

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:

VIRAL BODIES: UNCONTROLLABLE
BLACKNESS IN POPULAR CULTURE
AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Gabriel Allen Peoples, Doctor of Philosophy, 2016

Dissertation Co-Directed By:

Jeffrey Q. McCune Jr., Professor of Women,
Gender, and Sexuality Studies; Professor of the
Performing Arts Department,
Washington University
and
Jason Farman, Professor of American Studies and
Digital Cultures & Creativity

Viral Bodies: Uncontrollable Blackness in Popular Culture and Everyday

Life maps rapidly circulated performances of Blackness across visual media that collapse Black bodies into ubiquitous “things.” Throughout my dissertation, I use viral performance to describe the uncontrollable discursive circulation of bodies, their behaviors, and the ideas around them. In particular, viral performance is employed to describe the complicated ways that (mis)understandings of Black bodies spread and are often transformed into common-sense beliefs. As viral performances, Black bodies are often made more visible, while simultaneously becoming more opaque. This dissertation examines the recurrence of viral performances of Blackness in viral videos online, film, and photography/ images. I argue that viral performances make products that reinscribe stereotypical notions of Blackness while also generating paths of alterity—which contradict the normalized clichés and provide desirable

possibilities for Black performance. *Viral Bodies* forges a new dialogue between visual and aural technologies, performance, and larger historic discourses that script Black bodies as visually (and sonically) deviant subjects. I am interested in how technologies complicate the representation of images, ideas, and ideologies—producing a necessity for new decipherings of performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life.

VIRAL BODIES: UNCONTROLLABLE BLACKNESS
IN POPULAR CULTURE AND EVERYDAY LIFE

by

Gabriel Peoples

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2016

Advisory Committee:

Professor Jeffrey Q. McCune Jr., Co-Chair

Professor Jason Farman, Co-Chair

Professor Psyche Williams-Forsen

Professor Faedra Carpenter, Dean's Representative

Professor John L. Caughey

© Copyright by
Gabriel Peoples
2016

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to those that are so visible, yet, despite their visibility, have never really been seen. Those in the interval, between the breaks, occupying *Nepantla* and within the ellipses. This dissertation is dedicated to those who are marginal because of where we have devoted the center. This dissertation is dedicated to the forgotten and ignored that remain in the wake of “progress.”

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank God, who, for me, is the most intimate part of my self, the only part that I cannot lie to, that knows every hair on my body, and every crease in my skin. When I have felt that I could not go any further, the God in me, the God in others, has been what pushed me to persevere, dig deeper, and continue this path to attaining my Ph.D. As much completing this process honors the God in me, I must pay homage to the God in others that have been crucial in inspiring me in this becoming: My late mother, Yvonne Allen Peoples who instilled in me the drive to be anything I wanted, finished graduate school, and gave a serious ear to my production and enjoyment of Hip-Hop music. My father, Rufus Peoples who inspires me to work hard, grind, and to not sacrifice my ambitions for anyone. My brother who, by spreading his wings, has opened new possibilities in my mind for where I can take my knowledge beyond the States. My advisor, Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Q. McCune Jr., a thought-provoking soul I am grateful to have encountered; a sobering breath of fresh air, never afraid to critique my weaknesses and through that critique reveal a deep listening that lets me know I am heard. Had it not been for Dr. McCune's seeing of exceptional insights I produced, I may have given up on attaining this level of education some time ago.

Importantly, much thanks goes to Psyche Williams-Forsen for exposing me to Material Culture, John Caughey for exposing me to Life History, Faedra Carpenter for sparking deeper considerations of Performance Studies and its relationship to Theatre, Jason Farman for helping me to structure my metaphors around the viral and key areas of my dissertation defense and much gratitude to all of the latter professors for giving me very useful feedback for early and recent iterations of my dissertation chapters. Thanks must go to Damion Thomas for challenging me at the early iterations of my project to think deeper about how I would personally involve myself. I'm also very appreciative of the relationship between American Studies and Women's Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, which fostered my ability to see links between the two disciplines and clarified things about each that would have been more difficult to understand alone. Within Women's Studies was certainly Patricia Hill Collins, Michele V. Rowley, Elsa Barkley-Brown, and Katie King whose approaches to pedagogy and reflection on the discipline of Women's Studies and its intersections were certainly influential to me as a researcher and teacher. I also acknowledge the diligence of Cliffonia Pryor, Manwah Betsy Yuen, and Julia C. John who helped me navigate the woes of the bureaucracy of the University.

Michele, thanks for getting copies of my dissertation to my committee when I could not be in Maryland to do so! Emily, thanks for looking out for me when you didn't know who I was besides a brotha in Nepantla in need of assistance. Renina, thanks for the BBQ and the infinite numbers of snacks we've had over our discussions of our research and livelihoods. Bettina, thanks for the serious conversations we've had in earlier iterations of my research, who knows, they may resurface on the next project. Luqman, thanks for being fam. for most of my grad career brotha, ups, downs, all arounds, studying, etc. much success to you Amina, and Ryan. CP, you know what it is family, you've always been supportive of my endeavors since undergrad and helped me secure a

spot in the DMV, thanks for roaming DC with me, sharing meals, bdays and all the etceteras. Ciara, thanks for all the real conversations through the years and taking moments to look at an entire chapter of mine that was giving me such a headache at the time. Nesha, thanks so much for the many ways that you have mentored me throughout the years in the significance of feminism as well as the importance of grounding myself in reality after being in some of its clouds. Shouts out to everyone in POA, I know I got the rep of giving everyone existential moments, blame it on Paulo Freire. Chanel and Derrick, thanks for setting aside time so we could all focus on getting some work done whilst in ATL. Mickey, I've always appreciated the myriad ways you came through for me in GA and our many convos about the South and Black politics, your curiosity is quite inspiring.

My entire cohort is deep, but special thanks go to: Double A, I appreciate all the various times we discussed our projects and simply making it in the PhD process amidst life, may we continue to blossom. Doug, hold it down in Colorado and wherever else life may take you, I always enjoyed our intense intellectual and lighthearted conversations. Tiffany, you were the first of us to get out there and inspired me to be confident and get done, I hope you take Georgia over and thanks for all those rides. I'm still waiting on that freestyle Andrew o_0 Thanks for encouraging me fairy god-sis. Leaders of the new Bimbola, Doug, Izetta, Paul, Jessica, A., Stephanie, Terrance, Kevin, Shane, I see you. Special shout to T'sey and Ilyas for holding down the ASA fort in D.C. as well as coming through to the dissertation defense (I got your painting in my office!), I appreciate you both. Also, Carla, you've seen me from 5th to technically 25th and it meant so much to have your presence at my defense, you're awesome.

Christina, thanks for being there as a sister when I needed one and even for feedback I received from your parents about the regulation of the radio. Marlon, you gave me some of the best feedback I've ever received from a conference chair in some early iterations of my research that helped me in expanding my considerations of queer subjects, thank you brotha. Kayla, much appreciation goes to you for always checking in on me and asking about my project. Amanda, thank you for being there during low point-high points of my professional career and personal life, in the words of Pac, you are appreciated. Andres, you already know what I been through and where I'm trying to go, thanks for being there for me, may we see many more years of success. Aunt Cookie, I always noticed that you checked to make sure I was alive and well, and I so appreciate that, so many will confess to graduate school as a lonely process, I'm lucky that mine was not. Aunt Henrietta, thanks for showing an interest in reading up on whatever I happen to write, whether it be a master's thesis or dissertation. Same goes for Grand Johnny, I hope to be that intellectually curious when I'm an elder...p.s. your pound cake gave me life as a grad student, you may never understand, just know. Grandmother, thanks for the kind words and peppermint bark along my journey, you had that southern way of saying baby that always made me nostalgic for my Detroit childhood. Aunt Dorothy, thanks for the cards, I'm not much of a card person, but I always put them up. Shout out to all my Allen and Peoples family, thanks for always encouraging me to think ahead and to finish college and thanks for the support over the years.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1 Introduction, Viral Bodies: Uncontrollable Blackness in Popular Culture and Everyday Life	1
Chapter 2, People Hear What They See: Rumor and Branding in (Re)presentations of Blackness	42
Chapter 3, I Can't Live Without My Radio: Viral Performances of Black Masculinity in Film and Everyday Life	102
Chapter 4, This Song Will Never Die: The Memeification and Amplification of Race, Sexuality, and Class through Viral Media	155
Chapter 5 Coda, Viral Bodies: #NoCureforStigma.....	226
Notes	237
Bibliography.....	273

List of Figures

Figure 1.	“White Men Can’t Run”	13
Figure 2.	“Broadside notice issued by the Plymouth Committee...”	50
Figure 2.1.	<i>Absolut Power</i>	53
Figure 2.2.	<i>Ode to the CMB: Am I Not a Man and a Brother</i>	58
Figure 2.3.	<i>The Anti-Slavery Record Vol. III, for 1837</i> “The Runaway”	64
Figure 2.4.	<i>Ode to the CMB: Folks Say, “Take That Chain Off Boy Ya Blindin’ Me”;</i> <i>Ode to the CMB: Am I Not a Man and a Brother; Ode to the CMB: Lucy</i> <i>is a Slave with Diamonds</i>	65
Figure 2.5.	“Ten dollars Reward”	67
Figure 2.6.	<i>Branded Head</i>	71
Figure 2.7.	<i>Scarred Chest</i>	76
Figure 2.8.	<i>Jordan and Johnny Walker in Timberland circa 1923 (Circa 1923)</i>	86
Figure 3.	“Radio”	103
Figure 3.1.	“Weekend Update”	119
Figure 3.2.	“Radio Raheem Bites Lower Lip”	126
Figure 3.3.	“Radio Raheem Turns Up The Volume”	127
Figure 3.4.	“You Got It Bro”	128
Figure 3.5.	“It’s A Devastating Right and Hate Is Hurt”	131
Figure 3.6.	<i>The Night Of The Hunter</i>	131
Figure 3.7.	“Fight The Power...Spit”	133
Figure 3.8.	“You Nigger Motherfucker”	135
Figure 3.9.	“The Block Is Hot”	140
Figure 3.10.	<i>The Boxer</i>	143

Figure 3.11.	<i>Black Wall 2 (for Radio Raheem)</i>	144
Figure 3.12.	<i>Radio Jordan</i>	147
Figure 4.	“ANTOINE DODSON. THIS IS JUST TOO FUNNY!”.....	156
Figure 4.1.	<i>Annoying Orange - Kitchen Intruder (Bed Intruder Spoof) with AutoTune Remix!</i>	176
Figure 4.2.	“World Star Hip Hop Freaks”.....	184
Figure 4.3.	“Tis the season to send a personal video greeting!”	186
Figure 4.4.	“ANTOINE DODSON. THIS IS JUST TOO FUNNY!”.....	202
Figure 4.5.	Sweet Brown - Ain't Nobody Got Time for That (Autotune Remix).....	214
Figure 4.6.	Sweet Brown - Ain't Nobody Got Time for That (Autotune Remix).....	215
Figure 4.7.	Sweet Brown - Ain't Nobody Got Time for That (Autotune Remix).....	215
Figure 4.8.	“The Justice League”	217

Chapter 1 Introduction, Viral Bodies: Uncontrollable Blackness in Popular Culture and Everyday Life

The evening of July 13th, 2013 I was a passenger on the DC metro bus as I arrived in Silver Spring, MD. I will never forget the look of hopelessness on the faces of others on the bus that night and my own feelings that Black folk were not valued or protected by the Department of Justice (quite the oxymoron, indeed). In my heart, I knew what happened even though I had not caught up on the news that day: George Zimmerman had been found not guilty for the second-degree murder of Trayvon Martin. Against the toxic feeling that no one, besides his own Blackness, was responsible for Trayvon Martin's fatal shooting, that night I tweeted, "We are not expendable, we are not disposable, we are valuable, we are loved."¹ Today's popular, controversial, yet complex #BlackLivesMatter hashtag—a highly visible symbol as well as index used in social media—was created on Twitter shortly after that verdict and later arranged as the political organization Black Lives Matter. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter captured a certain resilience within that moment of despair, which I felt as well, and archived a move inclusive of, yet, beyond Trayvon Martin, and later, Michael Brown and Blacks in Ferguson, MO—tethering all such heinous civilian and police violences toward Black bodies, making visible a more general pattern of anti-Black violence.

#BlackLivesMatter remained relatively dormant, only being used 48 times a day across Twitter the month before the fatal shooting of an unarmed Michael Brown by Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson, after which it increased in use to more than 52,000 times that month.² As folks began to make sense of the Michael Brown shooting, the moment of death and Brown's positionality became central. His best friend and witness, Dorian Johnson, said that he last saw his friend Michael Brown with his hands

up, a gesture of “don’t shoot” and yelling, I don’t have a gun, stop shooting” before he was killed by police officer Darren Wilson.³ After Johnson’s testimony, Missouri civilians chanted and put their hands up in a gesture of opposition to police brutality and assertion of vulnerability, saying in chorus, “hands up, don’t shoot!” Not only did the chant travel in the real, being transmogrified into t-shirts, magazine and newspaper covers, and word of mouth, but it traveled virtually as well being digitally archived—throughout Twitter, Facebook and other media. The communal response of solidarity and empathy with Michael Brown led to a hashtag, #handsupdontshoot, to index their activities, anti-Black acts of violence, or peaceful protests of police brutality related to them.

Of course, what began as a rallying cry of protesters during the aftermath of Michael Brown’s death was carried to many communities where the ongoing mistreatment of unarmed bodies by police officers were similar to that in Ferguson, MO. While the accounts of Michael Brown surrendering have been refuted,⁴ within them was a truth claim—a statement about the world taken as true when other evidence is scarce.⁵ Thus, while some accounts became rumor, they ultimately made cultural sense against a contemporary backdrop where anti-Black acts of violence were more visible than ever. The virtual and real iterations of #handsupdontshoot had such wide circulation and meaning that they reverberated nationwide. The gesture and chant was used during a speech on the House floor titled, “Black in America: What Ferguson Says About Where We Are and Where We Need to Go,” by four members of the Black Caucus, indeed, an audiovisual symbol of solidarity with protesters.⁶ The gesture was performed by members of the St. Louis Rams as they entered the field to face the Oakland Raiders, indeed, a visual symbol of solidarity with protesters and vulnerability as Black bodies.⁷

For me this viral hashtag represents two primary things: First, it brings visibility to Michael Brown's death and indexed how it unfolded in the streets of Ferguson, MO, serving as a precedent to testimonial and medical evidence in the court of law. Second, it functions as many activists' and protesters' symbol of a non-violent will, chronicling and bringing emphasis to the unarmed Black bodies who encounter armed police and civilians and are killed egregiously with only the "fear of what Blackness can do" as evidence and defense.

Since its induction in the viral archive, #handsupdontshoot is still used in reference to Michael Brown and Black lives that have encountered excessive force from police, with a caveat. Indeed, the value and visibility that Michael Brown's death brought to the hashtag is now being used to describe what Cecil the Lion should have done,⁸ pranking someone with airsoft guns,⁹ or a hashtag slant rhyme response #pantsupdontloot—which attributes a stylistic (sagging) and criminal act (looting) to Black bodies in moments of vulnerability and trauma.¹⁰ This use is a type of violence that undermines the necessity to make visible how Black lives are particularly vulnerable to excessive force from police.

Within the visibility of that violence is also visible critique. "Cosby would say pants up don't loot" brings attention to the moral contradictions of those who generalize about and morally police Black bodies.¹¹ Its visibility was used to bring attention to fourteen year old George Junius Stinney, Jr., the youngest person in the 20th century U.S. to have been executed whose pants were up and who was innocent of killing two White teens, yet, was sentenced to death.¹² Indeed, this user grapples with the respectability politics raised by the hashtag, which assumes that Michael Brown was sagging and

suggests that if Michael Brown wore his pants on his waist, nothing would have happened to him and no one would need to protest anything. Another critic identified as White, “I’m white,” reinforced his views on fairness, “I support racial equality and justice,” and directly rejected the righteous premise of the hashtag, “#PantsUpDontLoot IS NOT RIGHT.”¹³

The decision not to indict Darren Wilson for the fatal shooting of Michael Brown led to #BlackLivesMatter being used on Twitter approximately 10,000 times that day and 92,784 times the day following the verdict.¹⁴ I expose these examples to show the complexity of employing a hashtag, as it shifts in meaning, use, and significance, depending upon public use and utility. On some levels, each of these hashtags are specific and on another hand they also can be used generally and even some times as parody. The visibility of these indexing instruments, #handsupdontshoot and #Black LivesMatter, do important work in raising awareness of police and citizen performances, while also delivering a blow, so to speak, for activists demonstrations and circulating activists’ discourses to broader communities.

A hashtag is a highly visible symbol as well as index. It’s highly visible due to its incessant, uncontrollable, discursive circulation. Within the circulation of a hashtag are also the circulation of behaviors, ideas, and bodies. I theorize this type of incessant, uncontrollable, discursive circulation of bodies, their behaviors, and the ideas around them through what I call *Viral Performance*. Uncontrollability begins to describe who is out of control (in terms of bodies acting out or out loud), what is being controlled (in terms of managing visual and aural narratives and respectability), the multivalence of viral performances, as well as the erratic spread of a performance once it is published.

There are four things that viral performance does in my dissertation, *Viral Bodies: Uncontrollable Blackness in Everyday Life and Popular Culture*. My dissertation conveys how within American popular culture, pedagogy is created from a mass production of a thing that is accepted as a proxy for knowledge. This project clarifies how the rapid ubiquity of a thing is created through viral mechanisms that transfer knowledge (like rumor, word of mouth, mass-produced image and video). My dissertation insists that viral performance has long been with us by mapping the trajectory of it from rumor to viral video; understanding this, it becomes clear how narratives and representations that affect people's material lives are circulating faster now than they ever have. Lastly, this project illustrates how rapid ubiquity hides the complexity of a thing by making it so widely available that it becomes disposable; additionally, rapid ubiquity reveals the complexity of a thing by uncovering patterns and repeatedly bringing a thing to the vanguard of our conscience.

Through the theory of viral performance, my dissertation explores how visual and sonic fields mark Black bodies in ways that create both simplified personhood—the idea that a person or group can easily be known—and complex personhood¹⁵—which acknowledges that people and groups work together and contradict themselves in ways that make them difficult to be easily understood.¹⁶ Particularly, my project explores viral performances in photography/images (Hank Willis Thomas' *B@anded* series), film (Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing*), and viral video (The Gregory Brother's "BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)") that generate, circulate, and rework (mis)understandings of Black behaviors into commonsense beliefs. Indeed, viral performances create things that

reinscribe generalized beliefs or “scripts” about Blackness, while also generating paths of alterity where essentialized understandings of Blackness are challenged and transgressed.

