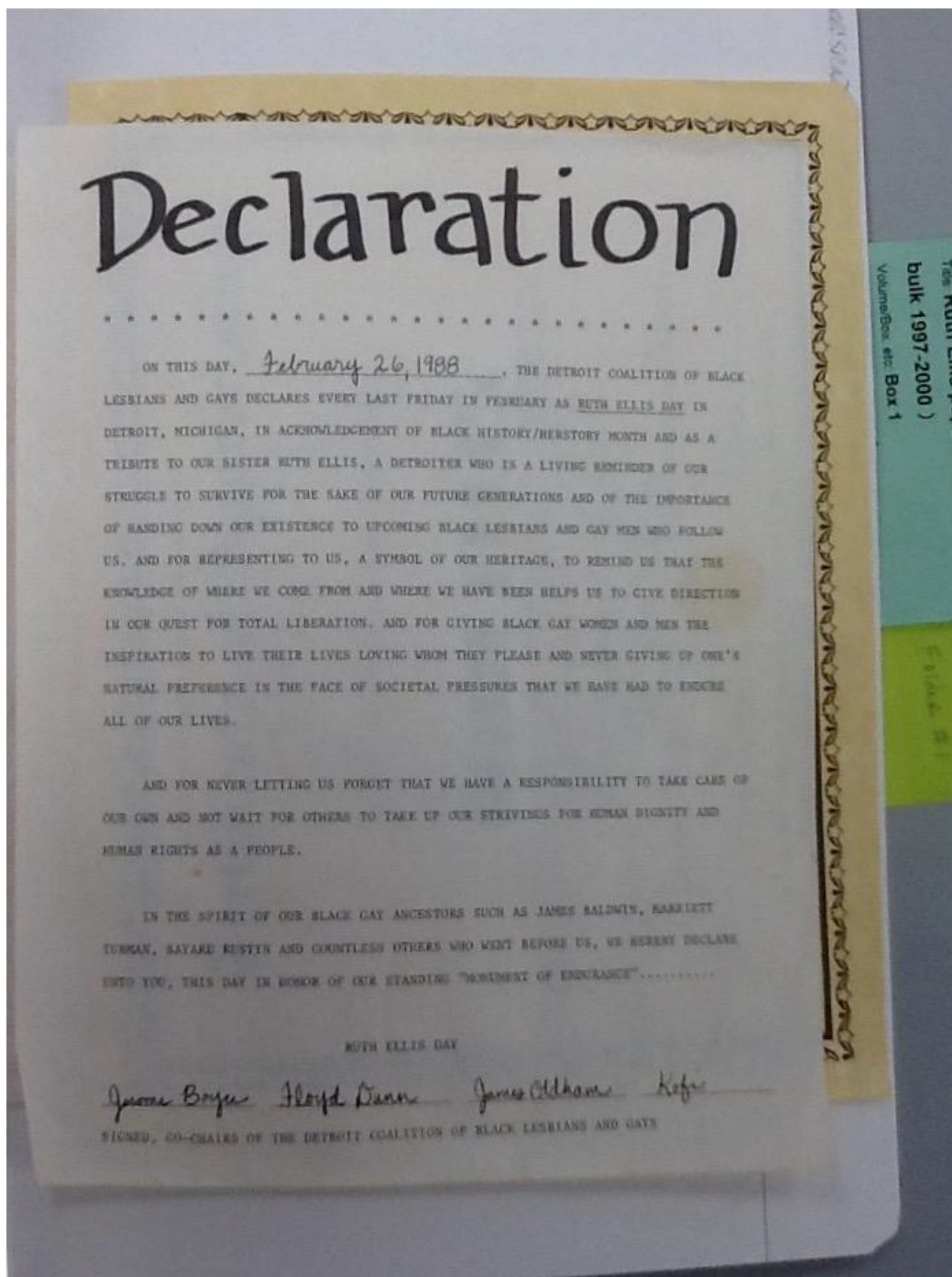


Figure 3.8: Ellis and friend
Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor



Declaration

* *

ON THIS DAY, February 26, 1988, THE DETROIT COALITION OF BLACK LESBIANS AND GAYS DECLARES EVERY LAST FRIDAY IN FEBRUARY AS RUTH ELLIS DAY IN DETROIT, MICHIGAN, IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF BLACK HISTORY/HERSTORY MONTH AND AS A TRIBUTE TO OUR SISTER RUTH ELLIS, A DETROITER WHO IS A LIVING REMINDER OF OUR STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE FOR THE SAKE OF OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS AND OF THE IMPORTANCE OF HANDING DOWN OUR EXISTENCE TO UPCOMING BLACK LESBIANS AND GAY MEN WHO FOLLOW US. AND FOR REPRESENTING TO US, A SYMBOL OF OUR HERITAGE, TO REMIND US THAT THE KNOWLEDGE OF WHERE WE COME FROM AND WHERE WE HAVE BEEN HELPS US TO GIVE DIRECTION IN OUR QUEST FOR TOTAL LIBERATION. AND FOR GIVING BLACK GAY WOMEN AND MEN THE INSPIRATION TO LIVE THEIR LIVES LOVING WHOM THEY PLEASE AND NEVER GIVING UP ONE'S NATURAL PREFERENCE IN THE FACE OF SOCIETAL PRESSURES THAT WE HAVE HAD TO ENDURE ALL OF OUR LIVES.

AND FOR NEVER LETTING US FORGET THAT WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE CARE OF OUR OWN AND NOT WAIT FOR OTHERS TO TAKE UP OUR STRIVINGS FOR HUMAN DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS AS A PEOPLE.

IN THE SPIRIT OF OUR BLACK GAY ANCESTORS SUCH AS JAMES BALDWIN, HARRIETT TUBMAN, BAYARD RUSTIN AND COUNTLESS OTHERS WHO WENT BEFORE US, WE HEREBY DECLARE UNTO YOU, THIS DAY IN HONOR OF OUR STANDING "MONUMENT OF ENDURANCE"..........

RUTH ELLIS DAY

SIGNED, CO-CHAIRS OF THE DETROIT COALITION OF BLACK LESBIANS AND GAYS

Figure 3.9: The Declaration for Ruth Ellis Day from the Detroit Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays. Ruth Ellis Archive at Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

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Chapter Four

"Be Light within A Moment": Nick Cave's "Soundsuits" as Black Queer Value

> "And then once I stepped into it, I thought about building this sort of second skin, you know, a suit of armor, something for protection purposes. Then I started thinking about protest. In order to be heard you've got to be aggressive, you've got to speak louder."
>
> —Nick Cave[1]

> "For instance, the foot is merely the prime mover of the spinning-wheel, while the hand, working with the spindle, and drawing and twisting, performs the real operation of spinning. It is this last part of the handcraftman's implement that is first seized upon by the industrial revolution, leaving the workman, in addition to his new labour of watching the machine with his eyes and correcting its mistakes with his hands, the merely mechanical part of being the moving power."
>
> —Karl Marx[2]

Introduction

On March 3, 1991, Rodney King an African American man was pulled over by white police officers in southern California after a high-speed chase and brutally beaten. King later stated: "I was scared for my life. So I laid down real calmly and took it like a man."[3] A bystander filmed the incident and it was news televised sparking national and international protest and outcry against police violence. In response to the brutality, Chicago-based African American contemporary visual artist Nick Cave envisioned and created his first "soundsuit," an intricately detailed wearable sculptural artwork composed of twigs, wire, and metal armature.[4] As noted in the epigraph, in reference to the making of the first soundsuit: Cave explains: " . . . I thought about building this sort of second skin, you know, a suit of armor, something for protection

[1] From Andrea Shea's "Nick Cave Brings 'Bigger-Than-Life' Soundsuits to Salem" in *The Artery* (4 Mar 2013): http://artery.wbur.org/2013/03/04/nick-cave-soundsuits-peabody-essex.

[2] From p. 374 of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy in Analysis of Capitalist Production, Vol. 1* by Karl Marx edited by Frederick Engels (1867).

[3] "The Rodney King Affair," *LA Times* published March 24, 1991.

[4] See Figure 4.1, "Soundsuit" (1998) image published in *Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth* (2009) exhibition catalog published by Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

purposes . . ."[5] The soundsuit, in its enactment of the epidermis as a "second skin," signals black social difference as a site that challenges the liminality of Blackness through the production of alternative social value.

Further, the soundsuit as a "second skin" that activates the sonic poses a challenge to the imposition of race onto the body as it functions to visually demarcate racialized and gendered difference through policing and surveillance with regard to King and more extensively.[6] Exhibited as sculptures and as artworks in motion by way of dance and performance, the soundsuits demonstrate the simultaneity of attention to visual and aural mediums. In this chapter, I argue that the soundsuit reassigns value to Blackness that is ontologically affirming even as it remains co-present with the structural violence that produced it. Cave posits the soundsuit as an art object that contemporaneously indexes history and the present, or as he describes: "My ability to make objects come alive is also a testament to my ability to have things resonate with their past history and usages alongside my personal though usually opaque meanings."[7] Thus, the affirmative value of the soundsuit is produced through an ongoing connection to the past. Through its insistence on a past that eschews an understanding of aesthetic practice as dehistoricized, the soundsuit operates as a cultural strategy that rearticulates the relationship between objecthood, personhood, and Blackness with regard to the social and cultural designation of value.