Viral Bodies’ central argument is that new media and new technologies are deployed in ways that make everyday acts of Black life “go viral,”¹⁷ transforming them into problematic products for spectacular consumption. Viral performance turns Black “beings” into “things”—not only disposable objects, but things worth paying attention to, things to keep and not discard in a reality where so much is objectified. “Things,” indeed, do not always need to be pejorative. To unveil this process of what Duriel E. Harris terms as, “thingification,” “[T]he annihilating objectifying force at the core of all oppressions,”¹⁸ I follow robust and repetitious (re)presentations of Black bodies, what I call *Black virality*.

Black virality, a subset of viral performance, is indeed, informative, violent, and productive. It informs bodies through widely broadcasted performances that (mis)understand and communicate Blackness. Indeed, in the process of virality, where meanings are made through repeated and robust performances and representations that rapidly proliferate, Blackness becomes uniquely flattened and shaped as a “thing” often to be discarded, but also peculiarly revered, beautifully attractive. This interweb of rapidly ubiquitous performances is relied upon to inform one’s subjectivity and how it intersects with other social, economic, and cultural structures; thus, viral performance rapidly and instantaneously transmits information about Black bodies and ideas about Black cultures across a matrix of real and virtual interfaces.

To grapple more directly with these real and virtual interfaces, I use netnography¹⁹—conducting the study of communities and cultures in computer-mediated

virtual spaces—as the central approach to my chapter on the most viral video of 2010. Netnography differs from ethnography in that the archive from which primary sources are drawn tends to be a perpetual archive (even though sites and comments can disappear), allowing for more possibilities to continually return to the sites and the interactions within them. Using this approach led to my coining of a new archetype of Blackness through which to both understand and critique Blackness, the *Ghetto Witness*. Ghetto Witnesses are often, but not always, persons of African descent that use the street vernacular of their larger racial or ethnic group, irrespective of their audience, to describe a sensational event or theory from their deeply personal perspective, clarifying, verifying, and producing a larger narrative.²⁰ I explore this concept at length in my fourth chapter.

Indeed, the analytic of viral performance, not only encourages new and interdisciplinary approaches to subjects and materials that clarify new ways of understanding and critiquing them, but it offers the fields of Performance Studies and African American Studies a lens through which to consider the material power of rapidly ubiquitous figurative representations and their critiques. It does this by evidencing the mechanisms through which a viral performance becomes a thing, how that thing circulates and mutates uncontrollably, and critically identifying the viral discourses that are unveiled through such a process.

Viral performance offers a different way through which to understand the “signal difference” that African American studies scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. identifies in *The Signifying Monkey* (1998), for example. Here, signal difference is used to specify the type of repetition that Signifyin(g) engages in that gives it more originality than a copy, an originality that also revises.²¹ Viral performances are revisions with signal differences

rather than duplicates, yet, they include and exceed the literary texts that Gates uses to theorize Signifyin(g) through their additional concern with the Signifyin(g) that the material body and things outside of texts engage in. It is important to remember that what Signifies with signal difference is not a viral performance unless those signal differences become rapidly ubiquitous in worlds like everyday life and/or popular culture.

Within Performance Studies, viral performance operates under the umbrella of performance—an organizing concept to study human behavior and how it is socially constructed and reinforced, to study the performing arts, as an example and method of inquiry, and as a means of activist intervention into academic, cultural, and performance spaces.²² While every viral performance is a performance, every performance is not a viral one. Even though viral performances are behaviors and discourses, not all behaviors and discourses become rapidly ubiquitous, which is what viral performance centers. Viral performance holds both performance and performativity in a delicate balance; whereby, it is a simultaneous consideration of the present moment, indicated by performance, and how that present moment is historically constituted, indicated by performativity.²³

An early adoption of the term “viral performance” is made by Miriam Felton-Dansky for whom it is a genre of art and performance that intentionally exploits today’s communications technologies to self-reflexively critique them, what she calls a “new theatrical mode for a digital age.”²⁴ Two manuscripts were precursors to her conception of viral performance: Douglass Rushkoff’s *Media Virus*, which draws direct connections between how a virus functions biologically and in networks of media, and Richard Dawkins’ *The Selfish Gene*, which describes memes as devices which communicate and replicate cultural information similar to genetic material.

Rushkoff and Dawkins dangerously make an easy association between how media viruses and memes travel sociologically and how medical viruses and genetic material travel biologically. I argue that this move is obfuscating. For example, the ways in which viruses, particularly HIV, increasingly affect those who are economically and educationally marginalized and sexually stigmatized does not mesh well with how a media virus circulates within and across communities, in ways that are often not terminal or deadly. This move to metaphor also compromises the mechanics of viral material, as I use it. For instance, a media virus, unlike HIV, does not generally die once it is exposed to oxygen; it lives beyond the material transmission. Nonetheless, the likelihood of one's livelihood being susceptible to a media virus are higher in economically and educationally disenfranchised and racially and sexually stigmatized groups since pejorative perceptions of them are indisputably already in wide circulation. To this point, I am willing to concede certain metaphorical moves—in lieu of how viruses work—to better translate the discursive operations of media in circulating narratives which are passed from site to site, person to person, and epoch to epoch.

Different from Felton-Dansky, for this project viral performance does not only begin in the realm of the representative, intentional, or theatrical but also exists in the domain of the real and the effortless, hence “everyday life.” Additionally, viral performances exist outside of the norm of what we consider communications technologies, or, they expand our notion of communications technologies to include the body (gestures) and the voice (rumors). Viral performances are infinitely generative of Black bodies, summoning their past while simultaneously creating in their present.²⁵ Theorizing viral performance allows me to be conversant with the complex present

moment where there is an unprecedented visibility of Black bodies being brutalized by police or civilians. In part, this viral violence is created out of perceptions of the worth(lessness) of Black bodies, which have been influenced by things incessantly seen and heard about them. New technologies have also made this violence toward, and ill perceptions of, Black bodies, which has been ongoing for centuries, unprecedentedly accessible. Viral performance works to clarify how the virtual and the real are no longer, and perhaps have never been, mutually exclusive.

(Black) bodies, being essential to viral (Black) performances, are also viral in stigmatic ways. Thus, (Black) virality not only refers to the exponential ways that (Black) performances are transmitted to others, but also the (Black) body itself as a pathological contagion. Blackness, then, can sometimes be a sickness to be isolated, eradicated, and ridiculed (which is another form of isolation) in fear or expectation of its presence being multiplied elsewhere. There are, indeed, sicknesses that are passed on within viral (Black) performances, things that deteriorate the wellness (and/or the perception) of the bod(y/ies) involved.

Sickness, however, is acknowledged within viral Black performances, not only for its pathological implications, but also for its sociocultural meanings, particularly within Hip-Hop cultures whose aesthetics are engrained in performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life. Indeed, Hip-Hop assists in my ability to read the viral and understand its function and relationship to Blackness—providing rich language with which to explore the discursive and everyday terrain of viral performance. The sickness of the viral is what makes it generative—both producing and spreading. Sickness is the state of being ill, signifying both disease, and of particular interest, what I call *Illness*—a

Black street vernacular slogan for an expression or way of being that is undeniably appealing, communicable, and enduring.²⁶ Thus, Black bodies redeploy *Illness* and a viral body can be Ill, not because it is sick, but because it is fresh, cool, popular.

Dis-ease, a disorder of the structure and function of living things and what they construct, creates the disruption of norms that makes bodies susceptible to *Illness*. For example, if it were not for the poverty that created the socioeconomic conditions where one had to wear second-hand clothes, which would lead to them being too big or small, sagging may never have become as Ill as it had/has. Sagging jeans, potentially a result of incompatibly sized hand-me-downs in the latter example, are the fashion style popularized by 1990s Hip-Hop artists that alter a (perception of the) body.²⁷ However, the body, through its resilience, fights back—indicative of purposefully wearing sagging jeans as a statement of style, despite its look being a sign of poverty. Sagging jeans become highly visible (spectacular even) through their ability to disrupt the original structure of the jean and the appropriation, duplication, and mass production of the disrupted structure that follows. The more that the visual of sagging jeans circulates, its visibility increases, which may lead to widespread adoption and/or critique, making the once-marginal the center. The sociocultural conditions and conflicts that created the style, which are crucial for understanding the complexity of the style, are often lost in the midst of its increased visibility, simplifying the style. The conditions that catalyzed the jean's distortion are ignored for the sake of the jean's spectacularity.²⁸ In similar ways, the consumption and production of the deterioration, dissonance, and distortion of Black bodies contribute to the viral performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life.

Importantly, there are limitations to viral performances. One thing that makes a performance viral is an explosion of visibility and spread along its timeline of existence. Similar to a nuclear explosion, the closer one is (via time) to the point of burst, the more visible and viral the performance is. As time increases, the intensity of that visibility decreases almost as rapidly as it manifested; yet, the atmosphere and environment in proximity to the point of burst is affected for years to come, sustaining the viral afterlife of the performance. Therefore, a performance, or its referent, that travels at an alarming speed and scope at some point in its existence is a viral performance; whereas, outside of those factors, a performance is not viral.

The mid-2007 Intel ad²⁹ in fig. 1 was my early recognition of a viral performance in media.³⁰ Six carbon copied Black men dressed in track uniforms are readying

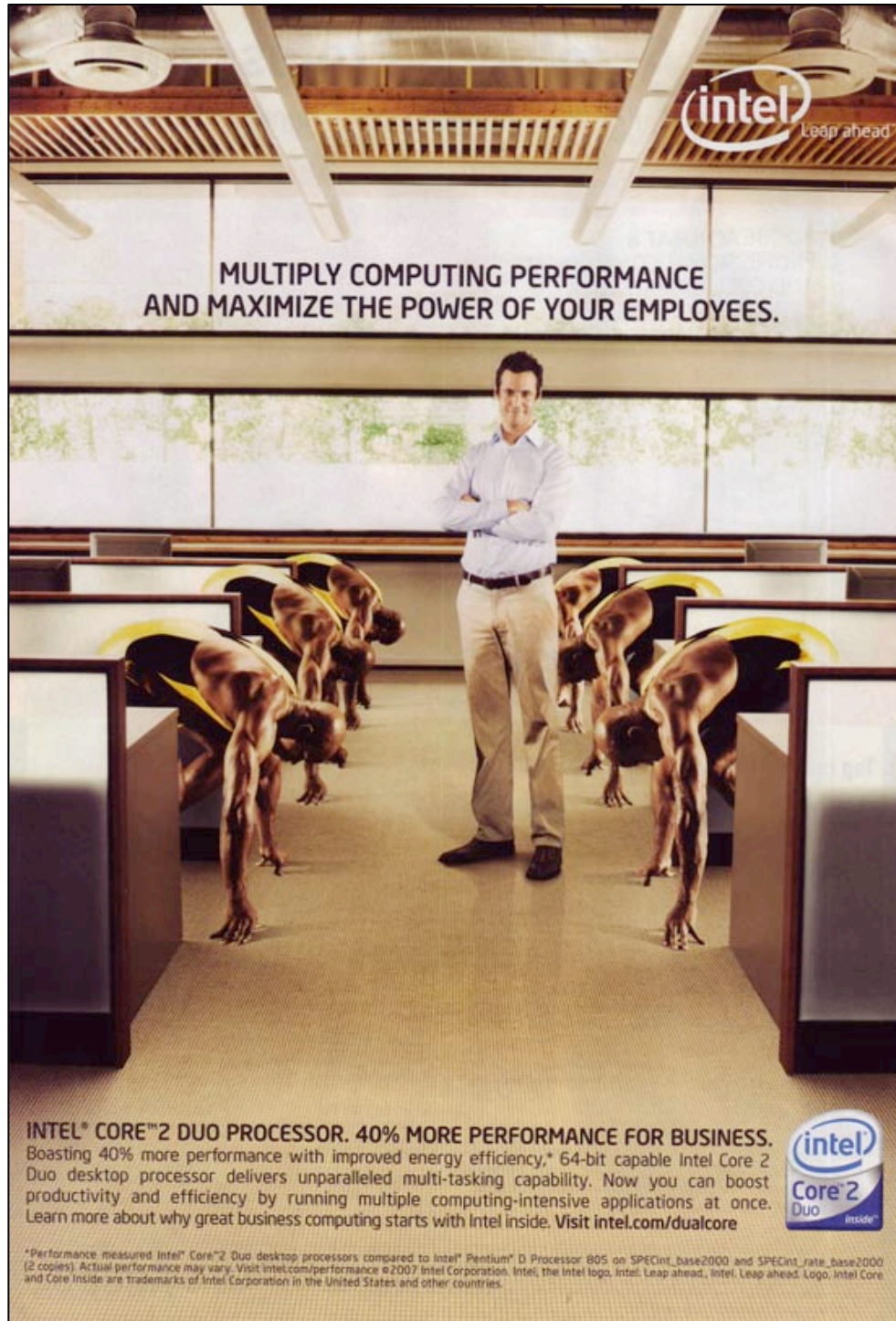


Figure 1. Wily Feret, *the Inquirer*, “White Men Can’t Run,” August 10, 2011, <http://www.theinquirer.net/inquirer/news/1004060/intel-racist>

themselves for a race, staring straight down. Track lanes are substituted for office desks and track turf for tiled floors. Examining the image further, all the athletic Black men are virtually bowing in the presence of a White man in a common IT uniform. He stands over them with his arms folded—smirking and looking directly at the viewer. The text of the ad further illustrates a visual hierarchy: “MULTIPLY COMPUTING PERFORMANCE AND MAXIMIZE THE POWER OF YOUR EMPLOYEES.” Here, Black men are always already employees and White men employers or managers. More than computers or employees, this ad inadvertently explains one of the ways in which a viral performance of Black masculinity works: through visualizing rumor, requiring the use of the optic and aural senses.

The White man is the employer and/or employee and the Black men are conflated into computer processors, able to work/run fast as expendable objects whose function is at the whim of the user. The historic Black stereotypes and rumors about the devoted servant and the superior athlete are restored in this performance.³¹ The office space also recalls moments where one can have ownership over bodies. The ad suggests that Black men are the forced labor behind the performance of businesses, while the White man can leisurely reap the benefits of this labor: folding his arms while others work as processors—doing multitasks for the demands of the user. The way in which the White man stares directly at the camera while the Black men look toward the ground reinforces a hierarchy where Whiteness signifies pride, while Blackness is relegated to shame, abjection, and/or subservience. Moreover, the Black men’s identical appearances reinscribe anonymizing mythologies that suggest that all Black bodies look the same, while the White man remains unique and peculiar.

Both bodies presented in this ad are branded in the sense that they are being used for an advertisement for Intel processors. The White male as nerd stereotype, unavailable to those not White or male, is used here.³² Black men's bodies in North America, however, have a different relationship to branding than do White men's bodies that comes back to how they were confined and regulated during North American slavery.³³ Intel manipulates their bodies in a different way that the White man's body escapes through his racial legacy. The particularities of Black men's experiences are consolidated into one maximizing image, transforming them into things, things readying themselves for a race as much as the perception of a *race*.

Although this seems like a simple Intel ad, branding creates discursive scars. This advertisement marks Black men's bodies as inherently and superiorly athletic and dutifully in servitude to the demands of others, particularly White men. This branding also works to erase other possibilities of Black maleness and masculinity: as each of these men may possess the skill to manage and maintain the Intel technology. Nonetheless, we lose these possibilities in the face of Intel's commitment to a linear narrative, which calls forth and sustains historic tropes of Black-White male relations and hierarchies. This rendering is a signpost for the workings of viral performances of Blackness within our society—Black bodies repeatedly consumed as motionless while they attempt to move and break away from static notions about their personhood.

Upon initial publication, Intel pulled this ad from all publications except one unnamed media placement. Because of this censorship, the ad gained popularity and mass-production through other viral means, circulating through online news and personal blogs, which questioned its use of race. Viral performances of Black masculine tropes,

indeed, produce political responses from their acts, whose critique would have otherwise gone unnoticed. As a virus attacks parts of the body, causes degrees of inflammation, and multiplies itself, antibodies are produced to counteract its effects; metaphorically, viral performances spread through their digital and analog environments, irritating their consumers into responses that not only multiply their acts, but also critique them. In other words, the exponential spread of a viral performance also increases the resistance to it.

Thus, we must also consider how a viral context may transform the meaning here, for while viral performances may generalize beliefs about Black bodies, they also challenge those very beliefs, transforming how Black bodies are understood.³⁴ Even though the ad was redacted for its racist imagery, it may still be refashioned as subversive to racist imagery. In the “small writing,” it also states, “actual performance may vary.” This admission functions to suggest that while these Black men appear identical they all perform [race, gender, sexuality, _____] differently, anticipating some of the issues that I raised around anonymity and raced gender roles. Some people online saw the advertisement as comedic and unsuccessful because by facing each other, when the starter gun goes off, all the sprinters would run into each other, revealing how inefficient Intel processors are. The resulting accident would also be symbolic of a failure in the control and management of Black bodies, indicative of their uncontrollability. This is an example of how viral performances keep Blackness in motion while at the same time fixing it in place, working multivalently, “symbolically in a number of directions at once.”³⁵

This Intel ad illuminates ideas and thoughts that will be important in the larger dissertation. It conveys how rumor is viral in nature (spreading uncontrollably and

becoming rapidly ubiquitous in the popular imaginary), saturated in political motives, and functions in contemporary performances of Black bodies in popular culture. How viral ideas travel through Black bodies also becomes evident in this Intel ad (i.e., rendering an image, commodifying it, and distributing it). Nonetheless, as much as those Black men are trapped by those viralities, which point toward larger discourses of deviancy and inferiority, through those viralities, they also resist such discourses. Any portrayal/performance is constructed with its own politics and agendas, which are both influenced by and perpetuate viral performances. Importantly, the Intel ad conveys how the currency of Blackness in popular culture—both the popularity and fiscal value of Blackness—incentivizes its commodification, which in turn influences how Black bodies “define, locate, and understand [them]selves via [(dis)]identification.”³⁶

Furthermore, there is a relationship between virality, branding, and erasure: The viral performances of Black bodies are used to advertise brands (alcohol, YouTube channels, shoes), stigmas, and markers of Blackness, making them highly visible while rendering other possibilities of their Blackness invisible, erasing them. We also see a dialectical relationship between virality, erasure, and branding: viral performances of Blackness, not only limit the possibilities of Blackness, but also multiply them, producing an array of meanings. While these possibilities can still erase the complexities of Black bodies and brand them, branding does not necessarily lead to erasure. Erasure and branding are distorting mechanisms, but they also create clarity around subjects, revealing the socio-political forces they are up against. Branding is also an act of self-affirming agency, transforming how Black bodies are seen and providing possibilities for social, economic, and visual mobility.