Soundsuit Value

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[5] From "Nick Cave Brings 'Bigger-Than-Life' Soundsuits to Salem" an interview with Andrea Shea published in The Artery (2013).

[6] Franz Fanon theorizes epidermalization in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). Following Fanon, Simone Browne discusses epidermalization in *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015) in reference to the ongoing relationship between Blackness and surveillance.

[7] From "Cultural Crossroads: The Art of Diplomacy at the United Nations" post by Virginia Shore (2010).

Nick Cave's soundsuits advance an aesthetic that draws on stitching, beadwork, and quilting to pair everyday found objects and textiles through sculpture, dance, and performance. Conceptualized in Chicago's Grant Park, the first soundsuit named "Soundsuit," thereby starting the practice of donning all suits with the same name, is made of hundreds of twigs that function to enact a "second skin"[8] Cave articulates the process of beginning to make the first soundsuit in 1992 after hearing word of the acquittal of the white police officers who beat Rodney King. The soundsuit was completed in 1998. The brown and grey twig body suit is complete with a top portion that looks like a twig version of a straw hat. The image of this particular soundsuit pictures a black person wearing the suit with arms at right angles in a manner that resonate with police arrest thereby recalling Rodney King as a figure who signals a broader inscription of precarity in the context of black gendered embodiment. Thus, the performance of the soundsuit articulates the particularity of the social positionality from which it materialized.

In their collaborative chapter in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant describe President George Bush, Sr.'s response to the Los Angeles Riots in 1992 as characterized by policies of "benign neglect." As Omi and Winant detail these policies reflect the idea of limited government action with regard to social institutions and infrastructure within a political context that bolsters conservative economic policies of deregulation and deindustrialization. According Omi and Winant, "benign neglect" policies "revived . . . 'trickle down' policy recommendations like subsidized enterprise zones and privatization of public housing" that contributed to economic and social deprivation in urban communities of color and more extensively.[9] They move to point out that "benign neglect" can

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[8] Refer to Figure 1 in the Appendix. Cave describes connects making the process of beginning to make the first soundsuit in 1992 to the acquittal of the white police officers who beat Rodney King in "I Dream the Clothing Electric" by Jori Finkel published in *The New York Times* (31 Mar 2009).

[9] From p. 98 of "The Los Angeles 'Race Riot' and Contemporary U.S. Politics" in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (1993).

also be thought about as a neoliberal and neoconservative backlash to Keynesian welfare state policies: "Poverty and discrimination, seen in the past as problems requiring state action, are now seen as the results of state activity" (99).

Moreover, the Rodney King beating animated a longer history of the political subjection of black people in the context of sustained racialized and gendered regulation and brutality in the United States. Further, it characterized treatment familiar to communities of color subjected to extensive police surveillance and abuse. Ruth Wilson Gilmore has described the ways in which polices that produced social deprivation diverted resources away from community institutions and into systems of punishment such as the expansion of the prison system.[10] Although California served as a test site for neoconservative policies, particularly with Ronald Reagan as Governor prior to his presidency, they had a national reach.

Thus, Cave's soundsuits were produced and inspired by a cultural and political moment in which the economic and social diversion of resources fueled the dilapidation of urban communities of color such as Watts, Detroit, South Central Los Angeles, and the Southside of Chicago. The twin political strategy of neglect and punishment combined to produce the social conditions to which the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, or as many have argued—uprising, served as a response. Along these lines, Cave's soundsuit serves as a related and connected cultural response. The soundsuit rather than signal the context of Los Angles exclusively, invites a consideration of the ways in which "benign neglect" might have functioned in Chicago thereby linking it to Los Angeles.

Reaganomics as set of a political and economic policies prioritized tax cuts alongside an investment in military spending, market privatization and deregulation while advancing the idea of "supply-side economics, the theory that lower tax rates would power the economy, produce

[10] Here I refer to *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007).

more revenue and more than pay for themselves."[11] The speculative model of "supply-side economics" in its emphasis on economic growth sparked by lower tax rates that in turn would "narrow deficits" in future decades solidified an economic structure that deprioritized economic redistribution, and furthered economic policies that produced unemployment and social and economic deterioration especially in formerly industrial centers.[12] Along these lines, the social relations hinged on social and economic neglect and punishment that represented the beating of King in 1991 and spurred the 1992 riots might be thought of as part of the legacy of Reaganomics in the early 1990s.[13]

As Jakobi Williams notes in *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* (2013) that simultaneous economic neglect and punishment combined to shape the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party's approach to self-defense as it was sited in a long legacy of black challenges to anti-black brutality also linked to civil rights movement politics in the city. The interplay between black civil rights and black power is designated by Williams' use of the Chicago Freedom Movement. Although Williams focuses primarily on the social conditions that gave rise to the growth of the ILBPP in the late 1960s and 1970s, nevertheless his analysis illuminates the ongoing conditions that contributed to the articulation of self-defense popularized by the Panthers decades later.

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[11] From '"Reaganomics' Forged New Path" by William Neikirk published in *Chicago Tribune* (6 June 2004).

[12] Here I also refer to Neikirk's '"Reaganomics' Forged New Path" wherein he argues that Reagan made the economic situation better, but that there exists controversy over his approach. The articulation of "trickle down" economics that writers in the Reading Rodney King edited volume challenges Neikirk's argument by demonstrating the further deterioration of urban communities of color in particular under economic policies that grew out of Reaganomics.

[13] The gender-based anti-black racism produced out of conditions of social neglect and punishment was challenged most notably by the rap group Public Enemy in the 1980s and early 199os as the group referenced deaths of black men from police chokeholds as one example that indicated the violence of the moment. Spike Lee's film *Do the Right Thing* (1989) also signals this political moment for black and multi-racial communities in New York City with regard to the police.

Relatedly, the use of force and excessive force with regard to black people can be understood in relation to outcry against deaths from the police chokehold during the 1980s and 1990s.

Thus, the social conditions of economic and political neglect that reflected policies that designated marginal communities as lacking social value actually diverted state resources into the expansion of systems of punishment and policing thereby reifying value that allowed for the reproduction of the state as a regulatory institution.[14] The soundsuit contests precisely the disarticulative constitution of value that undergirds black precarity. In reference to the making of his first soundsuit, Cave describes a value in personhood that operates as a deficit: "I started thinking about myself more and more as a black man as someone who was discarded, devalued, viewed as less than."[15] For Cave, "less than" describes a metric of alterity and marginalization that we might link to the model of deficit driver by "supply-side" economics in its racialized and gendered effects. The first soundsuit evokes the disregard for King's life through the use of the twig as a found object, thus suturing the "less than" disposability of King to the status of litter that often attaches to twigs strewn about the ground.[16]

Further, "less than" with regard to Blackness and fractional personhood more specifically, can be sited historically with reference to the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787 that counted black people as three-fifths of a human to increase white southern political

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[14] Beth Richie discusses this phenomenon in *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation* (2012). Value here speaks to Marx's delineation of it in his labor theory of value that describes the process by which the meaning attached to social categories allows for their circulation.

[15] From "I Dream the Clothing Electric" by Jori Finkel published in *The New York Times* (31 Mar 2009). I also refer to "A Look at Nick Cave's Stunningly Colorful Show at Jack Shainman's New School" by Hrag Vartanian in *Hyperallergic* (19 May 2014).

[16] There are many critical treatments of Cave's use of twigs and other found objects as tools of social and political commentary. One such example with regard to twigs in particular is Chloe Courtney's "Nick Cave on Practice, Performance and Violence" in *Adobe Airstream: The West's Premier Online Art Magazine* (Nov/Dec 2015).

representation.[17] As I have pointed out, the logic of fractional personhood that operated through the Three-Fifths Compromise contributed to the strategy of political compromise that allowed for the legal and political emergence of the American Midwest as a collection of free territories through the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. The construction of the American Midwest as politically free relied on upholding the property rights of white slave holders to reclaim black persons "held to servitude" in the territories of the Northwest.

Therefore, the three-fifths rule signaled a coterminous articulation of black value as fractional that contributed to the broader unprotectability of black personhood thereby rendering it a liminal site that trafficked inside and outside of object status with regard to commodification and liberal conceptions of personhood that undergirded political representation. In this way, Cave's indictment of "less than" speaks to the assignation of value to Blackness that appears to reduce black status to a site that lacks all value, while the capital accrued in its stead is diverted for the purposes of white southern political representation and the accumulation of capital vis-à-vis political representation. The regeneration of black dispossession, or the movement between object status and personhood of Blackness at the level of the liberal state recognition thus extends to the processes and practices that physically render black liminality precarious, such as the use of force on the part of the police against King. Thus, "less than" when accounted for with regard to the soundsuit demands an interrogation of the process by which value is assigned and produced.

The process of assigning value socially operates in ways that are cultural and economic and historically specific. In "Commodified Freedom: Interrogating the Limits of Anti-slavery Ideology in the Early Republic" (2004) Stephanie Smallwood extends and expands the classical

[17] In earlier chapters I have detailed the ways in which the fractional logic of black personhood was linked to the emergence of the American Midwest through the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 as it shared a political context of the burgeoning U.S. as referenced by the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787.