Visual technologies with the potential for mass production, such as online viral videos, cinematic film, television, and photographs/images, have enhanced the virality of Black performance to unprecedented levels. The images that they portray of Blackness, however, are so pervasive and have such a quotidian nature, that the decoding of these images have a high tendency to take for granted the raced, gendered, and social assumptions and metaphors that are embedded within the portrayals. *Viral Bodies* will examine three viral performances, where Black masculine presence in popular culture and everyday life creates or informs a “common sense ideology” about Black bodies. Select photographs/images from Hank Willis Thomas’ *B@anded* series, Radio Raheem’s performances in *Do The Right Thing*, and the viral videos of Antoine Dodson’s 2010 newscast, will illuminate the ways in which the “viral” interplays with common understandings of Blackness. While I focus significantly on “original”³⁷ viral performances, I also interrogate how other acts they inspire cause us to consider not only their rapid ubiquity, but their multivalence.

Even though this project focuses attention toward Black men, interrogating forms of Blackness in popular culture requires engagement with performance by Black women’s bodies as well. Blackness is, indeed, constructed through its relationship to Black men’s, women’s, and everyone’s bodies between those extremes. A focus on race, class, gender, queerness, and disability is contingent on the context and the markers that emerge as salient in a case study. As such, in chapter one and, particularly, chapter three, there are moments and sections dedicated to thinking about Black women’s relationship to moments of viral performances of Blackness.

I have limited my examinations of viral performances of Blackness to online viral video, film, and photography/images. There are far more channels, notwithstanding, in which we find viral performances of Blackness such as standup comedy, sports, stage-plays and everyday acts like “what are those?!”³⁸ An exemplar of the very thing that I am writing about—these popular cultures, spaces, and mediums where Blackness is being negotiated—is Hip-Hop.

Even though I do not focus specifically on Hip-Hop, as the entire project reaches completion, I realize that its idioms and aesthetics are throughout each chapter, creating a type of Hip-Hop refrain. This is surely a result of how I have participated in Hip-Hop culture as a fan in the audience of concerts and as a DJ of parties that feature music from the African Diaspora. I do not want to minimize the subjects being discussed, however, in dwelling on my own biases. This Hip-Hop refrain also reflects the aural conditions within which I am writing that influence it as I contrapuntally sample³⁹ discourse, images, and audio, interpret them, and convey a range of meanings and feelings. While Hip-Hop is intimately tied to my project, even in thinking about how people appropriate it as the quintessential meaning of Blackness, I do not want Hip-Hop to overpower the meaning or potential of my dissertation; indeed, for this project I have chosen to work within a specific field of vision and sound.

To limit my research parameters (as viral performances can be found in numerous acts), I discard other forms of viral performances of Blackness and spaces where those acts are claimed and produced. The narrowness of this scope has allowed me to explore possibilities more in depth than a wide consideration could have afforded. As a result, I critically examine the performances, not only considering the discourses, but also the

institutional and structural forces that viral performances of Blackness shape, and are shaped by. Forces such as the denial of decent housing, limiting economic opportunities, and racial and gender discrimination are exposed with a focus that would have been more difficult with a wider consideration of more performances and spaces.

While I am theorizing through viral performance and examining acts of virality within multiple sites, I employ “lurking” as an overarching methodological approach, which emerges as a position from which I research and write concerning how Blackness relates to the viral. Robert V. Kozinets describes a lurker as “the active observer who learns about a [web]site through initially watching and reading.”⁴⁰ Each chapter requires lurking—a deep hanging out in the scene of viral performance.

Specifically, in the chapter on Hank Willis Thomas’ *B@anded* series I do a kind of lurking in the visual culture archive out of which I curate the viral to clarify how it is ingrained in Thomas’ photos/images. By lurking in Radio Raheem’s film archive, *Do The Right Thing*, I move “lurking” into the Hip-Hop past that links to and anticipates Eric Garner’s and Jordan Davis’ fatal encounter decades later. I adopt lurking as a role in which to participate in and observe online interactions on video-sharing/aggregation sites where comments about *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)* are posted.

Understanding the position of Black bodies as they exist in the shadows of social justice informs my stance with lurking as a performative mode of being. This mode of being is a form of hanging out with an ethical sensibility and attention to experiences of deep significance. D. Soyini Madison writes on this in her reflections on performance ethnography: “...experience begins from our uneventful, everyday existence...But then something happens, and we move to moments of experience...We give feeling, reason,

and language to what has been lifted from the inconsequential day-to-day.”⁴¹ Reflecting on experience within the scope of performance is not to think about any experience, but particularly the experience which ruptures the ordinary. Lurking is another way to engage in performance ethnography in a virtual space. This lurking requires a repeated doing; indeed, to know how what I experience is remarkable requires a central element of viral performance: an incessant, and at times unwelcome, return, which distills what “goes viral” from what gets lost in oblivion.

Black Performance Studies and African American Studies

This dissertation examines different mediums such as online viral video, film, and photography/images and illustrates how recordings of a performance event with new technologies can repeat, revise, and retain mythologies of Blackness. My focus on the viral performances of Black bodies makes this dissertation a Black Performance Studies (BPS) Project. Black performance is a central unit of analysis for my research, as it is integral to understanding the pleasures and challenges that Black bodies experience as they exist—this complex tension between deconstruction (what reveals Blackness as a performance) and what remains of Blackness when performances cease. The following research questions guide how I examine the performances throughout *Viral Bodies*: How do performances of Blackness become multiplied and widely circulated? What becomes of the meanings and narratives that their circulated performances signify? How does absence—the things which we know should be there but are not—magnify the racial and gender politics in viral performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life, telling us more about what is communicated than what we see or hear? How does the

Black body perform as a thing, which can be collected, restoring, and re-membering dissident histories?

My research questions emerged as I engaged in various literature across multiple fields, particularly African American Studies (AAS) and BPS. While there is overlap between these fields, there are distinct things from each that make them useful for this project. AAS gives me the ability to understand viral performances of Blackness in a larger discourse about raced subjects. Their scholarship on Black masculinity deals with the racial and gender malpractice, loss of power, limited agency, privilege and behaviors of Black men.⁴² The different ways that scholars have considered how Black masculinity is created, presented, and made intelligible signal key mechanisms in the production of viral performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life.

The way in which I examine viral performances of Blackness uses Ronald L. Jackson II's notion of *scripting*, Maurice O. Wallace's concept of *enframing*, and Nicole R. Fleetwood's idea of *rendering* and, thereby, captures the processes of labeling, structuring, and creating viral performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life. All three scholars are particularly useful in thinking about the interrelationship of photography, as an image of a performance event that survived the event, and performance, as the visual staging of bodies and their behaviors. I depart by looking at how Black bodies are restaged, reframed, reperformed, and re-rendered through the performances enacted outside of the initial viral performance, the limited ways that Black bodies can refashion their behaviors, and how that refashioning creates room for subjugated subjectivities. Where I depart will give particular insight into the social production of meaning, media (il)literacy, and the collapse of the virtual and the material.

Performance Studies, on the other hand, emerged from marginalized perspectives in Theatre and Anthropology that sought to dis-integrate the ideas of “performance,” “acts,” and “play” from their exclusivity with the performing arts, thus, to reject the boundaries between art and life. Through this rejection Victor Turner and Richard Schechner intervened in the prejudices of theatre and anthropology, allowing scholars to examine how performance is engrained in the everyday actions, drama, sports, music, and theatre of people.⁴³ Their intervention also became central to ideas in BPS, which acknowledge how representations and performances of Blackness are connected to “living Black,” but depart by emphasizing that those representations and performances are not to be conflated with “living Black.” BPS’ idea ties into how viral performances are consciously used in everyday life, yet, they are not always drawn upon to react in a particular way or enact a certain behavior.

Scholarly omissions within AAS and Performance Studies made BPS possible and necessary. AAS’ historic omission of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered and feminine male or masculine female subjectivities continues to shape the way that gender and sexuality are critically dealt with.⁴⁴ Performance Studies’ historical exclusion and marginalization of Black-authored texts and the contributions of the Black oratorical tradition to its discourse continues to affect the depth in which race is dealt with in its contemporary scholarship.⁴⁵ Due to these omissions and exclusions, BPS became necessary to ground performance theory in the praxis of race and to affect the praxis of race with performance theory.

As a subfield of Performance Studies, BPS investigates Black behavior, music, theatre, ritual, and dance, etc., situating its analysis in the resistance of oppressive

systems—White supremacist, sexist, homophobic, and patriarchal—that affect and are affected by Black performance.⁴⁶ It takes into account ranges of performances and how they are situated within, and exercise, structures of power that impact Black bodies as a group. BPS is concerned with what it means to live Black and how and where to resist systematic oppression when there is a different exercise of power against the group and the individual. The move toward an attention to race grounds performance theory in an experience that exceeds the social construction of human behavior. E. Patrick Johnson writes on how Blackness goes beyond being an acted out notion of selfhood:

Blackness does not only reside in the theatrical fantasy of the White imaginary that is then projected onto Black bodies, nor is it always consciously acted out; rather, it is also the inexpressible yet undeniable racial experience of Black people—the ways in which the ‘living of Blackness’ becomes a material way of knowing.⁴⁷

Johnson suggests that Blackness is not only imagined or memorized, but that it is embodied knowledge, which can be performed, but is not *always* a performance. Darieck Scott summarizes this idea, writing, “Blackness is *lived*, but it is a representation.”⁴⁸ Blackness is a way of being in the world as well as an historicized act that performs traditions, reiterates gestures and speech, and uses stylized expressions to articulate itself in everyday life and popular culture.

BPS deals with how “Blackness is not only...a pawn and consequence of performance, but it is also an effacement of it.”⁴⁹ In other words, while understandings of Blackness rely upon performance, “being Black” also exists in ways that make Blackness appear unnoticed, natural, and experienced. Blackness is both controlled and created through performance and, also, remains when a performance ceases. Here, race may create critical metaphors (“the world is not a stage for everyone”) that allow me to think

about performance in such a way that I see its possibilities and its limitations, disallowing its narrow construction. Emanating from the tension between performing Blackness and living it, BPS asserts itself arguing that Blackness is a “fragile fiction,” whose experience (both the seen and unseen) is manifested in and through performance.⁵⁰ This does not mean that, “‘the real’ has disappeared, but it is to acknowledge that it is impossible to recognize ‘the real’ without a concept of performance in view.”⁵¹ Accordingly, viral performance becomes a contemporary generative site at which to investigate Blackness, and the affect our social lives have on it and the impact of it on our social lives.

BPS provides me with a theoretical framework to deal explicitly with performance in Black life that does not disavow Black women, lesbians, gays, and transgendered people, and the Black middle class from Blackness.⁵² It provides me with a broader conception of Blackness upon which to investigate viral performance in popular culture. BPS is able to discuss the layered complexity of performances of race, which engage issues of gender and sexuality in ways that are useful for understanding both the subversive and hegemonic ways that Blackness and masculinity are virally performed in popular culture.

A conversation between AAS and BPS is needed to address the complexities of the viral performance of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life. Both fields contain theories and language around race, gender, representation, and performance that enliven popular understandings of viral Black performances. In using viral performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life as the nexus that brings the two fields of African American and Performance Studies into a necessary dialogue, BPS, a combination of both disciplines and an emergent subfield by its own right, manifests as

an important tool in the analysis of how Blackness and gender interplay in public and private acts. Viral Black performance calls for the use of BPS as it is an incessantly emerging performance grounded in the realities and fictions of Blackness. Viral acts of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life field questions for us that cannot be articulated by African American and Performance Studies alone, but through their synthesis which can be found in a BPS approach.

Different scholars of AAS and BPS have theorized seeing Blackness through the visual staging of bodies in everyday life, the stage, the “still” image, and the cinema. Concepts such as epidermalization, scripting, enframing, common sense, cliché, rendering, and scriptive things are highly instructive to this project. Much of this project—as I examine the construction, circulation, and politics of viral performances of Blackness in popular culture—employs language or lenses encountered within these fields of study.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* Frantz Fanon undertakes a psychological analysis of the Black problem—this implicates the alienation of Black men, the institutionalized racism tied to the economic discrimination of White men towards Black men that has led to both of their alienation, and the Black and White man’s alienation being a challenge to their humanity. It grasps at the complexities of Blackness, racism, colonialism, and class. Fanon is especially useful for his illustration and theorization of the moment of being seen as a Black man by a different race. His descriptions capture the transplant that perpetually takes place in the realm of online video-sharing, popular culture, and everyday life at large, grafting ideas onto another body based on culturally informed understandings of its gender and race.

Taking up Du Bois' sense expressed in double-consciousness of "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," Fanon deals with what one sees and imagines when stepping out of one's self to define one's self, seeing one's identity through the eyes of the other, and, in particular, experiencing existence through the eyes of a White person. Out of his most popular lines in the book, Fanon writes on the unspoken stigma that was grafted into his skin after a White boy publicly gestured, "Look, a Negro!" to him:

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering...the little White boy throws himself into his mother's arms: Mama, the nigger's going to eat me up.⁵³

The violence of being marked as Black or what Fanon describes as being "battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships, and...above all: 'Sho' good eatin'" emerges here.⁵⁴ Fanon highlights the moment of "seeing" Black and how that public sighting informs our notions of fear, threat, and contamination. The stereotypes of, and pathologies associated with, Blackness are, for Fanon, inextricable from being marked as such. His description relates to the ways in which Black performances of masculinity become rendered through visual and sonic technologies and given back to us as fragments, distorted Black bodies, and embedded with demeaning metaphors.

Fanon's use of "epidermalization"⁵⁵ allows us to think through this racial moment as it unveils the unwanted inscriptions of discursive and cultural assumptions onto the skin and the internalization of those inscriptions by Black men. Thinking about Blackness in popular culture and everyday life, each performance comes with its own

epidermalization, or projection of what is to be represented racially, which exercises erasure and branding upon Black bodies.

Fanon's racial idea of epidermalization is implied in Ronald Jackson II's *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*. However, Jackson consciously uses the notion of racial and gendered "scripting" for understanding the process of assigning meaning onto Black masculine bodies. Using a critical historical analysis, Jackson examines the historicity of Black body politics during slavery and early minstrelsy and the scripting of the Black body for what it reveals about the contemporary mass-mediated stereotypes. Jackson's malleable use of the "Black masculine body" allows us to consider masculine bodies that are not a product of gender, but of experience and performance, giving us an expansive view of Black masculinity. Emphasizing the hierarchical power relationships between the scripted and scripter, Jackson asserts that the scripter is an "institution or individual in a decision-making position who has the authority to develop and mass-distribute images."⁵⁶ This suggests that the scripted is who or what has an image or idea grafted upon her/him/it to be mass-distributed.

With the idea that the scripter and scripted are involved in the process of scripting, Jackson states that complicity⁵⁷ is necessary and that it centers "on the idea that people tend to comply with the classifications and identities that are placed on them; they may [comply] even as they confront the traditionally accepted norms, labels, or action."⁵⁸ In other words, people tend to perform their socially-assigned identities and roles, and the resistance to socially-assigned identities and roles, nevertheless, involves their embrace. As I explore ideas around appropriation and intent in viral performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life, the complicity of the performer becomes an important

area to interrogate the limitations agency in viral Black performances. The (lack of) agency in viral performances brings attention to the politics of race, “in defiance of public discourse that says that race doesn’t exist and doesn’t matter,” revealing the nexus between visual practices and political cultures.⁵⁹

Importantly, Jackson introduces the idea of “rescripting” to allow for agency and the possibility for liberation from scripts.⁶⁰ While Jackson leaves no further explanation of rescripting, his outline of scripting as a process of assigning meaning and projecting it onto bodies gives us a way to define it. Rescripting allows for scripting to be performed without occupying a position of authority, thus, the scripted becomes the scripter, refashioning the purpose of their previously assigned identities and roles. This will be a timely concept to use, particularly in my analyses of performances that happen “post-production”⁶¹ as reenactments and reengagements of an earlier virally circulated act.

Jackson’s attention to scripting and its dramaturgical roots views the body as textualized, something that is discursively and culturally written upon to assign meaning to and read to make meaning of. This creates an epistemological dilemma as he is looking at material artifacts, cinematic images, and popular media all of which include, but ultimately exceed the boundaries of the written, taking into account the visual, the performative, and the aural for instance. Not only is this an epistemological dilemma, but it represents the epistemic violence that the text has historically exerted towards other forms of knowledge, knowledge which may draw out the nuances that the text is unable to detect.⁶² Jackson’s use of the “script” is too rigid, which limits the agency of improvisation that exists in the performance of a dramaturgical script. Scripting is, nonetheless, useful in thinking through the roles that have been historically prepared,

which people (un)knowingly play in viral performances, and the possibility that they can create new roles that are only partially dependent on historically prepared referents.⁶³

Maurice O. Wallace's *Constructing the Black Masculine* analyzes the processes, image repertoires, and stereotypes that have taught us how to see and understand Black men to explore the literal and figurative relationship between Black men and visibility. Throughout Wallace's manuscript, "enframing" is used to describe the fixity of racism out of which Black masculinity cannot escape. Wallace writes, "the frame(-up) restricts, if not altogether dooms, a Black man's potential for transcending the chasmed otherness of race by establishing boundaries (screens, image repertoires, stereotypes), mental *parerga*..."⁶⁴ Parerga are the frames that are separate from the picture/body/thought they encapsulate and the environment or context they are in. Yet, as the limit of the picture/body/thought, they bear much weight on the representational range of the picture/body/thought.⁶⁵ We cannot, thus, critically examine an image without also examining the physical and/or perceptual frame that limits the image's range of meaning. To critically observe viral performances of Blackness, one must take into account the cultural referents, assumptions, and stereotypes that they are produced with and that the politics of spectatorship summon.

This conception of enframing is useful, even as it is limiting, for my analysis of viral performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life. As performances of Black masculinity cannot escape the "pre-existing images" of race, masculinity, and sexuality, enframing captures the essence of this process. In addition, "enframing" offers a way to examine the photograph/image—an approach which nuances these Black performance phenomena to include movement. Understanding the photograph as moving

allows me to go beyond examining it as an image that survived a performance event, to an actual performance event taking place. I believe that Wallace is invested in how reiterated acts happen within photographs and the way in which enframing, thus, exceeds its epistemological boundaries in art and photography and delves into the realm of performance. Wallace ultimately argues for a new way of seeing, producing knowledge, and having relationships to power that encompasses, "...a multiplicity of perspectives, is heterocular...[and, in other words,] a new ontology of sight."⁶⁶ This perspective exemplifies a different way of seeing the Black body that allows for, and produces, constantly shifting images of Blackness, a Blackness that moves.

In *The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* Kara Keeling explains how the movement of the Black Femme in cinema catalyzes expressions of Black women's sexuality that were never meant to be, disturbing the common sense around it. My project explores the work that the Black Femme does in theorizing cinematic viral performances of Black male masculinity. Particularly, I examine how the evocation of the Black Femme by Black men disrupts normative performances of Black masculinity and also thinking through how Black masculinity is deployed virally and disturbs the common sense around it.

While I refashion the use of the Black femme, Keeling deploys the Black Femme as an analytical tool for its ability to rupture normative constructions of race, sexuality, class, and gender. These normative constructions are what Keeling names as clichés, which are destroyed by the Black Femme and, as a result, a new possibility is opened in the perception of the audience. Therefore, the Black Femme is a living image that can be used to investigate rupture by determining what the norm is that is disrupted by the Black

Femme's presence. As an analytic, the category of the Black Femme allows Keeling to look into the "radical elsewhere," this place where alternative forms, such as the Black Femme, are possible in a way that they would not be outside of the cinematic.

Keeling also connects the cinematic to "the real" by means of affect where the film interacts with the biology of the audience, which in turn influences the film's relationship to capital and how it will do in the economy. When considering how performances of Blackness in viral video, film, and photography/images travel, this affectual process is how the viral is transferred from representation to embodiment. This affectual process causes the spectator to react to a pleasurable, or unpleasurable, friction (between the represented and the real) that they then pass on by viral means, such as reenactment and word of mouth, which has an impact on the currency, economic or otherwise, of the viral performance circulated.

Keeling suggests that there is affective labor that goes into processing televisual images and representations that are framed and circulated by cinematic machines; this is the same type of sensory-motor habituation and sensory perception required to live in and make sense of the world (crying, laughter, and anger for example). This labor, which is culturally informed, acts as a form of common sense. Keeling uses common sense to, "refer simultaneously to a shared set of motor contrivances that affect subjective perception *and* to a collective set of memory-images that includes experiences, knowledges, traditions and so on and that are available to memory during perception."⁶⁷ Keeling's use of common sense bears weight on the faulty notion that we can understand Blackness through viral performances when, indeed, our perception, our common sense is culturally informed. Viral performances multiply signify and, as such, act as differing

proxies to multiple spectators, conjuring their subjective labor involved in living in the world.

Unlike Keeling's deployment of the Black femme to disrupt normative constructions of race, gender, class, and sexuality, in *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*, Nicole Fleetwood considers the ways in which Black bodies are "always already troubling the dominant visual field [in Western discourse]." ⁶⁸ Rather than question why Black bodies trouble the visual field, as has been done when considering Black bodies and the politics of representation, Fleetwood examines Black visibility's "productive possibilities" and how it uses its troubling vision in generative ways.

One of Fleetwood's central concerns is the troubling notion that one can understand "Black lived experience and Black subjects as knowable through visual and performative codes." ⁶⁹ This notion assumes that the field of vision is neutral, something that does not script, enframe, or construct bodies. Judith Butler argues against this, writing, "The visual field is not neutral to the question of race; it is itself a racial formation, an episteme, hegemonic and forceful." ⁷⁰ To capture the "constructed nature of visibility," which transmits data and knowledge that make Black subjects appear as knowable, Fleetwood deploys the terms "rendering/rendered," which connotes how Black subjectivity is produced through visual discourse. Fleetwood's use of "rendering" is the way in which the field of vision renders the racial marking of bodies. ⁷¹ Thinking about visibility as constructed, Fleetwood shows "how visualization works in the production of Blackness as that which is viewable and as discourse." ⁷²

Fleetwood suggests that through the combination of the visual and performance, Blackness, Black bodies, and responses to them are produced. ⁷³ Her constant attention to

the field of vision as a structure of power is useful in considering how viral performances of Blackness are structured and rendered before they ever reach our eyes. As with any rendering, certain things are kept, while others discarded; thus, any notion about knowing the Black body through overdetermined visual codes is complicated as so much that was discarded or kept of the representation is unknowable. “The primacy of the body as a viewable object in defining performance and more importantly in understanding subjectivity” is troubled when the visual already renders a body, and through that rendering, disappears or disembodies it.⁷⁴ In response to this, Fleetwood suggests that considering the outline or shadow of the body that occupies the field of vision or affective framework can help decide more about the absent referent than the visible body itself.⁷⁵ Here “outline” and “shadow” function as metaphors for the things which exist (if at all) in the margins of the visible, the things which are not central to a performance’s frame.

When considering the constructedness of the Black body in the visual field, the idea of rendering is dynamic as “Black subjectivity itself is constituted through visual discourse and performed through visual technologies.”⁷⁶ In other words, the same visual technology that renders Blackness is used by Black people to constitute notions of selfhood. Thus, we see the rich complexity of the visual field: how visual technologies, such as online video, advertisements, and film, instruct (Black) bodies exterior to them, the process of which perpetuates their viral performance.

Whereas Fleetwood examines how visual technologies prompt bodies outside of them, Robin Bernstein examines how “things” instruct bodies exterior to them. A performance is contingent on others, central or marginal, who also occupy and perform in that space, this includes things. Bernstein studies the complex interaction between a racist

wooden caricature and a Mexican woman in a photograph, how they flatten into one text and grey the binary between person and thing, and how this liminal dance constructs race in her essay, “Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race.”

Drawing from Heidegger, but doing something different by incorporating a performance standpoint, Bernstein writes that, “performance is what distinguishes an object from a thing.”⁷⁷ This is the distinction between Heidegger and Bernstein that I am adopting in my use of thing theory. Considering how things affect human behavior, Bernstein writes,

A chef’s knife, a laptop computer, and a wooden caricature
all invite indeed, create occasions for—repetitions of acts,
distinctive and meaningful motions of eyes, hands,
shoulders, hips, feet. These things are citational in that they
arrange and propel bodies in recognizable ways, through
paths of evocative movement that have been traveled
before.⁷⁸

Paths of evocative movement, such as the way in which one dances (or does not dance) from being cut with a knife, tell us about the performativity, “paths...traveled before,” that things instruct. The paths, which have been traveled before, are important because they allow us to historicize new viral performances of Blackness. Thus, “things” function within viral performances of Blackness, which instruct reactions that have been “traveled before;” viral performances of Blackness are also transformed into things, material artifacts, which can be buffered, downloaded and saved, fast-forwarded, rewound, cropped, and edited, which also instruct the responses of spectators.

Approaching the term *script* as a theatrical practitioner might, Bernstein employs a malleable idea of “script” that differs from Jackson in *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*. She suggests that plays use a combination of “elasticity and resilience” that maintains a recognizable referentiality to the script, yet, allow for enough unpredictability

that a unique performance is created each night.⁷⁹ This is the flexibility Bernstein uses when exercising the idea of “scriptive things.” She writes, “Things, but not objects, script actions.”⁸⁰ Bernstein suggests that performance is both instructed and constrained by things, yet, in limited ways, performance can also resist that constraint and instruction through improvisatory acts.

My attention to scriptive things is apparent in chapter two where I use viral performance, specifically that of rumor, as a lens to examine the photographs and images of Hank Willis Thomas’ *B@anded* series. Using critical discourse analysis and performance analysis, I explore how his use of viral materials—from reframing the infamous slave ship Brooks to dislocating Nike’s Jumpman symbol—enable a larger critique of white dominant narratives of Blackness, allowing for re-vision and improvisation of more transgressive readings of Black history and present. Thomas unveils how the practice of distributing artwork can be used to mobilize social justice and social change.

Chapter three examines the scenes of Radio Raheem in Spike Lee’s *Do The Right Thing*. Using performance, content, and a material culture analysis, I look closely at how filmic and photographic material can act in viral ways—both speaking to Black experiences and creating frameworks that potentially misunderstand them. *Do The Right Thing* features a radio-carrying cosmopolitan-like cross-city traveler named Radio Raheem who operates as a sort of embodiment of viral Blackness roaming in the New York city streets—destabilizing the status quo, constantly being misunderstood and “thingified” even as he evidences complex personhood. Radio Raheem (even after his death) exists as a synecdoche for young Black men and the viral performance of the use

of excessive force to subdue Black bodies. I engage in my own performance and circulation of him in a photograph, both solidifying him as a cultural thing and prophetic force.

In the fourth and final chapter of my project, I move from a close visual cultural studies reading to netnography, gaining a richer understanding of spectatorial viewpoints as individuals encounter viral performances. Here, I closely examine the discourse, context, and production of viral videos and images. Particularly, I explore the now famous, *BED INTRUDER SONG!!!* (now on iTunes), which was based on a news broadcast about a sexual assault that was posted online. I elucidate how a serious issue such as Black female sexual assault and the emotional response to it can be transformed into a thing that is virally performed as comedic spectacle. I also look closely at how queer Black effeminacy is utilized as a viral product to detract from its own feminist intervention.

The coda, “Viral Bodies: #NoCureforStigma,” will end my dissertation with the implications of my research and its future possibilities. Of these future directions is a focus on how viral performances create possibilities for social justice and public consensus. Also, I will ruminate on some of the historical precedents that make justice feasible in relationship to viral performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life.

Importantly, something has “gone viral” when it becomes rapidly ubiquitous—quickly being found some of everywhere. Viral performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life penetrate multiple worlds, touch things (i.e. mp3s, mundane conversations, cartoons) within those worlds, and through that touch, transforms them.

There is an incessant nature to the latter “touch” and an affect created from the consumption of viral performances best witnessed in visceral reactions to viral material, i.e. the need to say or post something in response, or reproduce the viral material in some form. Consequently, as a performance becomes viral, it is difficult to capture in numbers. I might begin to quantify a viral performance where epidemiology classifies an epidemic or the point at which an illness (or *Illness*) can invade a susceptible population. An epidemic exists where each infected person shares the infection with one more susceptible person, creating many secondary infections or the basic reproduction ratio being more than one.⁸¹

My critical analysis of the three case studies and production of images (and video only used in presentations) to make further inquiry into the cases and viral performance theory, function as co-productions of new media, gender, and race, further blurring divisions between performer, audience, and scholar in the Performance Studies tradition of Joni Jones, E. Patrick Johnson, and Marlon T. Riggs. The reasons behind choosing the case studies are due to how rapidly ubiquitous they, as acts, once were and in many ways still are, which speaks to their importance in the popular imaginary and the material and social effects of perceptions about Black bodies. Each case study alludes to significant sociocultural impacts, to name a few: the violence toward Black men through/over fashion, police brutality in relationship to popular perceptions of Black masculinity, and sexual violence experienced in Black communities. The implications of these performances increase the urgency of critically analyzing their reenactments in popular culture and everyday life as they not only reinforce, but also challenge and redefine the material obstacles that Black bodies face in everyday life.

With this being the first project to engage close examinations of viral performance, I travel across various instantiations of it (image, film, online viral video). I also use various approaches to viral performances, drawing from visual and material culture, critical discourse analysis, performance analysis, and netnography, which also puts them in conversation. While this project puts approaches to viral performance in conversation, it acknowledges that viral performances also function differently. Viral performance, while the throughline of the entire project, does not function the same way in each medium: photography/images, film, and viral video.

For example, Hank Willis Thomas' work does not experience mass production in the same way Radio Raheem and Antoine Dodson do within film and viral video. While his conceptual photos and images are not viral performances, they do capture and manifest forms of it such as rumor and mass produced images that utilized Black men's and women's bodies to sell products and agendas.

Radio Raheem, on the other hand, (re)presented the popular occurrence of Black men wielding boomboxes in the street, which was a viral performance that occurred in everyday life from the mid-70s to mid-80s. The medium of film functioned to reproduce Raheem on such a massive scale that he became the reference point of Black men wielding boomboxes into the twenty-first century. Referencing so many Black bodies that came before him and prophetically pointing towards those that would come after, Raheem also succumbed to the viral performance of the use of excessive force to subdue Black bodies. This is another way to think through viral performance as circulated acts that instruct certain bodies in how to excessively handle other bodies.

Through massive online exchanges on social networks that emphasize video-sharing like YouTube⁸² and postings on video aggregation sites such as WorldstarHipHop (WSHH),⁸³ Antoine Dodson became the reference for the trope I coin as Ghetto Witnesses.⁸⁴ Indeed, through his Ghetto Witnessing, Antoine Dodson not only co-produces but, importantly, troubles ideas around the gender roles, sexual behaviors, and the limits of Blackness; the proliferation of this viral video in popular culture and everyday life further circulated these acts of disruption and production.

Importantly, more people are entertaining themselves online and particularly through websites that use image/video-sharing and streaming, consuming moving images of Blackness. In addition, mobile applications and technologies such as Whatsapp, Snapchat, Instagram, tablets, cell phones, and laptops have enabled the circulation and sharing of images, sounds, and text to unprecedented international levels. All of these interfaces allow for performances similar to Hank Willis Thomas', Radio Raheem's, and Antoine Dodson's to infiltrate and forge new spaces of entertainment and social engagement to reach fresh spectators. As a result, we will continue to see the influence of viral performances (the rapidly ubiquitous proliferation of rumors, mass-produced images, and video) in popular culture and everyday life as access to the Internet increases through the development of both mobile and stationary interface technologies and the new construction of broadband and fiber optic infrastructure.

The referent that conjures the theory of viral performance for this entire project is the saturation of viral videos that have become a part of the American imaginary. Nonetheless, I follow a trajectory from the earliest viral performance (rumor) to more contemporary forms (viral video) to consider how viral performance is also a historical

mechanism used to (re)script subjectivities with a legacy that persists in everyday life and popular culture. Thus, this particular analytic, viral performance, while inspired by the present, is useful across time. Viral performances are burgeoning acts and analytics in which to interrogate the products and social impact of widely circulated discursive Black bodies.

Chapter 2, People Hear What They See: Rumor and Branding in (Re)presentations of Blackness

Conceptual photographer, Hank Willis Thomas, crafts a creative visual archive in his series uniquely titled, *B@anded*, a gesture toward how mass-produced images are used to give substantive meaning to (Black) bodies. In this way Thomas illuminates viral performance within the context of visual culture, showing viewers the craft of repetition and its role in creating and distorting Black life. Thomas links contemporary representations of Black bodies to the most popular iconic and mass-produced images from the archives of transatlantic slavery without subtracting from the foundation and context behind them.⁸⁵ For instance, he makes the seal for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade into a gold chain. The seal still stands for improving and abolishing the immoral and inhuman conditions that enslaved Africans had to endure, but it also suggests the less popular fact that the seal was made into a fashion symbol and sold as a commodity to make money. In referencing popular signs of Blackness, Thomas builds upon the foundations and contexts of images from the archives of transatlantic slavery, illustrating and challenging their legacy in today's terms. In three sections I explore the images from Thomas' *B@anded* series that link the present fate of Blacks with those of the past through rumor that he visualizes.

The *B@anded* series featured in his book, *Pitch Blackness*, emerged out of the sense of loss that he experienced for his cousin Songha Willis, who was murdered over a gold chain during a robbery outside of a club in Philadelphia. Songha's murder, in many ways, suggested that his life as a Black man was valued less than the things that someone could possess. One of the implications of reducing beings to things, is repeatedly lessening the value of human life and inflating the value of things. Thomas places

Songha's death in the frames of animations and photographs, moving this moment of loss to illustrations of the viral performance that is Black-on-Black murder and how such violences have become numbing in the similar inundating ways that viral performances can operate.

Rather than making his cousin appear as merely a numbing statistic, Thomas presents his cousin's life and accomplishments through digitally scanned photographs. The following chapter in *Pitch Blackness*, "Winter in America," is a collaboration with Kambui Olujimi featuring stills from their stop-motion animation project that used G.I. Joe action figures to interpret the details of his cousin's last five minutes of life. By using action figures, Thomas and Olujimi think through the ways in which children, boys in particular, are socialized to enact violent scenarios at early ages and "how the everyday violence of black life has been literally reduced to child's play."⁸⁶ The chapter fades to an ending with a photo of Songha from the morgue. We then see visuals of the family that Songha left behind, bringing us into the next chapter: "Bearing Witness: Murder's Wake."

"Bearing Witness: Murder's Wake" gives us a glimpse into the many lives that his cousin affected beyond his immediate family. As the chapter progresses, more faces are shown and the presence of thumb-sized black squares increase. These black spaces illustrate the futile nature in attempting to find every individual whose life is touched by Songha, standing in for those people that Songha touched, and vice versa, who will never know about his death. In many ways the previous chapters function as a memorial to Songha. Once the *B@anded* chapter begins, the affective labor of the previous chapters has laid the groundwork to begin thinking about the relationship of Black maleness to

gun violence, alcohol, loss, and how Black life functions as a thing less important than the commodities which it wears, produces, or is representative of.

The commodity, a gold chain, involved in his cousin's death also summons how Black maleness is pitched, convincing consumers of things that constitute its authenticity and cultural value. Furthermore, the excess of imagery around authenticity and culture creates a pitch B/blackness, a B/blackness out of which there is no light or way out, a B/blackness that is centric to one's experience, so dark and taken for granted that one cannot see it. Yet, the B/blackness is also so excessive that one begins to question its presence, it is so overwhelming and varies to such a degree, that one would rather pitch the idea of B/blackness altogether.

Through the last half of 2014 and into the first half of 2015 we have had massive protests around Black lives mattering, particularly catalyzed by the death of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and the climate of police brutality in Ferguson, MO that rang true throughout the country. Black men's performances, in life and in death, have been central to the iconography and motivation of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, a movement that does not place one form of Blackness as more important than another, seeking to affirm all of their value.⁸⁷ So much of what is seen and absorbed daily about Black bodies feeds into how stories about them unfold because what is ingrained in a mind about characterizations of groups and individuals affects how that mind will treat them in everyday life. We need to be able to critically decipher the work of sounds, images, and rumors that label (Black) bodies, as opposed to easily accepting them as true, for if we do not, we will remain unable to understand the value of (Black) bodies. #BlackLivesMatter.

In this chapter, I will examine the ways that race, gender, and commerce interplay in Hank Willis Thomas' *B@anded* series, revealing myriad ways in which advertisements transform Black bodies into things used to sell more than the objects in question. I argue that by visualizing rumors Thomas rescripts the viral performances—the incessant, uncontrollable, discursive circulation of bodies, their behaviors, and the ideas around them—which have historically deformed Black bodies and Black history. Through rescripting the rumor, Thomas re-members⁸⁸ the stereotypical narratives to suggest alternative truths, which better speak to the complexity of Black experiences. Gary Alan Fine and Patricia Turner identify three types of rumor, one of which best fits the set of images I analyze in this chapter, *formula rumor*—the efficacy of which “depends on the knowing and skilled use of stereotypes.”⁸⁹ This attention to rumor and this reconfiguration of Black “truths,” is a methodological approach that is used within Thomas' branding works. Here, I will interrogate the rumors, which I read as viral performances of “other truth,” that reverberate from select images of the Black body in Thomas' *B@anded* series.

The synesthetic⁹⁰ title of this chapter, “People Hear What They See” suggests that at the nexus of senses is where we begin to (mis)understand bodies. The underpinning idea is that the optic is always already steeped in the aural.⁹¹ In my analysis of Thomas' images, rumors influence how Black bodies are seen; therefore, when Black people are placed in view they often do not simply support rumors about themselves, but also critique them, creating “other truths” which may become remembered, rumored and/or repeated. Likewise, in the images that follow, as much as the Black men and women within them are actors of socially assigned identities—consenting to socially designated

scripts⁹² such as superior strength, anonymity, and insatiable sexual appetites—Thomas renders them as rescriptors—those subjects that do not occupy positions of authority, yet, create new roles, critiques, and possibilities.