Marxist understanding of value as economic by signaling through a discussion of commodification itself the ways in which value is cultural. Smallwood demonstrates that it is by paying attention to the role of culture and social categories more broadly that alternative forms of value may be identified. More specifically, Smallwood's delineation of value extends and revises the understanding of labor as productive that privileges its waged and exchange driven capacity to account for value produced through the process of commodity production and circulation. Smallwood attends to the will to commodify as a site for the instantiation of commodification by pointing out how racial identity formation as a cultural process has been intimately linked to commodification:

> As a discursive system however, commodification always exists alongside other, competing systems of representation, meaning commodification is always a political process. It is always a contest between different systems of representing or articulating value.[18]

I draw on Smallwood's claim to point out how the soundsuit as a cultural form draws on the value assigned to Blackness under conditions of precarity in order to produce alternative value. Smallwood demonstrates the ways in which conditions of freedom and unfreedom co-constituted U.S. liberal subjectivity during slavery and beyond. Freedom then was established through the condition of unfreedom. Smallwood situates commodification within a genealogy of early capitalist relations during U.S. slavery that generated value within a system wherein value is multiple and competing. Thus, Smallwood's analysis identifies the quantifiable dimensions of social and cultural particularities that then activate commodification as a process.[19]

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[18] See Stephanie Smallwood's "Commodified Freedom: Interrogating the Limits of Anti-Slavery Ideology in the Early Republic" *Journal of the Early Republic* Vol. 24 No. 2 (Summer 2004): 295.

[19] While labor appears a silenced partner in Smallwood because of her focus on commodification as an ideological process, in fact the work required to produce the language required for commodity circulation purposes is central to the process as she Points out. My use of cultural "particularities" draws on the use of the term by Rod Ferguson in *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) to designate the ways in which difference is produced and designated socially and economically in ways that are hierarchical.

The distribution of social value occurs within a context where value is dispersed and distributed differentially. The production of value attached to marginal personhood such as in the context of the Rodney King case justifies its actions by positioning marginal figures such as King as socially without worth and therefore readied for violation. In this way, value assigned to marginal figures generates value that reproduces the social conditions of liminality and vulnerability in particular with regard to Blackness. Thus, the extraction of value from subjects positioned as not having value functions to reproduce the institutional capacity of extraction. This extraction makes marginality matter in ways that actually reproduce institutionalized forms of brutality while creating a hostile environment within which the conditions for the reproduction of value that affirms the life-making practices of the marginalized continue to compete for self determination. While devaluation in its capacity to describe the process of the subtraction of value is connected to my discussion here, I focus instead on the social distribution of value in both its affirmative and denigrating capacities offers a lens through which to account for the soundsuit's connection to past atrocities only as a conduit to an examination of the alternative forms of value it creates for the purpose of social and cultural rearticulation toward survival.

The soundsuit signals the value that is socially reproductive in its demand for and enactment of the affirmative value that emerges out of the challenge to "less than." For instance, Cave's description of "Soundsuit" (1998) as "a suit of armor" that offers "emotional and physical" protection signals the socially reproductive potential of the alternative form of value that presented by and through the soundsuit. Moreover, the soundsuit serves as a reminder of the labor of social reproduction that creates the conditions for black survival and existence wherein alternative value is utilized and regenerated.

In *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983) Cedric Robinson documents the way in which race became naturalized and embedded in bourgeois ideology and

political economy and went unquestioned with no theoretical justification in Marx's dialectical materialist conception of history. Further, Robinson's delineation of the historical and economic processes that transformed serf labor and instituted wage labor illustrates the ways in which Feudal serfdom and capitalism were reformulated and reorganized through slavery as a process of labor extraction. As Robinson explains racialism legitimizes social organization as natural by reference to the categories through which division and hierarchy are realized. Racialism operated as a taken for granted assumption that was never resolved by bourgeois notions of rationality, but instead put to use by capital to regulate labor which in turn came to bear on the distribution of value. The soundsuit as a "second skin" articulates this condition of precarity and distributive value as it intervenes into the existing mechanisms for social organization in order to rearticulate the value attributed to Blackness as a condition that has far exceeded its racial dimensions.

Further, the soundsuit functions as a tool to rearticulate the social value that is attached to embodiment. When Cave says that as a black man he was: "viewed as less than"? Less than what, we might ask? It is possible to read Cave's meaning as perhaps ringing close to something like—less than a person, less than legitimate, less than valuable. Blackness is a category that designates identification, alliances, as well as forced sites of connection that have been assigned meaning through historical and economic social relations that have exploited the lives and labors of black people, and other approximations to what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls "premature death," racism, or what Robinson refers to as racial capital. The consideration of capital as it is shaped and defined by and through race, gender, and sexuality with regard to Blackness keeps present attention to ongoing production of individual and collective injury. The value attributed to Blackness then exceeds its racial dimensions to account for the intersecting forms of difference that shape the attribution of value.

Rod Ferguson's work, particularly *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (2004), allows us to identify the ways in which Blackness has come to signify other social formations such as sexuality, gender, and class. This does not mean that Blackness stands in for, or side lines these other formations, rather they are conditioned by Blackness, and they structure blackness. Accounting for this historically place of Blackness in racial processes is thus not about placing gender or sexuality to the margins yet again, but accounting for the excesses of race in its gendered and sexualized forms. The soundsuit as a second skin designates the expansive capacity of Blackness to signal other forms of marginalization and value through embodiment.

Therefore, the historical process by which economic value was rendered socially meaningful was established through racialization. As C. Riley Snorton has pointed out racialization was intimately shaped by gendered processes of sexualization that positioned black subjects as duplicitous and deserving of the status of "less than."[20] In Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism, Patricia Hill Collins demonstrates how this deviant racialized and sexualized image of black identity justified the construction of black bodies as objects and receptacles requiring the practice of brute force and violence:

> "Overall, colonialism, slavery, and racial segregation relied upon this discourse of Black sexuality to create tightly bundled ideas about Black femininity and Black masculinity that in turn influenced racial ideologies and racial practices" (32).

The demonization of black gendered and sexual personhood as it was extended and denied in the context of political liminality, is addressed in "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics," by Cathy Cohen. Cohen points out how Blackness as a category of racialized gendered and sexual difference, has historically been constructed as nonnormative, and thus at a distance from life affirming constructs like

[20] Refer to C. Riley Snorton's *Nobody is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the Down Low* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

safety, longevity, health, legitimacy, and respect. Normative power, that which is perceived to be normal and norm abiding (i.e. straightness, whiteness, maleness, class privileged) does not only at times determine those to whom brute force is delivered, but also the ascription of social value. Cohen argues that normative sexuality has been challenged by queer activists through a limited understanding of heteronormativity as particular to sexual privilege.

Cohen explains that challenging heteronormativity and attempting to value the lives of queer people through simplistic binary oppositions (queer and straight) does not account for important distinctions between and among heterosexual and queer people, and thus centers the experiences of the most privileged queers. Further, she contends that more of an investment in nonnormativity with regard to race, class, gender, and sexuality in place of a unitary focus on sexuality to the exclusion of other crosscutting social positions has the power to reinvigorate the radical potential of queer politics. Cohen's turn toward queer politics as a container for alternative conceptions of power positions alternative value within the domain of queer politics more broadly.

Cohen's attention to the radical potential of the category of queer is extended through queer of color critique as an analytic that draws on and extends Marxist critiques of capitalist extraction that demand social relations of hierarchy that generate surplus labor and capital for the purposes of accumulation. In conversation with Cohen's call for a radical queer politics, Rod Ferguson, in his delineation of queer of color critique following José Esteban Muñoz describes the ways in which surplus labor is mobilized not only to ensure the economic relations, but also the social relations necessary to reproduce capitalism.[21] Ferguson, in his examination of the figure of the black drag queen prostitute as a queer of color subject who not only allows for the

[21] I refer here to Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) and Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

identification of marginal exploitation through her social position, describes how she simultaneously points back to the social conditions within which she emerges. Thus, queer of color critique attends to marginal figures that stand outside of normative racialized gendered, sexual, and class social locations.

Further, as Ferguson describes drawing on women of color feminism in particular, the function of a white supremacist heteropatriarchal capitalist society demands surplus populations to not only stand as a contrast to the normative and expected understandings of personhood, but to reproduce the economic and social positions necessary to reproduce existing hierarchical relations: "surplus labor exceeds and fulfills the demands of capital" (15). In particular, Ferguson's articulation of surplus labor accounts for the laboring populations that captured and accounted for a range of forms of labor in the house, the factory, as well as sexual labor and socially reproductive labor dispersed across racial and ethnic minorities, immigrant, and indigenous populations. Social relations in turn orient and establish value directing it in ways that become meaningful and naturalized. Thus, surplus labor as a denigrated and exploited site of labor, is a point of entry for marginal figures and serves as one genealogy of the production of alternative value circumscribed by the iteration of "the past" that Cave attributes to the soundsuit as it is constituted through objects that resonate historically.

The operation of value as a site shaped by a multiplicity of cultural and social forms of power is illuminated through 1992 criminal trial that acquitted the police officers that beat Rodney King. Judith Butler has argued that the jury indemnified the actions of the police involved through their not guilty verdict that bolstered the idea that: "the body of Rodney King bore an intention to injure."[22] Butler's point demonstrates the way in which the black body as it resonates in the case against the white police officers that actually managed to position King as

[22] From "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia" in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993): 15.

the de facto defendant, is consigned to the role as the producer if not the potential producer of injury and this justifies the brutalization of black subjects. Social value contained within the context of bearing "the intention to injure," can only reproduce the capacity of the state to act through the police for purposes of regulation, pursuit, and abuse. Thus, Cave's soundsuit as an effect of the liminality of blackness and the denigration of social value attributed to Blackness simultaneously creates an alternative structure of value. The soundsuit as a cultural form that indexes this history thus points to the kind of negative social value attached to Blackness and the ways in which the establishment of alternative forms of value are assigned and contested.

Therefore, if economic exploitation and brute physical force operate as two normative modes through which the value of black subjectivity is determined, than Cave's soundsuits can be said to generate an alternative form of value, one that affirms black life and personhood and simultaneously pressures the definition of value that renders Blackness precarious. The soundsuit as a repository of the history of racialized and gendered anti-black racism and surplus labor demonstrates through its very existence that affirmative value can be detected within conditions of precarity.

In fact, even as Marx eclipses attention to culture as central to the production of value, he alerts us to the effects of commodity production as it relies on invisible forms of labor that can be sited more attentively through the way that the body of the worker engages against and through the process of labor extraction that commodity production requires:

> For instance, the foot is merely the prime mover of the spinning-wheel, while the hand, working with the spindle, and drawing and twisting, performs the real operation of spinning. It is this last part of the handcraftman's implement that is first seized upon by the industrial revolution, leaving the workman, in addition to his new labour of watching the machine with his eyes and correcting its mistakes with his hands, the merely mechanical part of being the moving power.[23]

[23] Marx, 374.

Marx characterizes "moving labor" as labor that is extracted through the process of production in general with particular attention to the way in which it merges to the site of extraction becoming "mechanical" taking its form from the industrial incorporation of the "spinning-wheel." That the worker has to routinely correct the machine's mistakes as a condition of labor demonstrates the bodily exploitation of the worker, and the use-value of labor-time in its inefficient capacity. As the handcraftsman's work habits and training become fused to the site of labor extraction, Marx points out how the work of the hand as it "performs the real operation of spinning" is then absorbed into the machinic conception of labor power. The centrality of the body to the labor process itself is illuminated through Marx's example. Along these very same lines, we might say that the soundsuit operates as a cultural form of "moving labor" that works on and through the conditions of anti-black racism with regard to King.[24]

As Butler's description of the black body with regard to King makes apparent the social determination of Blackness through the intent to injure subsequently works to protect the police officers. Thus, as an account of moving labor the soundsuit through its insistence on an ongoing

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[24] Thus, as a site constituted by the multiplicity of power, value in its operation is also multiple. Marx's labor theory of value Chapter VII: "The Labour Process and the Process of Producing Surplus Value" (177) in *Capital* demonstrates the origin of all forms of value in labor. Marx explains that the relative expression of value is expressed through the equivalent expression of value in which actual value is produced. The soundsuits demonstrate one site where the equivalent expression of value, value concerning the social reproduction of life, emerges that competes with late capitalist white supremacist and racialized heteronormative and patriarchal constructions of what lives and ways of being are meant to be valued. It is characteristic of capital to collude with and assist in the reification of social hierarchies in order to differentiate workers into differently waged sectors to ensure the most gain possible. While Marx formulated the category abstract labor in order to theorize the origin of value, his writings acknowledge that workers have particular social characteristics drawing them into or locking them out of specific labor markets (71).

For example, Marx says: "The greater the social wealth—the functioning capital—the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore also the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productiveness of its labour the greater is the industrial reserve army. The same causes which develop the expansive power of capital develop also the labour power at its disposal" (644). In this same section of *Capital* Marx tells us that: "The consumption of labour power by capital is besides so rapid that the labourer half way through his life has already more or less completely lived himself out. He falls into the ranks of the supernumeraries or is thrust down from a higher to a lower step in the scale. It is precisely among the workpeople of modern industry that we meet with the shortest duration of life" (641). It is here that the issue of capital's dealings in death become illuminated. Marx names for us those who fall into the designation of pauper vagabonds, criminals, prostitutes, orphans able to work, pauper children, the demoralized, and ragged as well as those unable to work for various reasons--pauperism forms a condition of capitalist production and of the capitalist development of wealth (644).

connection to the past keeps present in the production process the value attributed to King in its production of value that affirms black personhood. In this way soundsuit value as "moving power" is not singular or merely mechanical, but rather multiple in its capacity to produce affirmative value that challenges the liminality of Blackness as source of deflated value that capitalizes on the ongoing dynamic that exists between object, person, and commodity status.

The soundsuit as "moving labor" in its insistence on a connection to the site of social precarity through a tie to "the past" simultaneously functions as moving labor in the ways in which movement is mobilized particularly through performance and dance during exhibitions. For instance, in a video interview for *Art in Motion* Cave describes his artistic practice as a coming together of the movement based discipline of modern dance with fiber textiles. The evolution of the first soundsuit itself was also more firmly established after Cave assembled the twigs and other materials, put the suit on, and began to move in it:

> . . . not even thinking at the beginning that I could physically get in it. I thought I was making a costume that was more of a sculptural object. I didn't know it was a soundsuit until I put it on, and then realized through moving in it that this rustle sound came about from the twigs hitting up against each other . . . that's how soundsuit came about.[25]

The importance of movement to the production of sound that allows the soundsuits to more fully become itself channels its functions as moving labor. Further, the importance of movement is further noted through both the traveling exhibition and permanent collection holdings of the soundsuit with regard to their display and performance. Along these lines the soundsuit continues to lay bare the history of liminality that reproduces the conditions of black gendered regulation particularly with regard to black masculinity and black gender difference more broadly. Moving labor, in its account of alienated labor power thus attends to value that is invisible in particular even as its expression is life affirming remaining detectable through cultural forms such as the soundsuit.

[25] From *Art in Motion* interview by United States Artists.

In this way, the soundsuit recalibrates aesthetic practice not as dehistoricized, but rather as an ongoing conversation with the past. In this way, the soundsuit as a cultural form that points to the existence of anti-black racism demonstrates that the effects of anti-black racism do not all reproduce racism, but that they also produce alternative forms of value that are affirmative of black personhood and livelihood. Moreover, as an alternative register of value linked to the past, the soundsuit enacts a practice of critique and engagement that works to attune us to the power relations that allow for its emergence.

Marx's theory of moving power reveals the inner-workings and nuances of capitalist power through the alienation of the worker from the value of their labor. In this way, becoming in-tune with the machine especially within the context of labor exploitation itself constitutes a site of injury in so far as it extracts and demotes the body labor of the handcraftsman.[26] Thus, the disappeared social and economic relations and conditions that produce various delineations of capital, difference, identity, cultural formations, and power dynamics are revealed by accounting for the multiple ways in which value is produced and extended.

The extractive value that disparages the labor of the worker produces the conditions for the dominant and normative designations of power that in turn constrict the workers ability to sustain a livelihood that is affirmative within the terms of the economic market thereby articulating culture as a site through which to rearticulate self determination that is affirmative. Marx points out how capitalism shortens the life span of the worker and that this in and of itself operates as a form of labor alienation that determines marginal social status.[27] Cave's soundsuit offer a way to consider the ways in which U.S. capitalist and racist violence serves as

[26] Here I am thinking of work by Miliann Kang and Eileen Boris on race, gender, the body, and labor. This work builds on the articulation of labor following Arlie Russell Hochschild.

[27] In *Capital* Marx asserts that: "The consumption of labour power by capital is besides so rapid that the labourer half way through his life has already more or less completely lived himself out. He falls into the ranks of the supernumeraries or is thrust down from a higher to a lower step in the scale. It is precisely among the workpeople of modern industry that we meet with the shortest duration of life" (641).

the fodder out of which the soundsuit was imagined. Cave's work has functioned to reimagine and rearticulate racialized subjectivity as valuable in way that challenge its approximation to death, or as Cave says: "I was thinking about, well, you know, I'm a black male . . . You know, the moment I leave my house I could be a victim of circumstances, you just never know."[28]

The soundsuit illuminates the ways in which policing and surveillance compel a register of value for black gendered and sexual difference through which personhood exists conterminously through object status more generally. For instance, "Soundsuit" (2006) demonstrates the comingling between personhood and object status.[29] Also, made of twigs, wire, and metal armature like "Soundsuit" (1998), "Soundsuit" (2006) differs in its complete enclosure of the top portion. With no open spaces through which recognition can occur—the head and frontal portions are completed with twigs shaped cylindrically. The bottom portion of this soundsuit also enacts enclosure with the hands and feet contained. Whereas "Soundsuit" (1998) allows for the inscription of race and gendering categories even in its resistant capacity, "Soundsuit" (2006) resists altogether. The suit leaves no room for accurate identification thereby expressly challenging the logics of policing and surveillance that signify black liminality as a site of vulnerability and unprotectability through which the case of King is but one index.

The ongoing relationship to the past that the soundsuits reveal exists through the use of the technique of enclosure that many demonstrate. For instance, although there are soundsuits that offer the possibility of accurate identification, soundsuits in the 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009 series mobilize enclosure in full or partial extent in some way. The enclosure functions as a mode of containment designed not to curtail the production of alternative forms of value, but it functions as one way that the soundsuit as a cultural form practices an ongoing critique of processes of identification. "Soundsuit" (2007) displays a soundsuit that borrows from and

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[28] "Nick Cave: Brings 'Bigger-Than-Life' Soundsuits to Salem" in *The Artery* by Andrea Shea (4 Mar 2013).
[29] See Figure 4.2.

extends the use of the technique of enclosure from top to bottom. The soundsuit in this style demonstrates Cave's modification and continued use of enclosure from "Soundsuit" (1998) in the use of colorful fabrics constructed like a dressing gown complete with a flattened arrow shaped headdress sewn together.