I am interested in how rumor, a viral discourse which often derives from the experience of the optic thing (directly or indirectly), scripts and functions as the semantic foundation of that which we see. My use of “discourse” is influenced by the broad and performative ways in which Michael Issacharoff thinks about it in *Discourse as Performance*: “[V]erbal utterances to nonverbal uses comprising the visual elements, including gesture, facial expression, movement, costume, players’ bodies, properties, and décor.”⁹³ Discourse, in this formulation, is a set of performances. Rumor is a part of the discursive register, which makes meaning through the verbal as much as the visual. Indeed, Issacharoff’s broad idea of discourse goes beyond traditional conceptions related to written text and speech, but can and must be extended to understand the content of rumor, how rumor repeats itself, and the many forms that these repetitions take form in. Thus, through my interrogations of rumor in images, I am connecting the visual image to performance, discourse, and scripting. Rumors carry content with robustness and great speed, generating major discourses. However, outside of the ideological and figurative, rumors remain a secret, which is central to their power—the inability to prove or disprove them. The meanings, implications, and circulation of images in Hank Willis Thomas’ *B@anded* series hinge on the suggestive power of rumor.

As one of the artists of the *30 Americans* exhibit, which “showcases works by many of the most important African American artists of the last three decades,” Hank Willis Thomas, indeed, has revered status within both academic and artistic worlds.⁹⁴ As

a photo conceptualist, Hank Willis Thomas, has visually chronicled the lives of Blacks and African Americans for over a decade. He captures the fate of many Blacks by referencing popular signs of Blackness and Black masculinity through the medium of the “still image” and the vernacular language of advertising—an instrument that marketers utilize that employs popular discourse to communicate information about their products. Increasingly, his images, and the brands and Black bodies that they portray, have appeared in public spaces: gracing billboards and public signs, displayed in museums, portrayed inside of exhibits, and unveiled on outdoor walls. Thus, he is exemplary of an artist that is considering the discourses around Black men’s bodies that are expressed through brands and branding.⁹⁵ His unique position as an African American also makes him both narrator of, and actor in, the images that he creates, allowing both a critique and perpetuation of the rumors that he materializes through conceptual photos. In Thomas’ *B@anded* series, I am particularly struck by his invocation and production of rumor, a viral performance taking place outside of, and within, the frames of his images.

Thomas’ *B@anded* series, which can be found in his book *Pitch Blackness*, is an ideal location from which to begin theorizing viral performance for several reasons. *B@anded* deliberately summons historical and contemporary representations of Blackness such as the inherently athletic, superhumanly strong, or anonymous Black body and creates conceptual art ready for mass-consumption. By using popular images and ideas of Blackness, which are pervasive within American culture, Thomas deploys those that have already gone viral and performs an artistic-cultural critique that challenges the discourses they summon. Thomas’ work is also useful for me in three specific ways: 1) it uses historically mass-produced images of Black male masculinity,

revealing an early form of viral performance; 2) in materializing rumors into visual forms, it reveals an even earlier form of virality—word of mouth, which also participates in the act of incessant circulation; and 3) it relays the dialogical and historic relationship between the viral performance and branding—the deliberate and unintentional marketing of ideas through the marking of bodies as things.

B@anded does the cultural work of bringing our attention to, questioning, and imagining the rumors and stereotypes that everyday marketing appends to Black bodies. The series demands close analysis for the way in which attention is brought to larger ideas concerning the politics of marking, enframing, and scripting Black bodies. For example, instead of Hank Willis Thomas using the letter “r,” he uses ®. By overtly using the trademark logo for its alphabetical value, Thomas’ subtle change begins to connect branding to trademarking, bringing to mind the things, marks, words, or bodies that represent a certain product, business, or commodity, expanding our understanding of branding. He also frames images, cutting them off at certain points or enclosing them in new containers, expanding the meanings and rumors concerning the subjects of the image, both agreeing with and challenging Maurice O. Wallace’s notion that a frame limits an image’s range of meaning.⁹⁶ Lastly, he, as an African American artist, critiques the troping of the Black body through reproducing, with “signal difference,” those very tropes, disidentifying with designated roles for Blackness by deepening those roles and making them more obvious, even grotesque, in the present day.⁹⁷ Indeed, while he is responding to the historic illegibility—how Blackness is not easily deciphered—of the Black body itself, Thomas makes the legibility of the marketing of Black bodies highly visible.

In *Camera Lucida*—a foundational academic book on the criticism and theorization of photography—Roland Barthes considers the photographed subject as the motionless actor.⁹⁸ In contrast to Barthes, more in alignment with Fred Moten’s challenge to the stillness of an image, I see the subject in an image as moving and making sound, as in motion as the discourses around its being.⁹⁹ Indeed, Barthes’ idea of this “motionless made-up face beneath which we see the dead,” does not begin to describe the motion of a dead body changing form or the photograph—the object that the image visually manifests through—as constantly changing its form, becoming parts of other beings as it becomes re-membered and circulated (through memory and the recounting of its narrative and bacteria causing its fermentation).¹⁰⁰ Actually, Songha lives on, literally, affectively, and figuratively through deterioration, people’s emotional connection to him and the circumstances that ended his life, and how he is a representation of Black men respectively. The image and photograph are, thus, these things that travel and perform with spectators and consumers. Throughout this chapter, bodies in images are considered as performing, functioning as acts of performance events that survived them, and as the visual and sonic staging of bodies and their behaviors. With this in mind, I consider how Black men framed by Thomas, and the larger politics around Blackness and masculinity that go beyond their enframing, enact viral performance. Considering viral performance in *B@anded*, therefore, emphasizes the mutations in the mass-reenactment of performance events, expressing how meanings and material change as acts travel. Particularly, how it is that Willis intertextually distills viral performances and uses them to teach us something about the production of Blackness and Black masculinity in a postmodern moment.

From Broadside to Bottles and Chains

The December 1788 broadside of the lower deck of a slave ship engraved by T. Deeble for the Plymouth Chapter of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, seen in fig. 2 and widely known as slave ship Brooks, represents an early form of mass-

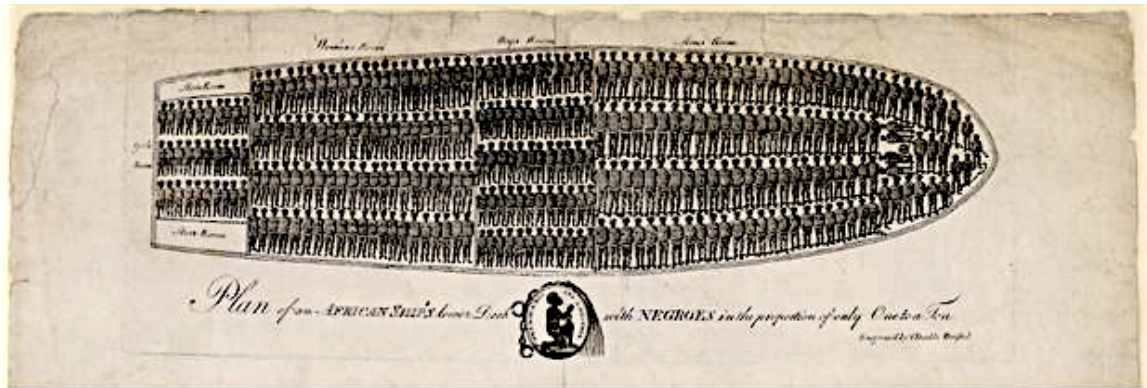


Figure 2. Plymouth Abolitionists, Bristol City Council Record Office, “Broadside notice issued by the Plymouth Committee, not opposing slavery but campaigning against the conditions of the slave trade and slaver ships; headed by plan of a slave-ship, lower deck packed with negroes, engraved by T. Deeble, Bristol,” 1788.

produced representations of Black bodies. Not only is it a slave ship icon, but it is iconic of the egregious experiences central to transatlantic slavery: forced migration, humiliation, traumatic separation, dehumanizing living conditions, lack of control over one’s body and home, and limited access to food and water. Nicole Fleetwood’s definition of iconicity speaks to the “iconic” nature of the broadside: “[T]he ways in which singular images or signs come to represent a whole host of historical occurrences and processes.”¹⁰¹ This image containing 292 bodies representing enslaved Africans compartmentalized by gender and age was seen around the world and, consequently, supported and influenced notions about how the men, women, and children in the image were perceived. The broadside was a widely distributed notice that was part of a larger campaign that initially did not oppose slavery, but fought against the deplorable

conditions that enslaved Africans endured through the slave trade.¹⁰² As such, the broadside of lower deck of slave ship Brooks was distributed alongside other antislavery prints, posters, books, and lectures, which points towards a whole different set of bodies and politics absent from the broadside.

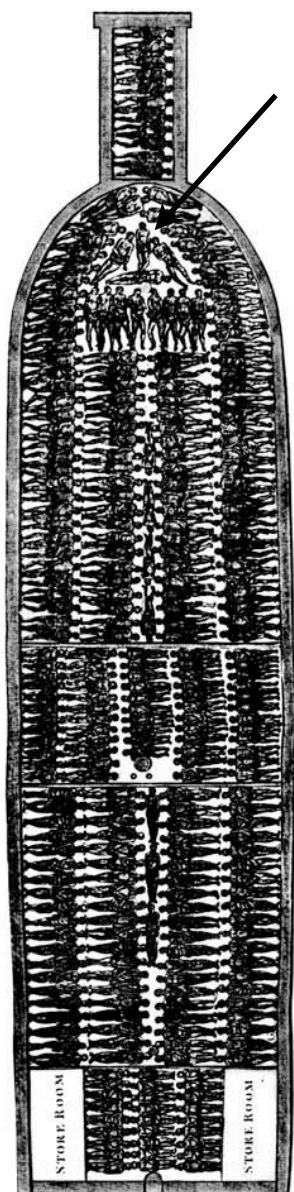
Here, I argue that “outline” and “shadow” function as metaphors for the things which exist (if at all) in the margins of the visible, the things which are not central to a performance’s frame, but may, indeed, construct the limits of the performance.¹⁰³ Hank Willis Thomas echoed this idea in an interview saying, “Photographs [and drawings and paintings] lie. What’s going on outside of the frame of any camera—even this camera right now—can say so much about what’s really going on, perhaps even more about the truth than what you see inside the box [or frame].”¹⁰⁴ Likewise, the absence of European bodies in the broadside of slave ship Brooks reveals a symptom of White supremacy, which makes Whiteness so normalized that it is invisible and taken for granted.¹⁰⁵ This, as a result, also censors the systemic involvement of bodies that are not White, but ultimately support White supremacy, and the guilt of abolitionists who do not desire their identities to be associated with slavery.

The illustrators of the lower deck of the slave ship Brooks were British. Nonetheless, the British bodies that structured the image and its referents are absent from the sketch. The absence of British bodies is important and art historian Cheryl Finley writes on what else it means:

The absence of slavers in the plan is a significant omission. What remains completely invisible as well, perhaps too great to be seen at all, are the individual investors in the slave trade, the governments that supported the industry, the African traders who supplied the slaves, and the church that condoned the trade.¹⁰⁶

The presence of individuals and institutions, which we cannot see, offer insight into the subjectivity of images. The illustrators of the slave ship Brooks broadside saw enslaved African bodies in particular kinds of ways, which were framed by their distance from the cultures and their proximity to the struggles of enslaved Africans. From a distance, the repetition of bodies, and almost identical appearances, are stereotypical of what Black bodies should look like: black, muscular, captive, and anonymous across time and distance, stereotypes of Black bodies that could be found across both proslavery and antislavery campaigns in Europe and North America.

Hank Willis Thomas uses the image of slave ship Brooks in combination with Absolut Vodka's campaign slogan, which normally places "Absolut" in the front of a word.¹⁰⁷ The aesthetics of this campaign that are expected to trigger the consumption of the alcohol are used, instead, to critique alcohol consumption and to imagine how we consume the bodies of African men and women and their descendants.



ABSOLUT POWER.

Figure 2.1. Hank Willis Thomas, *Absolut Power* (2003). Inkjet on canvas, variable size. From Hank Willis Thomas, Fred Wilson, and Christopher Cozier, *Representations* 113, No. 1 (Winter 2011), 74. Arrow emphasis mine.

As seen in fig. 2.1, entitled, *Absolut Power*, (the arrow emphasis is mine) the word Thomas chooses in the place of “Vodka” is “Power” and instead of simply placing the vodka bottle above the phrase, he designates the 1788 broadside image of slave ship Brooks created by the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade at Plymouth as the bottle. Thomas manipulates the broadside to fit inside the frame of a vodka bottle and adds a room to the slave ship in the neck of the bottle, adding approximately eleven enslaved Africans, totaling 305 bodies.

Looking closer at the image, Thomas imposes White bodies too (see arrow). The bodies are lodged just before the bottle’s neck, a nexus between freedom from containment and the slavery of being bottled up.

Yet the drink, like slavery itself, is sold as a Black problem. Nonetheless, Thomas,

through the imposition of White bodies in a historical context of enslaved Africans, also marks accountability and how by enslaving another, one enslaves themselves in substantially different ways. He begins to draw connections for us between the containment, consumption, and commerce of Black bodies.

Bottles

People drink alcohol for many reasons, some of which have been popularly and recently outlined by rap artist Kendrick Lamar in a song from his critically acclaimed album, *good kid, m.A.A.d. city*, who posits:

Some people like the way it feels /
Some people want to kill their sorrow /
Some people want to fit in with the popular /
That was my problem.”¹⁰⁸

Lamar’s problem came from the peer pressure of feeling like he needed to drink to fit in with people who were popular. That peer pressure is also a result of alcohol marketing, associating the drinking of it with what is fashionable. What I would like to focus on regarding this image, however, is Lamar’s line about killing sorrow. The desire to forget, or kill, one’s sorrow or whatever ails them takes particular salience when we consider Thomas’ image.

The design of the image visually manifests central elements concerning the diverse techniques and technologies used to subjugate and manage bodies since the classical period, bio-power. Since bio-power is dependent on life, there is an effort to enhance life without making it more difficult to exert power over. Therefore, “...it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the

body.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the design of the container, and those who fabricated it, takes charge of the lives of those within it by disallowing their escape into death, which is a type of absolute power. The container does not only contain the enslaved Africans in fig. 2.1, but the heads, hands, arms, legs and feet of other enslaved Africans contain them as well. The containment and incarceration of life leads to the fermentation of it, which we refer to as dying or what happens after death, leaving a poisonous foul stench in its wake. The power to contain and keep Black bodies in check is a poisonous move, reaping the poison that it sows. The proximity of the word “Power” to the poison it creates is a deconstructive move that Thomas’ image suggests. Thus, in the case of the drink, “Absolut Power,” even in one’s desire to forget about other worries, as Lamar suggests, one is merely consuming or swallowing pain and suffering. It is to drink to forget and to drink to remember. The actual poison from the drink can kill the memories of sorrow, but not without replacing it with more sorrow from the same poison, which in this image is produced from the containment of the bodies of enslaved African men, women, and children.

From Thomas’ imagery, one can only imagine the blood, urine, fecal matter, sweat, semen, and tears that are being swallowed from the slave ship galley of this drink. People outside of the bottle are, indeed, more free and not contained in the ways that those inside the bottle are, yet, it is the legacy of those inside the bottle that is connected to bodies in the present, whether as victims or benefactors of the slave trade. Multiple bodies represent a swallow of alcohol. The substance is poisonous and can kill, which is another one of Thomas’ implicit messages: people are dying or being killed (in)directly from consuming this drink, which takes power and control out of their hands, placing it

absolutely in another's. With the increased chances of Black men that consume alcohol resulting in deathly consequences,¹¹⁰ one can realize the urgency of Thomas' messages through his visual language: there is a power being exerted over White, and to a greater extent, Black people's lives through the advertising and consumption of alcohol.

The image is symbolic of the drink in Fredrick Douglass' *Narrative* when he discusses the strategic use of alcohol during holidays on the plantation to exert power over and control of enslaved Africans and writes, "...when the slave asks for virtuous freedom, the cunning slaveholder, knowing his ignorance, cheats him with a dose of vicious dissipation, artfully labeled with the name of liberty."¹¹¹ Douglass then describes how enslaved Blacks would feel worse after holidays because of the consumption of alcohol, duped by the "gift" of alcohol from the slaveholder. The name of the substance is addictive and misleading, advertised by the slaveholder to be liberating, celebratory, and empowering—"Absolut Power"—camouflaging its poisonous, and ultimately disempowering, content, suggestive of the slaveholder retaining the power over the enslaved. The drinkers of "Absolut Power" are marketed to, not by highlighting the power that said drink has over them, but by the ability to obtain this power by consuming it.

I share *Absolute Power* as an example of how Thomas reappropriates mass-produced historical artifacts to recall the memory of slavery and think about its legacy in the present. Thomas brings our attention to the shadows of the notice that become erased through its iconicity. As Nicole Fleetwood concurs, "Black iconicity serves as a site for black audiences and the nation to gather around the seeing of blackness. However, in the focus on the singularity of the image, the complexity of black lived experience and

discourses of race are effaced.”¹¹² An example of effacing through a focus on singularity exists within this image. While a magnified look at slave ship Brooks reveals detailed bodies in a diversity of positions and appearances—with some bodies actually appearing to be White—to the naked eye, the bodies appear the same. This sameness further circulates the notion of the anonymity of Black bodies—this inaccurate assumption that they can be accurately contained within, determined, and identified by a singular mass-produced image. So even though we see Blackness, we see its simplicity, rather than its complexity. Indeed, the insertion of White bodies brings our attention not only to their erasure from—and likely involvement in—the advertisement, but the uncritical ease with which we see Blackness. One may posit that White bodies do not belong in a (re)presentation about slave ship Brooks, but who, indeed, belongs on any slave ship?

Thomas forces us to imagine the complexity of the lived experience upon the slave ship: the sands of ocean floor that the bodies were transported over, the body of liquid upon which this ship was inserted, the poisonous fluids awash on the ship, the drowning of Black bodies, the sealing away of Black bodies, the governing bodies that sealed them away, and the ways in which the bodies central to the image were consumed as though they were expendable (like drinking vodka from a vessel). The country of origin of the brand referenced, “Absolut Vodka,” also summons Sweden’s relationship to Britain during the slave trade. Sweden, indeed, was a significant supplier of the iron used to outfit ships meant to confine enslaved Africans.¹¹³ Importantly, *Absolut Power* shows how the consumption and commerce of Black bodies are actions that we are all complicit in. Even if we do not drink, our taxes pay for the government to seal the bottles of alcohol, which also signals the wide-reaching involvement of the world in the

transatlantic slave trade—a gesture toward complicity that is absent in the original broadside and the seal found beneath it for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

Chains

The seal for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, another iconic image of Black masculinity that Thomas adapts in fig. 2.2, accompanies the bottom-middle of the broadside of the slave ship Brooks. Thomas (re)presents historical artifacts from

transatlantic slavery
and, thereby, adopts
viral performance as a
mode through which
Blackness can be
distilled, elaborated,
and complicated.