The transition to colorful fabrics and objects to some extent in Figure 4.3, also named "Soundsuit" (2006), marks a point of contrast from the earlier soundsuits made primarily of twigs assembled using similar techniques throughout the entire suit.[30] "Soundsuit" (2006), Figure 4, in its use of subdued hues draws on the twig based soundsuits that largely use earth tones, while demonstrating the development of the medium of the soundsuit through the pairing of fabrics that draw on different textures to signal the importance of enclosure. Enclosure becomes more elaborate through the use of toys and an abacus as is the case with "Soundsuit" (2008) and "Soundsuit" (2009).[31] While Soundsuit (2008) juxtaposes the playful use of a toy enclosure with the performance of the soundsuit imagining a full body lean and uneven hanging of arms. The position of this soundsuit evokes the visual history of anti-black gendered violence perpetuated through lynching that has been established by way of attention to the photographs taken from lynching postcards as I have previously discussed in relation to Dr. James Cameron and his survival of a lynching indicated by his absence from a popularized lynching photograph in 1930 that pictures two young men from his community.[32] Through its abstracted use of colorful toys and enclosure Soundsuit (2008) indexes the longer history of black precarity and the cultural strategies of survival that the soundsuit overall represents as a form.

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[30] I refer here to soundsuits imaged in Figures 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 all from 2006.

[31] Please see Figures 4.6 and 4.7.

[32] *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palm, 2000) by James Allen, John Lewis, Hilton Als, and Leon Litwack.

Although there are soundsuits that do not draw on the complete enclosure, as Figure 1 and Figure 3 demonstrate, the enclosure remains incisive to the artistry and critical intent of the soundsuit. The reliance on enclosure as a visual strategy offers one way through which the expansive critique of the soundsuit as a "second skin" continues to resonate with a broader critique of regulation linked to practices of looking. For example, racialized and gendered profiling that bolsters police brutality, such as that which the soundsuit as a medium came about, functions as one site activated by enclosure and the elaboration of the soundsuit as a "second skin." Thus, the soundsuit serves as an ongoing challenge to the practices of surveillance and regulation sited through the assignation of value to social difference that undergirds processes of racialized, gendered, and sexualized policing that depend on identification.

To put it more directly, the soundsuit, through the mobilization of enclosure challenges identification as a visual strategy of policing and surveillance through its aesthetic and political emphasis on the foreclosure of identification. In this way, we might say the soundsuit draws on enclosure as a disidentifcatory strategy of resistance. José Esteban Muñoz delineates disidentification as a mode of social critique enacted by queer of color subjects wherein dominant culture is not outright rejected through counter-identification, nor is it wholly assimilated into, but rather queer of color subjects "act on and against" dominant power through subversive engagement. In this way, disidentification as a minority practice operates as a survival strategy.[33]

Cave's work can be read as performing disidentification by drawing on the Rodney King incident and creating an alternative way of understanding black male embodiment that functions as a strategy of survival. This process of disidentifying describes Cave's process of working

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[33] See By José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

through—by remaining in conversation about the cultural forms that produced his work—and against narrow racial significations that attach themselves to bodies (i.e. skin color, hair, eye color, etc.) in an attempt to locate and position the body differently. Cave's disidentificatory practice is accompanied by processes of refashioning, rearticulating, and disarticulating a different relationship to visible forms of embodiment, while still remaining in contact with historically resonant racialization and identification processes that are nurtured by racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia.

I argue that the soundsuit reassigns value to blackness that is ontologically affirming even as it remains co-present with the structural violence that produced it. The soundsuit as a cultural form that is created specifically to register past forms of brutality rather than to reproduce institutions that condition anti-black racism generates alternative value with regard to Blackness. Thus, Cave's soundsuits are not characterized by the practice of forgetting, escaping, or erasing shared cultural memory in order to imagine a subjectivity away from the significance of black precarity, but rather it is about remaining in conversation with the past through aesthetic practice. Moreover, the soundsuits, in their capacity to regenerate and reproduce value, as a form of power, rearticulate the effects of what it means to be a black man, and to be a marginal social figure in ways that are life affirming. In this way, the soundsuit functions to reconsider the social value that is attached to black embodiment.

Further, the soundsuit as a site within which alternative value is produced that is drawn out of a challenge to dominant and normative modes of valuing Blackness, practices a disidentification through its insistence on a "second skin." As Chela Sandoval argues, the creation of counter-discourse or alternative cultural processes that challenge existing hierarchical social relations require the ability to envision beyond the existing conditions and structures that

determine life.[34] Cave has identified himself as a "messenger" thereby taking seriously culture as a mechanism through which shared forms of meaning and understanding create social life within the existing social relations, rather than standing to merely reflect the existing social relations, or to exist outside of them.[35]

Cave describes himself as someone with multiple identities: "I'm multi-dimensional—I'm interested in all of these variables and in understanding their place within the context of the work."[36] The multiplicity of his experience as a black gay male artist from and making work in the American Midwest comes to bear on his practice of valuing materials that are used, old, that come to define his mobilization of found objects.[37] Further, Cave connects his experience growing up working class in Missouri and sometimes making his own clothes and wearing hand-me-downs to his interest in textiles as well as to the expressive capacity that both textiles and dance offered.

> I would cut the sleeves off, or add something to the surface . . . thinking about, how does one establish one's identity being raised in a sort of lower-middle-class family, and not having much but realizing that the surplus around me was enough to keep my interest.[38]

In this way, biographical experience is constitutive of aesthetic practice, and contributes to the multiple layers that shape the making of the soundsuit. Multiplicity is also sited through Cave's position as marginal due to racial, gendered, and sexual difference, as well as his positionality as an artist in the Midwest with respect to the dominance of art making institutions, resources, and

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[34] See Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

[35] Refer to Cave's artist page on the Jack Shainman Gallery website. He is described as "an artist, educator and foremost a messenger, working between the visual and performing arts through a wide range of mediums including sculpture, installation, video, sound and performance."

[36] From "Nick Cave on the Galloping Success of His 'Heard NY' Performance" by Andrew M. Goldstein in *Artspace* (2 Apr 2013): http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/in_depth/nick_cave_heard_ny_interview-51010.

[37] I refer here to Theresa Culpeper's "Nick Cave and the Soundsuit" Chrysler Museum of Art.

[38] From "Nick Cave Brings 'Bigger-Than-Life' Soundsuits to Salem" by Andrea Shea in *The Artery* (4 Mar 2013).

industry located on the coasts.[39] The soundsuit, in so far as, it registers queer of color attention to power relations circumscribed by and enacted through figures who are nonnormative and marginal refracts outward the logic of black liminality in the Midwest more extensively.

The Soundsuit and The Sonic

The soundsuit as a site that registers nonnormative racialized and gendered value enacts queer of color visual and sonic critique through the rearticulation of the body primarily as a "second skin." This rearticulation also pressures visuality through the operation of sound as central. As Cave describes in relation to the making of the first soundsuit that began in 1992 it was the rustle that the twigs made as he moved in the suit that attuned him to the name soundsuit.[40] In this way, "Soundsuit" (1998) accounts for the way in which the sonic and the visual inform one another as they together index social meaning. Relatedly, Fred Moten has used the term "visible music" to refer the mutual operation of the visual and the aural in the production of the senses.[41]

The soundsuit as a site that simultaneously mobilizes the sonic and the visual reveals their interplay in the ways in which they both act on and through the body in its constitution. In this way, the soundsuit, as a cultural form, rearticulates the body and meaning it signifies. Also, pointing out the function of sound on the body, Jessica Teague and Gayle Wald demonstrate the ways in which sound with respect to the bodily experience of it functions as vibration. In her discussion of sound and affect, Wald argues that sound is an affective force that touches the body, rather than one that merely penetrates the ear. Wald's assertion that sound should not be

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[39] Cave's identity as a black gay male artist from and working in the Midwest is addressed in the interview "Nick Cave's Fabulous Resurrections at The Denver Art Museum" by Ray Mark Rinaldi published in *The Denver Post* (7 June 2013): http://www.denverpost.com/2013/06/06/nick-caves-fabulous-resurrections-at-the-denver-art-museum/.

[40] *Art in Motion* interview and refer to Figure 4.1 "Soundsuit" (1998).

[41] Here I refer to the final chapter of Fred Moten's *In The Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

thought about merely as penetrative, but instead as a whole body or corporeal experience directly ties to Teague's understanding of black music as it reverberates an expression of corporeal freedom through vibration. From this point, sound decenters not only the centrality of the visual by insisting on a co-constitutive relationship through the corporeal, but also challenges any approach to identity and the body that insists on their singularity.

The production of sound through the soundsuit is the way in which the "second skin" becomes practiced and active as a challenge to dominant modes of valuing Blackness that register through the imposition of difference onto the body. The sonic then in this iteration as it is produced through movement is therefore sited through moving labor as an alternative form of labor that produces alternative value. Sound as it registers culturally as affective emerges as capable of touching the body physically not only changing how the sense of hearing is understood, but how physical touch is understood as well. It is the movement of the person in the soundsuit that generates the ability or the power for the soundsuit to sound—like the foot of Marx's handcraftsman functions as the initiator or generator of the spinning wheel.
The soundsuit does not become soundsuit without a person to wear it, to make it sound and thereby to enact it as *moving power*. Thus, sound complicates the visual as it offers a challenge to epiderminalization as a structure of visuality and surveillance concerned with shaping how Blackness is seen which in turn attempts to determine the social meaning therein extracted and assigned.