Thomas ensures that
viewers never forget
the actual
commoditizing of the
Black man's body and

the discourses around
it that happened
through popularizing



Figure 2.2. Hank Willis Thomas, *Ode to the CMB: Am I Not a Man and a Brother* (2004), 24K gold and cubic zirconia, 5 × 3 in. In *Hank Willis Thomas: Pitch Blackness* (New York: Aperture, 2008), 70.

the political agenda of the abolitionists. To accomplish this, in his picture of a gold medallion, *Ode to the CMB: Am I Not A Man And A Brother*, we see that Thomas transformed the seal for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade—which historically appeared as a jasper medallion the broadside only later to be made into accessories and Jasperware—into a product that could be readily sold as jewelry today: a gold medallion featuring a cubic zirconia. Essentially, the historic seal that was on the broadside of slave ship Brooks in fig. 2 was adapted from an image to a modern fashion accessory. This accessory, coating the enslaved African in gold, immortalizes an image of him supplicating and in chains, fingers intertwined, prayerfully pleading and surrounded by the words, “AM I NOT A MAN AND A BROTHER,” except in this image, he is holding a cubic zirconia.

Thinking about the cubic zirconia in relationship to the diamond, with all of its cultural symbolism—a diamond is forever—the cubic zirconia reminds us that just because it looks like a diamond, does not mean that it is a diamond. Yet to the naked and untrained eye, a cubic zirconia may be sufficient to imitate a diamond. The cubic zirconia added to the medallion points toward the—to use the concept of W.T. Lhamon Jr—“Optic blackness” of this image. Lhamon describes Optic blackness as “a function of cultural optics that do not render experiential reality for blacks or any ethnic group but give, instead, a convenient, pliable mediation of the real—a fiction that seems sufficiently real for cultural symbolism.”¹¹⁴ In other words, just because it looks Black, does not mean that it is Black. Yet to the naked eye or ear, the optic thing may be sufficient to pass for Black. Juxtaposing the cubic zirconia with this enslaved African implies that the medallion is an illusion of Blackness, sufficient to imitate Blackness itself.

Created into a medallion by English abolitionist and potter Josiah Wedgwood in 1787, the seal was used within the campaign to abolish slavery that used the free labor of non-criminals.¹¹⁵ Wedgwood, known for the industrialization of pottery, historically mass-produced the image from the seal into medallions, leading to their wide circulation among abolitionists. Meant to call attention to the unethical and cruel conditions that enslaved Africans had to endure, the medallion also signified. In other words, the medallion spoke with two tongues: in one tongue it tried to upgrade the living conditions of enslaved Africans as well as abolish slavery, and in the other tongue it perpetuated notions around the inferiority of Black men.

For Black people, the fight for emancipation, which the abolitionists simultaneously mobilized around, and the fight for the “recognition of black humanity and citizenship,” which in many ways the abolitionists failed at given the racist attitudes and laws aimed at Blacks post-emancipation, was inextricable from the recognition of Black manhood.¹¹⁶ Later struggles for racial equality, couched in the rhetoric of Black manhood, would “call for an acknowledgment of the human rights of both black men *and* women.”¹¹⁷ This Black manhood, nonetheless, would dominate the discourse around which the social and political struggle for civil rights took, marginalizing the issues of Black women’s unique obstacles. The framework of “Am I Not a Man and a Brother” repositions Black men early on as the embodiment of the perils of slavery, with servitude, muscularity, and infantility as the trademark of the largest organization aimed at emancipation. Thus, the crisis of Black submission, or incarceration, is chained to a history of being always already Black and male, dangerously so.

The seal underscored the dilemma that would later be articulated by Black feminists in response to their involvement in Black nationalism, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Power movement, most of which sexism was an unacknowledged issue, “...all the Blacks are men.”¹¹⁸ The caveat from the seal can be read: all enslaved Africans are men. This idea would have historic virality—in that, the framing of the oppressed (enslaved) Black male subject drew attention away from the significant treatment, traumas, and triumphs of Black women in ways that continue to resurface in everyday life. To make matters worse, the Wedgwood medallion of the seal became one of the most recognizable images of the Black figure.¹¹⁹ The races and behaviors of enslaved Africans were represented by one supplicating Black man, which, along with placating the presence of Black women in slavery,¹²⁰ flattened the varying ethnicities and personalities that enslaved Africans possessed across the African Diaspora into one appearance and behavior.

While the medallion argues (or perhaps begs) for human equality in its rhetorical question, challenging narratives around who was considered human, it also contradicts its purpose by circulating a familiar image of a submissive (yet physically strong), dependent, and enslaved African man. It was a symbol of simplicity. This image served to support the rumors and myths in circulation around the unparalleled strength of the body, powerlessness, and infantilism of the minds of Africans, which ultimately, directly or indirectly, served as evidence to justify their perpetual enslavement.¹²¹ In the midst of rebellion from maroon communities and general resistance to slavery by enslaved Africans in British colonies, the medallion’s suggestion of inferiority, docility, and powerlessness was an obvious overstatement. Yet true to the two tongues of viral

performance—both advancing potential for illness and wellness—the medallion did help in the mobilization of support for the abolishment of slavery for non-criminals.

As Eugene D. Genovese states in his critique of Stanley Elkins' Sambo thesis—a popular thesis that essentialized the behavior of enslaved Africans as docile (one could argue that the medallion accomplished the same)—“Neither slavery nor slaves can be treated as pure categories, free of the contradictions, tensions, and potentialities that characterize all human experience.”¹²² In other words, the complex personhoods of the enslaved must be considered, upon which the spectra of their lived experience will begin to be realized. The seal for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade simplifies the personhood enslaved Africans, reducing it to Black and male, strong and subservient, formally spoken and polite. Indeed, the symbol embodies a racism that is found in liberal corners today, with people who offer aid to fight against the oppression of Black bodies unable to appreciate Black bodies as philanthropic, able to give aid as well as receive it, further infantilizing them as a group.

The acronyms, CMB, in Hank Willis Thomas' adaptation of the seal for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, *Ode to the CMB: Am I Not A Man And A Brother* suggests a reference to Cash Money Brothers from the 1991 film *New Jack City*. Thomas' title juxtaposes this medallion, an iconic moment in American popular culture of the late-18th century, with scenes from an iconic moment in late-20th century Black popular culture. A significant link between the two disparate figures is the gold chain as signifier of wealth and fashion.

The Cash Money Brothers were a narcotics consortium that sold drugs in a fictional New York City out of a building named, “The Carter.” After their initial success

in the drug dealing business, there is a scene where the leader of CMB, Nino Brown—played by Wesley Snipes—repeatedly chants, “Am I my brother’s keeper?!” Later in the movie when he finds out that his brother Gee Money—played by Allen Payne—has been using the drugs they are selling, Brown holds a gun to his brother’s head. Gee Money kneels down, as pitiful and powerless as the enslaved African on the seal, and pleads, “Am I my brother’s keeper?!” Replying with a grim, “Yes,” Nino Brown shoots Gee Money. The tragedy of the scene is that one cannot absolutely expect that another’s sense of morals will align with theirs, particularly when their life is on the line. Thomas’ representation also suggests that the seal was created, and even made into a commodity, to appeal to the morals and fashion-sense of other “free” people, inspiring them to mobilize on behalf of enslaved Africans while investing in slavery abolition. Yet *Ode to the CMB: Am I Not A Man And A Brother* suggests a certain disillusionment with White racism: that the lives of Blacks should not be left in the hands (or better yet around the necks) of the morals of those which benefit most from their disenfranchisement. This performance of an American brand of brother/manhood also highlights a way in which the devalued lives of Black men—as a concept—gets passed on virally: visually (re)presenting profits, power, and entitlement as products of violence, which trump Black lives.

In an attempt to appeal to the morals and sympathy of liberal Western Europeans and European North Americans, the abolitionist images of enslaved Africans, such as the seal for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, depicted them as motionless, absolutely oppressed, and dreading the next moment, supporting ideas that liberal Western Europeans and European North Americans already held of captive

Blacks.¹²³ In contrast, wanted posters of escaped Blacks in North America, which were visually disruptive to the popular narratives about their laziness, comfort, and happiness in confinement,¹²⁴ depicted escaped Black men and women as carefree, in-motion, and looking forward to the future, which also meant that they were out of control. Through juxtaposition, Thomas conveys that the tensions between the two types of mass-produced images—the seal for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade and wanted posters of escaped Black men and women—which were all ideas that anti-slavery and proslavery Western Europeans and European North Americans popularly held of captive and free Blacks respectively.

Unlike antislavery campaigns, proslavery propaganda, as seen in fig. 2.3, which was a manufactured stereotyped cut “...used on handbills offering rewards for runaway slaves,”¹²⁵ created alarm around the numerous possibilities of Africans and their descendants who escaped slavery. The motion of their bodies, free from captivity, signaled impending danger—like the fall of slave societies. In fact, Thomas bases different medallions off of the infamous etching of a Black North American with a knapsack over

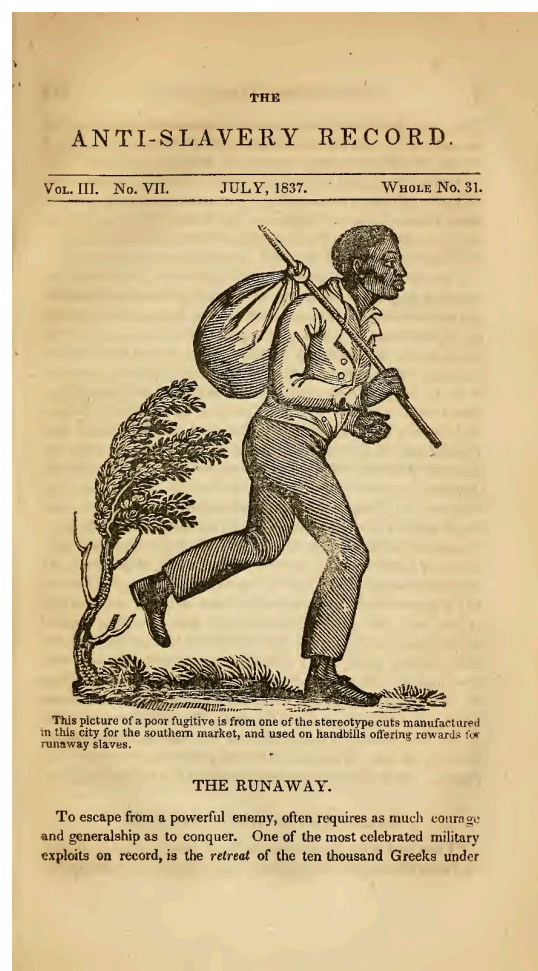


Figure 2.3. The American Anti-Slavery Society, *The Anti-Slavery Record Vol. III, for 1837* (New York: The American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), 73. <https://archive.org/details/antislaveryrecvol3no01amer>.

his shoulder. Thus, one of the, if not the, most popular wanted posters used for enslaved Africans seeking freedom was merely a mass-produced image of the same exact etching with different names, unique descriptions of who ran away, and monetary rewards attached to each, visually supporting popular notions of the Black body as anonymous, carefree, solitary, criminalized and on foot.¹²⁶ American historian, William L. Van Deburg, reveals that between 1830 and 1860, for example, novelists, with the choice between ambiguous, more complex, illustrations about enslaved African characters or fictional simplified types—which we find in visual anti/proslavery campaigns—they would choose the latter, adding to the discourses about the sameness of Black bodies.¹²⁷ This type of informal consensus created a common sense understanding of Black freedom, which was always predicated upon a singular archetype. Thomas’ handling of this image critiques the way in which our access to this image as archive produces a means of knowing how enslaved Africans performed escapes, when, in fact, such escapes varied not only in style, but in strategy, and in expression.

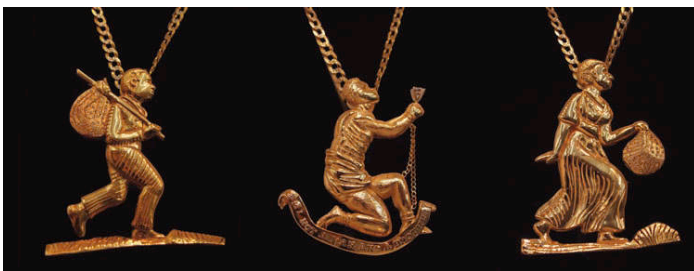


Figure 2.4. Hank Willis Thomas (Left to Right), *Ode to the CMB: Folks Say, “Take That Chain Off Boy Ya Blindin’ Me”* (2006/7); *Ode to the CMB: Am I Not a Man and a Brother?* (2004); *Ode to the CMB: Lucy is a Slave with Diamonds* (2006/7). 24K gold and cubic zirconia, 5×3 in. From Hank Willis Thomas, Fred Wilson, and Christopher Cozier, *Representations* 113, No. 1 (Winter 2011): 74.

The titles of the medallions to the left and right of Thomas’ imitation Wedgwood medallion in fig. 2.4, *Ode to the CMB: Folks Say, ‘Take That Chain Off Boy Ya Blindin’ Me’* and *Ode to the CMB: Lucy is a Slave with Diamonds*, illustrate the sentiment that others,

particularly proslavery White North Americans, expressed when they saw someone else, particularly Africans and/or their descendants, free and even prosperous. The phrases used beyond the colon, “Take That Chain Off You Blinding Me” and “Lucy is a Slave with Diamonds,” affirm the riches within and among free Africans and their descendants, while at the same time speaking to the attitudes of slaveowners and slave proponents and their inability to see freedom as being owned by Blacks. The medallions of wanted posters summon the raids in Cass County, Michigan, for example, in which White slaveowners from Northern Kentucky—drawn to the fortune of the largest rural Black county in early Michigan—attempted to recapture them.¹²⁸


Importantly, by incorporating women in his exploration of marketed Black masculinity, Thomas expands the limits of performances of Black masculinity that historically centered men. Thomas references The Beatles’ “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds”—a song about a woman on the move—from their 1967 album, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, whose interplay with wanted posters speaks to the Black woman’s fixity as much as it does her movement. In the song, The Beatles describe a woman who, as soon as she appears, disappears.

The specter of her identity speaks to the simplified personhood of the wanted image that recedes when considering the diverse and contradictory information that existed in its descriptions of her, as seen in fig. 2.5. The detailed description from the *Louisiana Courier*—a daily (except Mondays) newspaper for New Orleans from May 23, 1852-1859—unsettles the generalizations of the stereotyped cut that Thomas renames as

at
es-
his
as
ta-
6
nd
the
11
in
wn
en
10
nd
out
ho.

june 30 26 Bienville street

TEN DOLLARS REWARD.

 **RUNAWAY** from the subscriber the day before yesterday, the negress **MELITTE**, aged about 24 years, very tall and thin walks very fast; has lost her front teeth; speaks French and English, and is well known in the city.

The above reward will be paid to whoever will lodge her in jail, and give information thereof at the office of the Courier.

Captains of vesse's and all other persons are cautioned against harboring or employing said negress, as the law will be rigorously enforced against all so offending.

june 30 **J. A. BONNEVAL.**

UNION BANK OF LOUISIANA.
N. Orleans, 29th June, 1837.
THIS Institution will be closed on Tuesday next, the 4th of July. Persons having

Figure 2.5. J.A Bonneval, "Ten dollars Reward," *Le Courier de la Louisiane*, June 30, 1837, Louisiana State Museum, accessed May 31, 2014, <http://cdm16313.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/APC/id/74/rec/1>.

Lucy; it reads, "Runaway from the subscriber the day before yesterday, the negress Melitte, aged about 24 years, very tall and thin walks very fast; has lost her front teeth; speaks French and English, and is well known in the city." Thomas, thus, moves beyond reinforcing a masculinist representation and uses the complexities of gender portrayals in popular culture to nuance perceptions of Black masculinity. Lucy does as much work as the supplicating man from the seal to think through how performances of Black femininity are an important part of the discourses about Black masculinity, both of which trouble simplified Black personhood. Indeed, we see how using the essentialism (both

unplanned and strategic)¹²⁹ of Black masculinity and femininity provides evidence of the injustice and hope that Blacks respectively face and strive for as a group, allowing for the mobilization around issues of social justice for Blacks, even if it means that the evidence that is mobilized around becomes iconic and/or a commodity.

One such commodity, the abolitionists' seal, virtually became a brand that was found decorating bracelets, ceramics and hairpins, to name a few, which in today's terms "went viral." A seal became an object, an everyday symbol for slavery, and a fashion symbol that could be found on people's necks, in people's hair and on people's dishes, a viral performance of Black masculinity in popular culture. These commodities first circulated as things to be consumed while trying to reveal the inhumane conditions of the slave ships and the slave trade; however, their meaning evolved alongside the abolitionists' political agenda to abolish slavery that used the free labor of non-criminals. The images printed on the broadside of slave ship Brooks and impressed on other commodities were so iconic that they came to represent the institution of slavery to the world.¹³⁰

Indeed, Thomas' work makes clearer how discourses travel through viral performances such as rumor and mass-produced images while also showing how discourses can be shifted through the manipulation of what is viral, or branded. Through his work, we see how the mass-produced images of Black men and women's bodies throughout North America and Western Europe were popularly used to advertise the political agendas of abolitionists and to convey how cruel of an institution that slavery was. However, what is more apparent in *B@anded* is how the personhood of Black men and women were simplified and commoditized, consumed, and used to advertise the

political agendas of abolitionists and proslavery advocates. In this process we see a form of erasure, where more than exchanging abolitionist and proslavery agendas, the representations exchanged pejorative notions that were already held of Black men and women as superhumanly strong, dependent, and in need of taming. We also see how the abolitionists' politics involved agendas that both sought to better the conditions of the slave trade and ships and wanted to abolish slavery altogether. Through viral performance, abolitionists accomplished popularizing the abolition of the slavery that used the free labor of non-criminals by using rumors of Black men and women's bodies in visual and material representations like broadsides, medallions, banners, coins, hair pins and crockery. Thomas shows us that this type of signification continues to this day, the advertising of brands and ideas on one end, and the incessant selling of (mis)understandings of Black bodies, and for the intents of this project, Black men, on the other.