The practice of the sonic in the soundsuit has been advanced through the conceptualization of sound at the center of recent exhibitions. For example, although HEARD•NY features performers dressed as horses dancing in Grand Central Station in New York City the horse performance builds on the tradition of soundsuit performances and

sculptures featuring materials that swish and rustle.[42] While the recent expression and articulation of the soundsuits with regard to sound is becoming more established, its connection to the past keeps present the archive of the Rodney King beating in all of its forms most notably as a visual archive. The cultural response to the King beating that the soundsuit represents is connected to other responses that attended to the pressing social and political issues through which the incident resonated.

In particular, the proliferation of the circulation of the video recording of the King beating in 1991 might also signal the role of sound as an alternative mode of expression that the soundsuit signifies. Robin Bernstein has argued that the lawyers who represented the police officers who beat Rodney King defined the terms through which the jury interpreted the video recording of the beating.[43] Bernstein identifies the mediated mode of vision assigned to the jury as "cybernetic," and points out its distinction from earlier models of vision that emphasized the viewer's agency in the viewing process. In particular, Bernstein describes the mode of vision defined by the ability to determine truth through the camera obscura in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the mode of vision of the stereoscope in the nineteenth-century that invited a subjective experience of vision wherein people looked at a pair of two-dimensional images and realized that it was their sense of vision that perceived the images as a single three-dimensional image.[44] Bernstein demonstrates the way in which Anna Deavere Smith's play *Twilight: Los Angeles* (1992) about the LA Riots engages stereoscopic vision and offers ways to

[42] I am referring to the performance HEARD•NY in 2013 discussed in "Nick Cave's Heard Dances through Grand Central Station" by Ann Binlot published in *Interview Magazine* (27 Mar 2013): http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/nick-cave-heard-ny and "Nick Cave Hears Detroit" by Wendy Vogel in *Art in America* (20 July 2015): http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/nick-cave-hears-detroit/.

[43] See Robin Bernstein's "Rodney King, Shifting Modes of Vision, and Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*" *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* Vol. 14 No.2 (2000): 121-134.

[44] Bernstein, 122-3.

challenge cybernetic vision in its performative capacity.[45] I draw on Bernstein to point out the multiplicity that exists in the cultural expression and treatment of the King beating within which the soundsuit similarly intervenes and is in conversation through an engagement with the visual and the sonic.

The soundsuit then as site of rearticulated value makes apparent that the production of an alternative form of resistance requires value that can affirm life. This strategy of labor operates as a form of resistance that challenges dominant structures of power that exercise the normative machinations of state power in its ongoing practice to approximate Blackness and black subjects to premature death. The sounsuit as "moving power" that keeps present the brutality of King reveals the body as a process, material, and a site that can be made to feel and sense differently. The body is revealed as a site of dissemblance through the soundsuit's mobilization of an assemblage of a multiplicity of diverse materials and mediums that refute the dominant models of vision and interpretation that attempt to define the body and the senses through an ongoing precarity to reproduce dominant social formations.[46] Sound as vibration and the focus on the interplay between sound and visual to challenge the dominance of the visual opens up an understanding of the senses that allows them operate as alternative sites of feeling and as modes of social reproduction that are life affirming.

Further, the approach to senses that emphasizes their multiplicity can also be extended to the attention to detail found in the soundsuits use of found objects. Found principally outdoors and in flea markets Cave explains with regard to the use of found objects: "What's powerful

[45] Bernstein points out that Smith's play draws on the videotapes of the shooting of Latasha Harlins and the beatings of Rodney King and Reginald Denny to intervene into cybernetic vision.

[46] Here I refer to the discussion of the body in Jin Haritaworn's *The Biopolitics of Mixing: Thai Multiracialities and Haunted Ascendancies* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2012).

about that is that you know you can make something out of nothing."[47] The focus on the discarded also reads as a challenge to class and elitism in aesthetic practice. Further, Cave's use of found objects, everyday materials, objects, and fabrics and textiles that are resonant with African ceremonial dress, African American quilt-making traditions that have been positioned as without value due to exploitation under colonialism and slavery even as they have been mined for their utility. For example, "Soundsuit" (2007), Figure 4.5, details a variety of patterns sewn together in a style that references a quilt. The flattened and extended enclosure indexes black diasporic textile traditions as it showcases the extensive labor and attention to detail required to produce it. Found objects in the soundsuit operate to signal the past and in doing so points to the relationship between object status and personhood with regard to Blackness.

Moreover, Cave's multi-disciplinary training transforms boundaries of art making practice as the soundsuit is characterized by an aesthetics that does not conform to gender norms and in fact one might argue engages in acts of gender-queering through the use of shape, textile, color, design, and performance. The soundsuit does not conform to a specific designation or expectation of bodily comportment. In this way, Cave's work challenges racial, gender, sexual norms that influence and organize how we read bodies.

Thus, the soundsuit demonstrates Cave's deployment of an aesthetic practice that brings together visual and aural mediums that resist dominant ways of understanding not only art making but embodiment. Cave's articulation of the soundsuit as a "second skin" serves as an intervention into the process of racialized and gendered brutalization of Rodney King and more expansively. Additionally, Cave posits the soundsuit as an art object that contemporaneously indexes history and the present, or as he describes: "I have found my middle and now am

[47] From Andrea Shea's "Nick Cave Brings 'Bigger-Than-Life' Soundsuits To Salem" in *The Artery* (4 Mar 2013): http://artery.wbur.org/2013/03/04/nick-cave-soundsuits-peabody-essex.

working toward what I am leaving behind."[48] Thus, the affirmative value of the soundsuit is produced through an ongoing connection to the past, a past that always remembers King.

The soundsuit, in its enactment of the epidermis as a "second skin," points to black social difference as a site that can render alternative meaning and value. My insistence on value that reproduces liminality and value that is affirming seeks to interrogate the reproduction of dispossession as it operates to evict black subjects from personhood and to position them as producers of injury and therefore in need of physical violation. In other words, economic exploitation and brute physical force function as two normative modes through which the value of Blackness has been determined for the purposes of the reproduction of the capacity of the state to expand through force and brutality as the Rodney King incident demonstrates. A focus on the value that reproduces policing, allows for simultaneous attention to the alternative ways through which Blackness is valued in ways that reproduce Blackness through alternative practices and processes that continue to create the conditions for self-determined personhood.

The soundsuit, now designating over 500 artworks, is itself shaped by the current economic and political conditions that characterize cultural institutions as well as the shift to a larger production and wider recognition with regard to exhibition. More research into current soundsuit production in addition to recent social critique that the soundsuit makes available might offer more insight into the way in which "second skin" continues to resonate as a challenge to precarity more broadly. As they have become the signature and most recognized work of Cave, the soundsuits also invite further attention and analysis that places them in relation to Cave's extensive body of work.

While chapters one, two, and three have cited the Midwest through the political, economic, and social practices that have delineated the region in part as the result of the relations

[48] See Nick Cave's artist page on the Jack Shainman Gallery website: http://www.jackshainman.com/artists/nick-cave/.

that constitute Black liminality, this chapter registers the Midwest through both the process of reassigning value to Blackness as it is based on a relationship to the past that indexes the condition of black liminality. In particular, the process of creating the soundsuit and the soundsuit itself signal the liminality of Blackness that is resisted. This liminality can be detected through the reception of Cave, as a black gay artist in the Midwest, as well as through the soundsuit as an aesthetic form that attempts an intervention into black liminality and precarity by way of acting on and against liminality through the materiality of the soundsuit as well as through its function as visually and sonically oriented aesthetic form that insists on the simultaneity of objecthood and personhood tied to the history of liminal Blackness more broadly.

The soundsuit, through its insistence on an alternative value that neither refuses to engage with objecthood, nor completely consigns art-making to a process of attributing meaning to objects that is independent of social formations, Cave accounts for the condition of liminality that has been attributed to black personhood within the structure of the soundsuit as a form that largely draws on found objects and enclosure. Uri McMillan, drawing on the figure of the avatar as a lens through which to consider black female performance, argues that objecthood provides the potential for self determination that disrupts normative understandings of what constitutes social protest and critique through the use of embodiment.[49]

Further, if performing objecthood allows for the "circumvention of limitations," as McMillan argues in the case of black women and continues in the tradition of the "evaporation of the distinction between artist and art object" in order to become object, then Cave's soundsuit might be further understood in its use of objects that speak to the past in that they activate a cultural tradition that accounts for the effects of black precarity as it has determined black object

[49] See Uri McMillan's *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

status and simultaneously works to rearticulate the relationship between Blackness and objectivity by generating alternative value to black personhood.

Therefore, the soundsuit creates a unity across multiple art-making genres and materials that index the ongoing relationship of the movement between objecthood as commodity and property relation and personhood as one designated through black self determination. In its attention to black liminality, the soundsuit attends to the longer history of black liminality in the American Midwest and more expansively, and also through the processes of resistance rooted in liminality that challenge its processes of erasure. Thus, liminality like the brutality of the police create the conditions for ongoing black precarity at the same time as those that produce alternative forms of value. The soundsuit connects to the past as a way to affirm black personhood, even as it draws on objects to render more apparent the fraught relations that circumscribe black personhood and render it violable.

Conclusion

In an interview for *Art in Motion* (2008) Nick Cave describes his motivation for making the soundsuits: "I would just sit there and watch how people were rejoicing around this experience. What makes people happy? What makes them step outside of their day-to-day existence and . . . Be light within a moment?" Cave's description of the soundsuits as one way for people to "Be light within a moment" illuminates the dispossession that characterizes the space of liminality and the access to an alternative experience of the body and of social relations characterized by "being light" that the soundsuit offers. The lightness of the moment that the soundsuit conjures speaks to contemporary artist Laylah Ali's description of her use of newspaper clippings in her artistic practice as evocative of " . . . bits and pieces of things you might recognize."[50] Ali's reference to "bits and pieces," like Cave's reference to "being light

[50] Interview with Laylah Ali featured in *Art in the Twenty-First Century: Power* Season 3 (2005).

within a moment," attune us to the fact that the minor and the particular can represent the entirety of an experience or a representation such as with respect to the soundsuit.

In its expression of "being light within a moment" as well as to a past that emphasizes the experiences of marginality the soundsuit engages a queer of color practice of cultural and social critique. Just as the queer of color figure of the drag queen prostitute for Rod Ferguson alerts us to the social, economic, and political conditions of marginality establish the terms of her emergence as a subject, the soundsuit points to the structures of policing and brutality that position Blackness as precarious.[51] In pointing to anti-black racism and police brutality through aesthetic practice, the soundsuit produces an alternative mode through which to value Blackness that remains in conversation with the past

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[51] All images in the figures section of this chapter are for the purpose of education and criticism and are expressly permitted by Yerba Buena Center for the Arts under Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law. Images by James Prinz. Please refer to *Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth*. San Francisco: Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 2009.

Figures

Figure 4.1
Title: "Soundsuit" (1998)
Media/Description: twigs, wire, metal armature
Artist: Nick Cave
Image permitted by Yerba Buena Center of the Arts
Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth

Figure 4.2
Title: "Soundsuit" (2006)
Media/Description: twigs, wire, metal armature
Artist: Nick Cave
Image permitted by Yerba Buena Center of the Arts
Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth

Figure 4.3
Title: “Soundsuit” (2006)
Media/Description: twigs, wire, dried plant material, crocheted and appliquéd fabric, metal armature
Artist: Nick Cave
Image permitted by Yerba Buena Center of the Arts
Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth

Figure 4.4
Title: “Soundsuit” (2006)
Media/Description: patchwork knitted and crocheted found fabric, dryer lint, socks, driftwood, metal armature
Artist/Designer: Nick Cave
Image permitted by Yerba Buena Center of the Arts
Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth

Figure 4.5
Title: “Soundsuit” (2007)
Media/Description: appliquéd found beaded and sequin garments, embroidery, knitted yarn, metal armature
Artist: Nick Cave
Image permitted by Yerba Buena Center of the Arts
Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth

Figure 4.6
Title: “Soundsuit” (2008)
Media/Description: appliquéd found knitted and crocheted fabric, metal armature, painted metal and wood toys
Artist: Nick Cave
Image permitted by Yerba Buena Center of the Arts
Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth

Figure 4.7
Title: “Soundsuit” (2009)
Media/Description: found abacus, fabric with appliquéd buttons, metal armature
Artist: Nick Cave
Image permitted by Yerba Buena Center of the Arts
Nick Cave: Meet Me at the Center of the Earth

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Conclusion

The Political Potentiality of Midwest Liminality

"Liminal Erasures" has endeavored to demonstrate that the regional construction of the American Midwest is conditioned by the legal and political liminality of black personhood.[1] In particular, I have argued that the interplay between personhood and object status with regard to Blackness has been instrumental to the regionalization of the Midwest and serves as the basis for black liminality. I turn to black science fiction writer Nisi Shawl's short story "Little Horses" as it articulates black freedom in the context of the American Midwest, and in so doing delineates precisely the formation of liminality I have addressed. Shawl's story elaborates a history of black fugitivity in the Upper Midwest:

> Slaves had crossed all along here. In winter the water froze and they walked to freedom. In the darkness, on the ice, they ran over the river to the land they'd been so long dreaming of . . . Leora loved that freedom, the kind that came only in your sleep.[2]

While my previous engagement with this example accounted for the history of black fugitive movement with reference to Detroit's Belle Isle and Ontario, Canada as routes to freedom on the Underground Railroad for former slaves, here I revisit this example as it articulates the liminality of Blackness specifically.[3] "Little Horses" centers around a black domestic worker named Leora who is employed in Detroit by the wealthy white McGinniss family and serves as the primary caretaker for their young son Kevin McGinniss.

The example above comes from the end of the story—while Leora looks out of the

[1] My attention to black liminality in the Midwest has endeavored to point out that cultural practices of resistance that occur in relation to liminality constitute forms of labor and alternative value that rearticulate Black gendered and sexual difference. I have worked to reconceptualize the understanding of the Midwest as a region not as fixed and uniform but as composed of relational process and practices that are ongoing in addressing historical and cultural examples of the ways in which black gendered and sexual personhood has been defined and actively shaped by prevailing cultural, legal, and geographic understandings of the American Midwest.

[2] Refer to Nisi Shawl's "Little Horses" in *Detroit Noir* Eds. E. J. Olsen and John C. Hocking (New York: Akashic Books, 2007): 87.

[3] I discuss this example in chapter three as a way to historicize Ruth Ellis' practice of black queer longevity as constituted by black challenges to discourses and practices of capture.

window of the family's limousine and the narrator explicates the history of the area. Early in the story it becomes apparent that the new limousine driver is involved with group of men who have hitched a plan to kidnap Kevin and hold him for ransom. Leora is accompanying Kevin on the day of the kidnapping and is also taken along with Kevin under the pretext of going on a drive to Belle Isle. Leora's position as the nanny structures her vulnerability in relation to that of Kevin. Even as she has a relationship with Kevin, the circumstances of her labor place her and not Mr. and Mrs. McGinnis in a situation of direct physical vulnerability along with Kevin. That we encounter the history of black fugitive movement in the context of a kidnapping to which Leora is of tertiary significance even as her actions play a decisive role in her survival and that of Kevin serves as a point of entry into the condition of the liminality of black personhood.

Throughout the story Leora devises plans and attempts to escape and to defy the custody of the kidnappers. These acts connect to the narration of the history of black fugitive movement. The narrator's observation that "slaves had crossed all along here" provides the context that tethers Leora to a longer history of captivity that has shaped the enactment of black freedom through acts of self-determination. Leora tells the driver Farmer that Kevin is not actually the McGinniss heir, that he is actually her son and is fathered by Mr. McGinniss. She tells them that the actual heir is Carter, Mr. McGinniss' other son who is being raised in Windsor, Ontario. The kidnappers follow her lead and agree to free them if she shows them where Carter is in Windsor. Even as they promise freedom, Leora remains skeptical. They drive across the bridge from Detroit to Windsor, Ontario and instead of letting them pass, the border patrol officers wave them to the side of the road. The story ends with the likelihood of freedom, and the possibility that the border patrol inspection will lead to the police uncovering the kidnappers plan which will in turn thwart their efforts, rather than ending with her actual escape. The potential attached to vulnerability that the moment at the border patrol supposedly signals reflects that of the contradictions in freedom that slaves who "walked to freedom" dreamed of as they crossed the

ice.

We find out that actually Leora's son is Carter, the half brother of Kevin, and that he died. The description of black fugitive movement at the end of the story also extends a moment from the beginning of the story related to Leora's attempt to communicate with Carter, her son who passed away: "The candle she lit after the funeral had been for Carter. Not to protect him. Too late for that. It was to commemorate his spirit, Big Momma had said. And to be what she called a c*onduit*, a way they could speak with one another."[4] The light of the candle that serves as a "conduit" to speak to Carter demonstrates both the illuminative capacity of tools of visibility as instrumental to the function of liminality as well as the resistance strategies of marginal subjects. Carter's death does not register through the logic of expiration that forecloses a connection to Leora; rather the candlelight serves as an alternative way to contact Carter.

Moreover, the flickering flame of the candle as "conduit" is rooted in Leora's identification of the South as a place where there are "mammies" instead of "nannies." The South emerges in the story as part of a tradition that comes out of black belief systems under slavery that created a vision of freedom of "the land they'd been so long dreaming of . . . " Detroit then operates as a conjunctural site where former slaves can access freedom and when Farmer mistakenly refers to Leora as Kevin's mammy as a place that provides the context for the distinction in positionality from mammy to nanny.

I have previously engaged the regulatory function of the "the flash" as it functions to offer a photographic analytic through which to consider legal technologies of capture such as the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and Wisconsin's decision to declare it unconstitutional with regard to their respective mechanisms of capturing Blackness. My reference to "the flicker" extends resistance to technologies of capture that occur through visuality in order to argue for a black humanism that does not center a unified black subject, in life or in death, but instead recognizes

[4] Shawl, 85.

that black subjectivity has been rendered liminal. This liminality even as it has produced approximation to precarity has also generated the conditions for resistant cultural practices such as the candlelight as conduit that point to alternative ways of knowing and being.