Unfolding Whips

*...I didn't mind working free as a walking billboard / but
now I want my money back / as the ice spilled and poured /
Onto the floor I did see a distorted reflection of my Nike
hat /
No I don't know how others might react /
For me it was an unsightly act that helped me get my
psyche back
I stood 5 feet back, afraid that it might strike me like
Shacklack clack! /
You think I'm kidding? Think it's no big thing
What I seen made my heart hurt, stomach turn, throat burn,
teeth cringe spine tingle, and ribs sting*

*I noticed that the swoosh symbol was nothing but a whip in
mid-swing...*

-Sage Francis¹³¹

In 2002, a spoken word artist and emcee named Sage Francis created a song called “Narcissist” from the *The Known UnSoldier “Sick of Waging War”* album. The song was critiquing the importance that is placed on appearances and the shock of critically thinking about the brands we consume and unknowingly advertise. He couches his narrative in the denial of being a narcissist (he only likes to watch himself exist) and coming to a point of conflict when considering the exploitation and price markup that go into creating and selling the clothes that he bought in the past. In the song, the final shock that Francis experiences is seeing the Nike symbol on a hat as a “whip in mid-swing.” Unlike Jeff Johnson, Nike’s first employee, who says he named the logo after the Greek goddess of victory,¹³² the Nike swoosh, in this poet’s thinking represents an unfolding action of a whip. Indeed, one does not have to be Black to be haunted by the specter of an instrument of violence used in settings of slavery, punishment, and control to dominate, intimidate, and terrorize both humans and animals. While Jeff Johnson’s narrative may be his truth, the multiple truths that the Nike symbol evokes is as, if not more, important.

I choose not to totally credit Francis with starting this rumor, however, as I also heard a similar rumor between 2001 and 2002. In fact, I had not considered the meaning of the Nike symbol before a Black classmate assuredly told me that it was a slave master’s whip. I did my part in participating in the rumor, planting the idea in people’s minds during casual conversation, often as a question: “You heard about what the Nike symbol means?” Via a central mechanism of viral performance—word of mouth—this idea traveled, working its way into the popular imaginary. In “Unfolding Whips,” I am suggesting that this rumor circulated enough to have made its way into Hank Willis Thomas’ photography, giving him an opportunity to illuminate its function. Through

photographic manipulation and using the techniques of advertising and propaganda to explore contemporary issues around race, gender, and commerce, Thomas materializes and corroborates in re-creating (or re-producing) Nike's rumor in visual form.

Branded Head

Thomas' photo in fig. 2.6, *Branded Head*, evokes the rumor that Nike's logo is the unfolding action of a (slave master's) whip. This does not mean that *Branded Head* is a



Figure 2.6. Hank Willis Thomas, *Branded Head* (2003). Lightjet Print. In *Hank Willis Thomas: Pitch Blackness* (New York: Aperture, 2008), 67.

visual representation of the rumor, just that the rumor is in dialogue with the discourse that enframes the image. It specifically brings our attention to the scarring that happens against someone's will, as in when enslaved people were branded—as punishment for running away—with the names of the plantation or slaveholder they belonged to,¹³³ or with someone's will, as in when Black

people participate in their own scarring through tattooing or fraternity branding. Brands are inscribed meanings and marks of style and value. Thus, brands become one with Black bodies in both stigmatic and pleasurable ways. There is also an inability to distinguish or separate brands from Black bodies and the pasts that come with those bodies. Black bodies frequently trouble the visual field regardless of the intents of the author—carrying with them branded memories, rumors, and images that Black people themselves cannot control. Still, Hank Willis Thomas’ work is an exemplar of “troubling vision,”¹³⁴ mounting a critique of public/private media’s use of Black men’s performances in the selling of products to the point that Black men also become the product.¹³⁵

The move to graft any logo onto one’s head is very untypical as branding is usually done in the mid to lower-body, whether voluntarily or involuntarily.¹³⁶ The keloid’s location on a Black man’s head, thus, gestures toward being created against his will, a traumatic event.¹³⁷ Thomas, therefore, makes the move to brand a head to bring attention to, and spark dialogue around, the pain, dehumanization, and the punishment of branding as well as the branding of consciousness—invoking this idea that the way in which we think and, dare I say, dream about ourselves is subsumed by the desire for and fear of brands.

There is also a noticeable emphasis of the Nike sign’s centrality in *Branded Head*. The Black man’s entire face is not included, yet the entire Nike sign is, marginalizing his existence while indicating what we should value as consumers. The simplification of a Black man to a “head” also brings attention to how advertising can dissect humans, leaving them with no names, only body parts: a decapitation upon which to deliver and

sell a product's message. The only body part that is emphasized in its totality is the Black man's ear. Thomas' attention to rumor and the sonic is marked through this emphasis.

Besides the ear, the Nike symbol is predominant.

The Nike symbol's positioning as more central than the Black man's body gestures toward the ways in which commercial ideas and goods have garnered higher value than the bodies that they use experience. In Kate Linker's article "Went Looking for Africa: Carrie Mae Weems," she investigates the silences about race in Carrie Mae Weems' "Family Pictures and Stories" and "Sea Islands" photosets. She suggests the significance collective memory plays in public media and writes,

Weems has alluded in writing to the "little packages of consumer racism" that are the stock-in-trade of our collective psyche. Weems' reference is obvious—ideology is constructed and reproduced through consumption—but it also encompasses the more subtle racism of black Americans who unconsciously internalize white-supremacist norms. This complicity of black people in their own victimization (a similar role to that of many women) is perpetuated by the uninterrupted sway of racist representations in the media.¹³⁸

Thomas magnifies this consumer racism that Weems has alluded to, making the little packages of the racism into large ones. His production of discourses by using the rumor performance of the Nike swoosh interrupts the sway of racist images in the media by making the media's concealed racism, which "does not exist," obvious. His images confirm the notion that, as we consume products from the Nike Corporation, we also consume their ideas of the bodies that they use to market products. Particular etchings of commercial capitalism can instigate Black men's tensions in communities; which occur and are often seen, particularly by neo-liberalists, as Black men's "problems" rather than as a products of a more systemic forces. This comes to bear particular importance when

violence over shoes, like the Nike Air Jordan, occurs within Black communities—moving Nike’s performance beyond commercial and into viral violence.

The balding Black man in fig. 2.6 is representatively disembodied, offset for a more central focus on the Nike symbol. As a result, he is eyeless, noseless, mouthless, and, with the exception of his head, bodyless. The only other thing that is made present in Thomas’ photographic adaptation, embodied in its wholeness, is the keloid in the form of a Nike swoosh. The swoosh is, indeed, an onomatopoeia—a phonetic imitation of the source of the sound it recounts—which begs the question: when a Nike symbol is seen branded on a Black man’s head, what does the “swoosh” sound like (could it be the sound that accompanies the swing of a whip, the sizzle of hot iron to warm skin, and/or someone swiftly passing you by)? The swoosh possesses many meanings, particularly when juxtaposed with Black body parts, that utilize the currency of Blackness (signaled by Black people’s success in sports), yet inevitably recall moments of racism whose legacy thrives.

The use of the swoosh and the keloid gestures toward the sonic, while also signaling trauma. This attention to the pain, in the suggested sound of an object causing enough friction (by hitting, cutting or burning) to form a keloid on the skin, is Thomas’ way of re-memembering, suturing the Black body. Thomas uses the sonic swoosh to remind us that though this is a fragmented image, there was something that happened to the entire body. In essence, he “render[s] the body whole again and, in so doing, offers a perspective” into the event that dismembered it¹³⁹—the central event here being Nike’s branding of this Black man’s body. It is questionable, however, whether we can have a “whole” Black subject to dis-member in the first place, particularly when any wholeness

that we know of Blackness is already impure and (re)mixed.¹⁴⁰ In other words, if we understand Black bodies as always already in parts, not cohesive and easily understandable, Diasporic, and encompassing complex personhood, we cannot re-assemble them as we never had their cohesive assembled bodies to begin with.¹⁴¹ Just as Blackness is mixed, interpretations of the Black body must be as well.

The title of the photograph, *Branded Head*, does not allow audiences to easily refuse the connection between branding and the Black man's body in the picture. In a real way, the Nike symbol could not exist without the skin on the head of the Black man in the photo. The swoosh emerges after the contact of its form with a body, rising from the skin as both a part and extension of it, evidenced as a trauma inflicted to the skin. These are not just scars, they are raised scars whose significance is foregrounded for a reason. In many ways, Thomas is raising the scars of Black life and Black history to pose the pain, loss of autonomy, and commodification of Black bodies as a problem and as absurd.

Despite all of this, like with any viral performance of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life, there are risks and rewards. The risks for the photographed and the Black men he could represent, as I have already outlined, consist of, but are not limited to, dehumanization, disembodiment, and ownership by corporations. However, the rewards complicate the risks. When one considers the autonomy that Black men have in branding themselves, the way that the image must be understood changes, and the concept of rebranding emerges—allowing for Thomas' and others' agency in choosing, speaking back to, and forming some liberation from, brands. After all, the title, *Branded Head*, does not reveal who the brander is.

Scarred Chest

Branding—the scarring of flesh with a sign—can also be voluntary. Thomas makes use of this (limited) autonomy in his adapted photographic image, *Scarred Chest*, seen in fig. 2.7. Here, Thomas more directly addresses the work of scarring and voluntary branding. When the most common location for brands are the upper arm and chest, fig.



Figure 2.7. Hank Willis Thomas, *Scarred Chest* (2004). Lightjet Print. In *Hank Willis Thomas: Pitch Blackness*, (New York: Aperture, 2008), 69.

2.7 turns the critical lens on self-inflicted or relatively voluntary scars—the kind where keloids can sometimes be an individual marker of belonging, homosocial¹⁴² participation, or self-importance.¹⁴³ It has been found that Black bodies, particularly African American bodies, keloid 7.1 times more than that of White Europeans and their descendants when their skin heals from burning or cutting.¹⁴⁴ This factor allows African Americans to brand themselves in expectation of the aesthetic keloid effect that burning or cutting their flesh creates, a practice popularly held in Black fraternities. Indeed, Nike corporation's intended symbolism of the swoosh as the Greek goddess of victory interplayed with everyday peoples' use of self-marking/branding/tattooing blurs the meaning of this image, suggesting not only external branding, but a branding from within.

Thomas repeated use of Nike swooshes in *Scarred Chest* suggests that branding does not only function as an external mark of difference, but also as a means of dialogue between the intrinsic and external. It is through repeated external branding that bodies are given a meaning that, over time, becomes intrinsic. This viral process can also work for the purposes of rebranding—repeatedly repurposing the meaning of a symbol inscribed into or intrinsic to the flesh. Even though Black bodies are haunted by the stigma, and faced with the racism and sexism that can be associated with branding, the repeated dialogue between their intended meaning and the external scripts that they challenge produce a rebranding. Along rebranding's path of alterity, other worlds can be experienced and imagined. Indeed, a rebranded mark can signal liberation, voluntary belonging, and whichever meaning that the individual who possesses it desires.

In Black Greek fraternities, for example, branding is sought after to symbolize achievements, belonging, and personal style, however, there is no single interpretation of meaning for fraternal brands.¹⁴⁵ From a connection with the heart to being a member of the “chest club”—a reference to being grouped with others that have obtained a chest brand—they have been used to symbolize a wide range of things. Michael Jordan, a Black man who has used and been used by the Nike brand so much that he has become symbolic of Nike itself, has an Omega Psi Phi brand burned onto his chest. Branding as the permanent or temporary public or hidden visual broadcasting of masculinity, belonging, and brotherhood cannot be denied here, a way of asserting, “I am a man and a brother” in a nation that has seen, and sees, Black men as infantile and outsiders. Further studying the scars and the margins of *Scarred Chest* also reveals ideas about the sexual energy within the image.

Certainly, the sensual nature of this image also brings the erotic associations of branding to the forefront. The way that the image cuts off just above the pubic hair and the location of the raised scars on the face of chiseled pectoral muscles has the potential to both invite and repulse the viewer by their bluntness. The censorship of what the eye expects to see after lower abdominal muscles does not hide the phallus, it centers it. In the wise words of rap artist Beanie Siegel, he discusses how, even in its erasure, the censored thing remains: “Now see if I care if this verse get aired / Even if you mute it / The curse is there.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, this reminds me of FM radio’s policing of “obscenities” and taboos that share the same end rhyme as the line that preceded them. Because of rhyme and reason, we all know what the “obscenity” is, defeating (or perhaps enhancing) the purpose of censorship, bringing our attention to (or away from) the taboo. For

example, “You ‘bout to get wet / Ya head’s bobbin’ and I ain’t said ____ yet.”¹⁴⁷ After censorship, there are only so many options for the possibilities of what were erased, encouraging the imagination and mind to fill in the blank. Even censorship, whether chosen by the photographed subject or not, is limited. If the adage “sex sells” rings true at all in the *B@anded* series, it is in Thomas’ use of the body in fig. 2.7. What lies outside the frame of the image, outside of the censorship, is perhaps the most important thing used to sell and encourage the consumption of the product.

Sandra Mizumoto Posey points to a scene in Spike Lee’s 1988 film, *School Daze*, as bringing attention to the “sexual mystique” of brands. Jane Touissant (played by Tisha Campbell-Martin) licks Julian “Dean Big Brother Almighty” Eaves (played by Giancarlo Esposito) on his chest and back, making sure that the point of her tongue runs across his raised skin, treating it as an “erogenous zone.”¹⁴⁸ The erotic associations with branded skin make brands something desirable for both men and women. In Yoruba culture, Posey adds, “[S]cars resulting from cutting the skin are perceived as sensual due to their tactile nature.”¹⁴⁹ In fig. 2.7, Thomas is using scarring for its sensual value and masculine appeal, exposing how companies inundate consumers with overly sexualized bodies to sell products—branding this body with the Nike symbol nine times, as though once was not enough to communicate it was an ad for Nike.

Something would be amiss to ignore the referent to Robert Mapplethorpe’s 1980 photo of Charles Bowman entitled *Torso* when referring to Thomas’ *Scarred Chest*. In *Torso*, we see the pronounced chest and abs from a Black man, posing with biceps raised outside of the margins of the photograph for maximum muscular effect, and an image shot or cropped before the collar bone and after plethora pubic hairs. Mapplethorpe is

recorded to have left the image of his lover's face out of another controversial photograph, "Man in a Polyester Suit," where a Black man's uncircumcised penis loosely hangs out of an opened zipper of a three piece polyester suit only showing half of his slacks and the top button of his vest, hands hanging to his sides. Sarah Boxer, photography critic of the *New York Times*, writes, "Mapplethorpe got so much permission for so many things that he made us forget, at least occasionally, what he was getting away with."¹⁵⁰ While the possibility of consent adds to our conversation about (limited) autonomy and how branded subjects can have a choice in what is and is not seen of their bodies, Boxer's subtext here is that consent and agency do not easily dismiss the pornographic ways Black men's bodies have been portrayed and consumed in North America.

Like Mapplethorpe, Nike's use of Black men has become pornographic and complicated by Black men's desire to be branded to increase their mobility as well as for the fiscal and social capital involved in doing so. This exchange of the erotic for increased mobility and sustaining public interest makes Thomas's image even more relevant and insightful. Here, Thomas reveals the complicated position of the athlete-porn subject—someone that is incessantly "overly aestheticized" in a focus on their body, strength, and athletic ability, a strange triangle, which performs a certain violence in its linking—reminiscent of linking Black subjects to primitive beings, emphasizing brawn over brains. Porn functions virally, repeatedly flooding our senses with images and sounds insofar as they become intrinsic to our understanding of said body, food, or thing. Indeed, as much as a photographed subject can transcend gender norms and challenge conventional racist knowledge through his choices in erasure and insertion, he also acts to

preserve the notions he confronts. By using conceptual photography to question the myths of Black men's bodies in advertisements as sexual(ized) objects, innately strong, and commodities, Thomas frames the potential ramifications of Black portrayals: even if voluntary, the critique of stereotypes, or assertion of the individual self, can be communicated in such a way that it disguises that very critique and resistance to being representative of a group.

Thinking through the potential autonomy of the photographed subject in fig. 2.7 summons the way in which branding was a visible marker that the branded subject was a runaway—someone who had already, and, thus, was at risk again for, divesting from his slaveholder's system of labor, which positively correlated with his social, economic, and physical peril—indicating an overriding struggle for freedom.¹⁵¹ The Black man's torso is an illustration of someone who is a repeat offender of trying to attain freedom from Nike, only to become that which he tried upwards of nine times to escape, another pornographic expression of Blackness. This illustration also suggests that Nike is a corporation, which uses slaveholder-like violence to maintain control of their “employees’” autonomy, reminding all that this particular Black body belongs to them. Adding to the irony of this suggestion is Thomas' use of nine Nike swooshes, a numerological move to mark the nine lives either lived by Nike as a repeated viral offender of Black bodies, or the way in which Black men are re-creating themselves perpetually when branded. Either way, this marking provides a significant commentary on the workings of viral performance in both Black lives and of the Nike brand. Thomas employs the viral for his uses and by employing it, he shows us that he is aware of it, a

type of formulaic rumor, further illustrating how the Black masculine is conversant with viral performance.

Branded Icons

*And born in New Orleans get killed for Jordans*¹⁵²
-Lil Wayne

*Broken promises, steal yo' watch and tell you what time it
is / Take yo Js and tell you to kick it where a Foot Locker
is*¹⁵³
-Jay Rock

*Death over dishonor / They killin Niggas for Js / That's
death over designer*¹⁵⁴
-J. Cole

*It's best that you stay awake than snooze / They taking lives
or they taking shoes*¹⁵⁵
-Elzhi

*Drug dealer buy Jordan / Crackhead buy crack / And the
White man get paid off of all of that*¹⁵⁶
-Kanye West

*Never thought project life was promised nothing but to die
twice / For steppin' on the next man's nikes*¹⁵⁷
-Nas

*Leave you lyin' in red...Now who will be the next to get they
fuckin' shoes took off*¹⁵⁸
-Mia X

The epigraphs above convey a frightening phenomenon, the loss of life or assault because of the type of shoes one wears and how the money spent on marked up shoes ultimately ends up paying White men—a vicious cycle of the consumption of fashion, the

consumption of life for fashion, and the systematic way that White men benefit from that very socioeconomic complex. I begin with words from Jay Rock (Watts, Los Angeles, CA), J. Cole (Fayetteville, NC), Elzhi (Detroit, MI), Kanye West (Chicago, IL), Nas (Queensbridge, Queens, NY), Mia X (New Orleans, LA) to briefly convey how widespread it is that people, particularly Blacks, are being assaulted or killed for marked up shoes. I am also conveying the awareness of Black American artists about the pain, fright, and misfortune present when stealing Nike Air Jordans (Js), having them stolen, or losing one's life and having them stolen. They perform reflections or wisdom that is also a form of *critical rumor*: the viral performance of "other truth" that ties structures of power to their effects in everyday life. Their meditations on the same subject, death over shoes (particularly Nikes and Js), are illustrating something systematic enough to affect people similarly in different geographies across the U.S.