The bookends of black death and fugitive movement that punctuate “Little Horses” exemplify the focus of “Liminal Erasures” as an account of effaced experiences and struggle. Relatedly, as “Little Horses” attends to alternative resistance practice, I have taken my cue from the black subjects that are illuminated in the historical and visual cultural materials throughout “Liminal Erasures,” to acknowledge the ways in which they show up in the historical record, and consequently how they might produce oppositional seeing and reading strategies. In this way, “The flicker” that characterizes candlelight illuminates the practice of resistance under conditions of liminal power, that simultaneously eclipse black personhood through the appearance of inclusion, and adherence to law and order, while at the same time promising personhood.

My approach to alternative practices of resistance are drawn from queer of color analysis as it directs us toward resistant strategies of self-preservation, that are not defined by permanence or limited notions of visibility that might reflect even lighting. Rather, I align the resistant strategies of the black subjects of the archives I consider more closely with what I'm calling, “the flicker,” a lighting practice that might be understood as automatically partial and wavering, but usually makes up for in duration, what it lacks in saturation. By focusing on resistant strategies that are constitutive of lighting technologies in and of themselves, I suggest how something like “the flicker” could operate as a way to account for oppositional black practices from within the modes of their omission, social or physical death, or vulnerability. In my project overall, I seek to capture not only the stillness and immobilization of black vulnerability characterized by liminality, but also the dynamic interaction inspired by resistant practices.

The examples in this study have accounted for the ways in which visual capture has been

instrumental to the process of rendering Blackness liminal. A focus on “the flicker” sited through “Little Horses” befits my attempt to register practices that engage with visuality, but cannot be reduced to it. Leora’s use of the candle as a tool to connect to her son who has passed away serves as one way in which access to the past is offered up through existing social relations, a present made more livable through the insistence on alternative modes of connection that emerge out of black histories of struggle and resistance. I also engage “the flicker” in order to point to a practice of resistance that draws on visuality, while simultaneously refusing it never offering the promise of total and even lighting. In this way, “the flicker” fails at the project of visuality in its function as a mechanism of surveillance and regulation as it serves as a practice of resistance.[5] Attention to “the flicker” details the way in which alternative practices of resistance might not register within the available categories for determining resistance that require large scale participation or action, but instead attune us to small acts that register as part of a broader tradition of challenging precarity.

“Liminal Erasures” as a whole has elaborated the concept of liminality as accounting for the way in which the region might be understood through black personhood, labor, longevity, and cultural production as effaced experiences. My attention to marginal experiences has not been primarily to include these experiences in the history of the region, but rather to offer an

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[5] My examination of the candle in this instance is guided by my attention to Simone Browne’s articulation of black visibility and vulnerability as two ways in which blackness is actually forced outside of humanness and personhood draws on the work of Simone Browne in relation to black luminosity. Simone Browne, in “Everybody’s Got a Little Light Under the Sun: Black Luminosity and the Visual Culture of Surveillance” *Cultural Studies* Vol. 26 No. 4 (2012): 542-564, explains how lantern laws in colonial New York City, along with other slave management and surveillance technologies, that were intended to guard against black insurgency and surreptitious actions, required black enslaved people, who were out after dusk, to hold a candle or a lantern to their face. Browne argues that rather than producing visible human subjects, this ordinance actually positioned black people outside of the category of the human, thus rendering them “unvisible.” Browne gives examples of the ways in which free and enslaved blacks living under the power of these technologies designed to see and surveil blackness produced coping strategies such as dance and other performance traditions, “acts of freedom,” that affirmed their humanity, and through which they communicated with one another, practices that are resonant with contemporary black urban expressive practices. My discussion pans out and shifts the geographic focus westward from New York City and Ontario, Canada’s relationships to slavery and black escape and freedom to closely consider the Midwest and the state of Wisconsin in particular. By doing this, I call attention to the practices of lighting Blackness, as well as the forms of resistance that emerged in relation to these practices that speak to Browne’s archive of black luminosity.

alternative approach to the study of space, specifically region through the lens of gender, race, and sexuality studies. As the field of gender studies, offers an intersectional approach to categories of difference, liminality has been discussed as a social positionality structured by systems of power that function to erase Blackness. My approach to resistance to liminality primarily through the lens of cultural production and practice has worked to provide alternative grounds for the examination personhood, labor, and resistance.

Thus, the history of the Midwest is one characterized by liminality and fugitive movement, and engagement with liminality as a form of power that undergirds fugitivity establishes black personhood as a site of resistance. The condition of liminality then demands the social and political labor also exercised to resist it. This labor describes both the condition of living within the structures of liminality and that which is diverted to resist liminality—the relational practices and processes that for instance produce the fugitive movement "across the icy water," thus, "collective preservation" as a practice of survival is also sited through the resistant capacities that designate challenges to liminality.[6] Even as my focus on liminality has focused on labor it has also been articulated through attention to policing and sexual regulation as central to the regional constitution of the American Midwest.

Future Research

My focus on the American Midwest has engaged many examples from the upper Midwest, attention to other areas of the region would enrich the project's overall engagement with the regional narrative. Also, more attention to liminality at the national level as it shapes the terms of its regional operation would create the opportunity for a more in depth examination. Relatedly, a consideration of additional historical documents that articulate the region as a whole

[6] From Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

that open up and complicate my discussion of the Northwest Ordinance would also enrich the discussion as a whole. My understanding of whiteness in the region has been shaped by a focus on racialized gendered and sexual regulation in the urban Midwest. Attention, for example, to the naturalization of the city as a racialized space might also complicate the project's approach to the region.[7]

Moreover, a closer consideration of the existing examples would also provide opportunities for additional research. For example, chapter two might extend its examination of the settling of the state of Minnesota and processes of military occupation and surveillance that sutured the Northwest to the union and assisted in the production of gendered constructions of white protectability through the logic of "vigorous manhood." While I might more thoroughly structure chapter four's analysis of the soundsuit with regard to new methods and approaches to the body presented through feminist affect studies or bioscience studies that describe the ways in which technology has reconstituted how we experience the body under global capitalism.

More attention to new approaches to labor would build on the project's overall elaboration of labor as an intersectional formation.[8] Labor's central role in "Liminal Erasures" can be sited through my engagement with both women of color feminism, queer of color critique, and feminist rearticulations of the category of productive labor more extensively. More

[7] A consideration of *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) by Raymond Williams in addition to more direct treatment of work on black gendered geographies such as *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) by Katherine McKittrick, Tiya Miles work on fugitivity and the upper Midwest, and Aisha Finch's "Scarcities: Black Slave Women, Plantation Domesticity" *Journal of Historical Sociology* Vol. 23 No. 1 (Mar 2010) as a black diasporic critique of racialized and gendered patriarchy as a strategy of control over space and people. More attention to deindustrialization in the Midwest and transnational racial, gendered, and sexual labor with regard to the city and the state would also contribute to this perspective. For example, Thu-huong Nguyen-vo's analysis in *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008) offers a lens through which to consider regional and transnational expressions of global capital with regard to sexual labor.

[8] Engaging with Sarah Haley's *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016) will also enrich my discussion of black women's sexual labor and criminalization in chapter two.

specifically, in chapter three, for example, I explained the way in which Ruth Ellis' sociality functioned as a form of labor that rearticulated longevity as a collective practice which in turn resisted prevailing understandings American exceptionalism. In chapter four, I described the way in which Nick Cave's soundsuits labored to generate an alternative value that affirmed black personhood through the enactment of culture as a point of connection to the past. Thus, the project's engagement with labor and resistance drawing on subjects who embody black gender and sexual difference has generated an analytic that can examine the components of innovative cultural practices that resist the liminality of Blackness, even as they disidentify with them.[9]

In particular, more work on "moving labor" as affective labor would create the opportunity to link the soundsuit as an aesthetic practice that simultaneously sits at the intersection of the history of criminalization and attempts to subvert the articulation of Blackness as a site that carries the intention to injure as well remains violable.[10] One way to address this would be to engage feminist rearticulations of object status with regard to visual culture.[11] Attending to research in this related field would offer a point of entry into the rearticulation of object status with regard to Black gender and sexuality with regard to its roots in processes of commodification that in turn rearticulate labor and value more extensively to account for culture and marginality. Drawing more extensively on feminist labor studies interventions into what constitutes productive labor would assist in grounding an alternative consideration of "moving labor" that places it as central to the consideration of the simultaneous operation of gender, race,

[9] Here I am referring to José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

[10] Judith Butler describes how the body of Rodney King "bore the intention to injure" to the jurors in "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia" published in *Reading Rodney King/reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[11] Here I am referring to Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* Ed. Amelia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2003); Kara Keeling's *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Uri McMillan's *Embodied Avatars: Genealogies of Black Feminist Art and Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

and class. This approach would contribute to research that engages the ways in which the study of categories of difference also produce new methodological directions. For example, with regard to my approach to queer studies, I might perform a closer consideration of queerness as it interacts with Blackness in order to complicate the study of both with regard to interdisciplinary analysis and social positionality.

APPENDIX A

Archives List

- **Wisconsin Historical Society**
- **Milwaukee Public Library Photography Archives**
- **Wisconsin Black Historical Society**
- **Minnesota Historical Society**
- **Minneapolis City Hall Tower Archives**
- **University of Minnesota, Social Welfare Archives**
- **University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Bentley Historical Library**
- **Chicago History Museum, Research Center**
- **University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library**
- **Chicago Public Library, Woodson Regional Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection**

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