I can relate to this viral trend having grown up in a 1990s Detroit where, even though Nike's Air Jordan design was superb and attractive, they were avoided along with brands like Triple Fat Goose (a then popular goose-down bubble jacket), because both my parents and I knew that people were getting those stolen from them or were being killed for them—and they simply cost too much for gym shoes. While I always admired the design of Js, I would wear anything instead: Nike Air Force Ones, Gary Payton Nikes, and even Joe Dumars' Adidas—I had both a desire for and fear of Nike's Air Jordan. They were a brand that held higher value than the people that wore them as clothing. These recollections align with the work that Hank Willis Thomas is doing, calling attention to the viral performance of Black-on-Black crime, the work that fashion

advertising does to instigate these crimes, and how the branding of certain products has given those products intrinsic social value.

Clothes, often identified by brands in North America, carry associations with certain cash values, style, and, important for this chapter, bodies. Clothes can be as raced as skin and, much like the bodies that wear them, how they are perceived changes as they travel between different contexts. The rumor concerning clothing that Hank Willis Thomas captures in this next section is found within an e-rumor in the form of a poem titled, “Clothes.”

The poem, “Clothes,” was circulated via email by an anonymous author posing as the late Maya Angelou. “Clothes” was so pervasive in North American cyberculture that Heather Newman, a writer for the *Detroit Free Press*, wrote an article concerning how anonymity, made possible through posting under fake or no identity online, was making it difficult to screen art for legitimacy after it spread online.¹⁵⁹ The Internet, in other words, was diminishing the ability to link authors to their original work, thereby, enabling original content to be linked to anonymous authors. Or, more pointedly, anonymity allows for authors to be linked to work that was not their original content, the latter being the result of “Clothes”—often found as an anonymous post on a website or forwarded email. Maya Angelou, penned as the author of “Clothes,” was needed because of her respected status in the world, and particularly among African American communities, as a truth-teller. In this way, even though she did not write it, Angelou functioned as a device to authenticate the information in the poem as evidence of anti-Black racism. The combination of the “evidence”—subsumed by rumors about anti-Black conspiracy in the

fashion industry—and Angelou’s position as truth-teller gave the poem enough currency to be circulated as an e-rumor. It reads as follows:

This is a poem by Maya Angelou to blacks and a message for us to think about. Please read carefully and try to interpret as best you as you can.

Clothes

You are in love with Tommy, Because his last name is Hilfiger, But behind closed doors, Tommy, Is calling you a nigger, But you could care less, Because you have been taught to dress to impress, If I ask you about your true history, You would have to look on the back of your jeans and Guess, You come up in the club wearing versace, Clothes made by a homosexual male, So even when you say you are straight, It is very hard to tell, And for footwear, you wear Timberlands, Even under the sun, That some tree that the symbol for them, Could have been the same one your ancestors were hung from, I cannot forget Nautica, When was the last memory you have of ships, Coming to North America in shackles, Being beaten over the back with whips, And to my beautiful black queens, Whose creative womb has become barren, I am confused because your face says Nefertiti, But your sweater reads Donna Karen, When was the last time you saw Liz Claiborne, Conversing with black women, But as soon as her name is printed on a purse, To Macy's you quickly go, running,

Ralph Lauren doesn't even look at black men, Unless they are driving him around town, But as soon as that slave master appears on the back of a horse, You put whatever you have picked up down,

My people, reclaim your status in this world and in your life, Fubu in case you didn't know, stand for (For Us By Us), Buying black will someday suffice, Do you know who owns Timberland fashion? Well, Timberland is owned by the president of the KKK, Surprised? Don't be. Read more books black people, Always hope for the best and prepare for the worst, You may not get what you pay for, But you'll surely pay for what you get.

Maya Angelou¹⁶⁰

In this poem, which for all we know was a viral marketing ploy by competitive brands, everything, except for Versace being gay (which, contrary to the poem's suggestion, determines nothing about the sexuality of someone who wears his clothing), has been proven false. Nonetheless, this speaks to the power of viral performance. Though Maya Angelou did not write the poem and none of the brands listed have proven to be racist, such rumors circulated online, playing on the fears of same sex desire and those familiar with North America's concealment of racism and its legacy. People passed "Clothes" on via email forwards and online blog posts, increasing its presence, currency, and solidifying it as rumor.

In the "Clothes" poem, there is one reference that Thomas takes up:

Timeberland's logo as a representation of a lynching "oak" tree.¹⁶¹ Figure 2.8, Hank



Figure 2.8. Hank Willis Thomas, *Jordan and Johnny Walker in Timberland circa 1923 (Circa 1923)* (2004). Inkjet on Canvas. In *Hank Willis Thomas: Pitch Blackness* (New York: Aperture, 2008), 62.

Willis Thomas' image from his *B@anded* series, *Jordan and Johnny Walker in Timberland circa 1923 (Circa 1923)*, interrogates on the one hand how rumor is captured in visual form, and on the other, illuminates the relationship between icons used for brands and Black masculinity. Thomas' image actually corroborates and troubles this viral narrative and offers a visual recap and revision to the larger cultural myth.

Paul Lawrence Dunbar, named "Poet Laureate of the Negro Race" by Booker T. Washington, illustrates some of the racially-motivated myths around the oak tree in his 1900 poem, "The Haunted Oak." His poem is based on a story from an elderly, formerly enslaved, man living on Howard University's grounds whose nephew was accused of rape and hung on an oak tree.¹⁶² The man's story of accusation and rumor is one that can be added to a long list of stories with parallel thoughts and reactions: a lynching steeped in the fear of racial mixture, the notion of the lascivious and/or criminal Black male, and the need to preserve the inherent racial purity of Whites and protect defenseless White women. Nonetheless, while the poem itself performs a necessary critique of lynching, it may have inadvertently created a rumor of the type of tree used as a standard in the violent process.

While trees are popularly referenced as the site of lynchings, history has shown us that anything will suffice, from trees to lampposts, basically anything sturdy enough to hold a body by the neck from.¹⁶³ In addition, lynching is not limited to hanging someone by the neck, but it is an extralegal means of killing someone through a mob, which often involved mutilation. Even though lynching was used in North America during the antebellum period of slavery, it dramatically increased post-Civil War. In *Living With Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930*,

Koritha Mitchell writes on the ill logics that sparked the signal increase in lynching, “After the Civil War, when blacks were no longer property, there was no financial reason not to kill them...[t]his is...when lynching became ritualized murder.”¹⁶⁴ I would add that free Blacks also represented the Confederacy’s defeat and the fear that the same violence would be performed on Whites that Blacks experienced. What followed was “ninety-five years of what has been called the ‘Second Slavery,’ namely disenfranchisement, debt peonage, Jim Crow, and legally sanctioned official and private terrorism.”¹⁶⁵ Indeed, it was the combination of the latter sentiments and laws that increased White desire to reinforce social and economic dominance over Blacks throughout North America.

Folklorist, Patricia Turner, analyzes the anti-Black conspiracy present in the e-rumor concerning Timberland through a different rumor. She shares a rumor from an informant about the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) controlling an athletic wear company with intent to exploit his African American generation. This rumor hinges on the reality of Black people’s exclusion from and marginalization within the fashion industry.¹⁶⁶ Turner gives insight into the use of KKK as a narrativist device that signals the abuse of Black bodies. Turner discusses how conceivable the rumor is today when one considers the punishments that the KKK eluded for atrocities they committed against Black churches and civil rights workers in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁶⁷ The e-rumor around Timberland focuses on lynching as one of these atrocities. Similarly, Hank Willis Thomas makes use of this rumor and created an image, as seen in fig. 2.8, which remarks upon the relationship between the commoditization of the Black male athlete, figurative icons and social bodies, and the lynching “oak” tree.

Timberland, Johnny Walker, and Jordan

I first witnessed fig. 2.8 accidentally. I was attending a showing of Thomas' animated short in the *30 Americans* feature at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC in 2012. Deep into the exhibition, I entered a room where an exhibit of varying reproduced images of an identical Black man being lynched were to my left and basketball players dunking basketballs in nooses were on a digital flatscreen behind me. There was a display in front of me with a black and white animation; I put on the display's headphones. The animation began with the Jumpman approaching the Morton Salt girl. Johnny Walker appeared in the background while empty quote bubbles appeared above the Jumpman and the Morton Salt girl. Both the Jumpman and the Morton Salt girl wobbled off in opposite directions. The camera zoomed in to Johnny Walker and froze for a moment, emphasizing his disbelief and surprise in what he witnessed: a Black man speaking to a White girl. He then approached a large group of Johnny Walkers and a quote bubble appeared above his head with the image of the Jumpman and the Morton Salt girl inside of it, conveying what he saw. Many empty quote bubbles appeared above the other Johnny Walkers' heads, what seemed like expressions of outrage. The other Johnny Walkers moved in a sweeping motion to the left of the screen. The Jumpman was shown in the next frame wobbling along to the right. When the Jumpman saw the mob of Johnny Walkers coming his way, fearful for his life, he quickly wobbled off-screen to the left. However, he was too late and the Johnny Walker mob carried the Jumpman toward the right of the screen. The Jumpman was brought to an oak tree, represented by a Timberland logo, which already had a noose hanging from it, and was tossed into the

noose. The animation is how we arrive at the image in fig. 2.8, *Jordan and Johnny Walker in Timberland circa 1923 (Circa 1923)*.

Illustrating one of the atrocities that is synonymous with White mobs in ante/post-bellum North America, in fig. 2.8 Thomas creates an ad that illustrates how brands are conflated with social identities, and the idea that, “black success *attracts* the mob.”¹⁶⁸ Through the fabrication of a lynching, Thomas illustrates the power of figurative rumor to have evidentiary affects on material lives and challenges the dangerous way in which we associate business brands with real social bodies. He fabricates this violence through a short animation clip in which fig. 2.8 represents the final scene.

Fig. 2.8 displays three objects we know as brands: a silhouetted Michael Jordan (The Jumpman) jumping with legs outstretched and holding a basketball with one hand, which represents the brand Nike Air Jordan, a basketball shoe. It also displays a White man in mid-stride donning a top hat, two-tailed suit jacket, white breeches, black boots, and holding a walking cane, which represents the brand Johnnie Walker, a Scottish whiskey. There is also a silhouette of a huge tree, resembling an oak, which represents the brand Timberland, a clothing company. The Jumpman is hanging from a noose attached to a branch from the Timberland sign, while Johnny Walker is walking away from the scene of the crime. Objects, however inanimate, have politics that move and move them beyond their objecthood.

More than symbols of clothing and alcohol alone, in fig. 2.8 the three brands are proxies: The Jumpman for Black American men, Johnny Walker for White American men, and Timberland for the racist landscape that allows a lynching, between the aforementioned racial groups, to take place. Brands are raced in ways that not only

simplify the personhood of Black and White bodies, but have also made them, and the landscape that they occupy, into things. Not only does race and/or landscape become a commodity for sell, but it also becomes a “referent for other things, a doubled quality that centers it at the symbolic surround of consumer culture...[making] it possible to recall in half-consciously nostalgic tones the older image of the black body as desirable merchandise [and the White one as the purchaser or owner of said merchandise].”¹⁶⁹ The merchandising of bodies is a flattening process, one that is portrayed in fig. 2.8 and further revealed in the roots of the silhouette.

The silhouetting of Michael Jordan literally and figuratively united his masculinity with a business brand, making it a highly desirable commodity. Silhouetting, however, is an inherently reductive act rooted in the practices of European geneticists to make race more accurately identifiable. Guterl discusses some of the history of the silhouette, almost the epitome of simplified personhood:

The general and historic point of the silhouette, literally, was to focus on the trace outline of the face or the body, and to force the eye to attend to the edge. And through that concentrated focus to reveal, with an authority derived from our confidence in sight, the objectively revealed inner character of the subject, stripped of emotion and adornment...racial sight turns to the silhouette to reveal the desired truth to help establish clear identifications where confusion would otherwise reign... Just as that trio of craniometricians had desired, the silhouette is understood to be a reliable, honest piece of evidence, easily read and understood. In a set of bumps and ridges, peaks and swells, it reveals the outline of whiteness, or blackness, or brownness, and of race more generally.¹⁷⁰

The silhouette historically functioned as a way to simplify perceptions of race, thereby, referencing the outline of race avoiding the intricacy and nuance that lied within. While, in popular culture, the color of Jumpman silhouette of Nike’s Air Jordan IIIs is so

inhumanly red that it appears nonracial, its physique is still easily recognizable as Black because of Michael Jordan's global popularity and popular associations of Blackness with superior strength and athleticism. As much as silhouetting erases one background, it reveals another.

Not only does Thomas support the rumor that Timberland uses iconography from North American slavery traumas, not only do we see how European geneticists were foundational to the creation of the silhouette, but we witness an illustration of how rumor can materially affect Black bodies. The material affects on Black bodies include how they are perceived and how they are treated by others as a result of their perceptions. The animation from *30 Americans* cannot be seen as separate from fig. 2.8 as we reach its frame via what transpires in the animation.

For instance, in the short animation I was able to see how the interaction that Johnny Walker witnessed between the Jumpman and the Morton Salt girl was perceived as an assault on the girl and Whiteness itself, which is made possible through a combined belief in the myths of the Black brute, White women's inability to consent to any contact with Black men, and the purity of the White race and the contamination of the Black race. Johnny Walker heard something about Black men, which framed what he saw in the Jumpman-Salt girl interaction. Importantly, we see an illustration of how one performance of Black masculinity, the Black brute, gets virally (re)presented and (re)produced: one Johnny Walker tells the other Johnny Walkers about what he "saw." The word-of-mouth transmittal of a reductive image of Black masculinity incited Johnny Walkers, who did not even witness the Jumpman's interaction, to unanimously react with violence against something as pedestrian as greeting someone, asking for directions, or

flirting. This type of racism combined with the defense of White womanhood is what spurred the Rosewood massacre of 1923,¹⁷¹ which Thomas summons by dating the image “(Circa 1923).” Using the brands’ campaign slogans, “Just Do It” and “Keep Walking,” is a reminder of how words were used as mnemonic devices on postcards of lynchings to advertise and document the violence. The words are also a reminder of the neglect that was necessary by civilians, State, and local authorities to allow crimes such as lynching to go unpunished. The public display

Koritha Mitchell’s *Living With Lynching* uses lynching plays as archives to explore the identity-sustaining ways that African Americans read or acted out scripts about lynching that challenged popular conceptions about Black men as brutes. These plays also functioned to memorialize the dead, possibilities which popular lynching photographs had all but rendered invisible. Mitchell rightly posits that lynching photographs were taken from positions of privilege and safety during the egregious acts.¹⁷² This changes how we must look at the photo as an objective piece of evidence, and instead we must see the performance, which was captured, through a subjective (read White) perspective. Not to rule it out of the realm of possibility/punishment/humiliation, but certainly, they did not solicit an African American volunteer to take photos of the lynching of another Black body. Had they done so, the photographs may have resembled J.P. Ball’s, a Black photographer who empathetically photographed lynch victims, memorializing, rather than dehumanizing and objectifying them.¹⁷³

Through the narrative that brings us to fig. 2.8, Thomas calls attention to what else is being sold that is inseparable from the everyday brands that we consume. We are being sold the idea of the superiorly athletic Black male who, even when hanging from a

noose, can still hold a basketball (recalling the owned slave as a Black man). In proximity to this idea is the fear of the Black male brute, such an abnormally strong criminal that even by speaking to White women he has essentially raped them (recalling the leased convict as a Black man). We are reminded of White men who believed in the latter myths so deeply that they would rather kill such a man than allow him the possibility to transgress racial segregation or see him as a full citizen entitled with all of the constitutional rights and responsibilities, including presumption of innocence, pleading the 5th, right to a fair trial, the right to sue due to libel and slander, right to self-defense, etc. Lynched Black bodies were left in the public as disrespect and reminder that if anyone else followed a similarly rumored path the same would happen to them, a type of collective punishment.

Thus, before Black men's bodies are ever used in ads, they have already been branded, weighted with meaning and scripts that existed before their bodies arrived on the scene. As Matthew Pratt Guterl describes in *Seeing Race in Modern America*, the incessant focus on the unparalleled strength and athleticism of Black men has connections to the entertainment of larger non-Black audiences during slavery. As Nike replays the "slaveholding emphasis" on the intrinsic superior strength of Black athletes, they also resurrect its linking to the Black brute "whose strength was matched by his rapacious appetites."¹⁷⁴ Nike ads for Air Jordans rely on the racial (il)logic that attributes Blackness to strength and athleticism, two things that are attractive to people who are shaping their Black masculinity, notions that can be communicated through a gym shoe with a beginning in controversy.

Michael Jordan unveiled the Nike Air Jordan I on November 17, 1984 during a game against the Philadelphia 76ers, where they became available to the public shortly after. Once purchased, the shoes featured a hang tag from a photo-shoot of Michael Jordan slamming a basketball mid-flight on a Chicago street court with the city's skyline in the backdrop—his body in this photo was later silhouetted, becoming the “Jumpman” logo. The red and black Air Jordan I was worn by Michael Jordan against NBA Commissioner Michael Stern's wishes—saying they defied the Chicago Bulls' color scheme in their absence of white. As a result, he fined the Chicago Bulls \$5,000 every time that Michael Jordan wore them, with Nike paying for the fine. The suggestion of the performance here was that the shoes provided a competitive advantage that was well worth the fine, an appealing message to consumers that arguably sparked “sneakerhead” culture beyond Chuck Taylors.

On October 18, 1985, David Stern officially banned the shoes. Nike spun this controversial dilemma on its head in a commercial called “Banned.” The camera panned from Michael Jordan's head to his Air Jordan 1s, which were blacked-out of the commercial, and the narrator said, “[F]ortunately the NBA cannot stop you from wearing them.”¹⁷⁵ In “Banned,” Nike suggests that by wearing Air Jordan, one could also manifest themselves as an outlaw—something that a rebellious person could relate to, and like Jordan, could be superior to other players who followed the rules.

Already, Michael Jordan was troubling the vision of the NBA—considered an outlaw and uniquely athletic—things that were no stranger to popular notions of Black masculinity. In fact, his photo-shoot that was later used for the Jumpman logo took place in Chicago where he was literally rising to fame from an inner-city basketball court. This

location further associated an unfounded natural synergy between the inner-city, Black masculinity, and basketball, contributing to reductive ideas around Black authenticity. The Nike Air Jordan III was the first gym shoe to feature the Jumpman logo: a red silhouetted image of Michael Jordan performing a dunk. The Jumpman logo replaced the previous wings logo of the Air Jordan I and II and symbolized a merger of Black masculinity with a business brand, manifesting what Todd Boyd called, “[T]he individual-as-brand concept.”¹⁷⁶

The popularity of 1988’s Nike Air Jordan III benefitted from Nike’s general “Just Do It” campaign and the specific “Mars and Mike” campaign, both of which took Nike to new heights financially, garnering exponentially higher amounts than \$1,203,440 plus in revenue ever since.¹⁷⁷ The IIIs are the shoe that Spike Lee, in collaboration with Nike and Michael Jordan, first advertised. Lee appeared as the immature, diarrhea-of-the-mouth, Mars Blackmon from his 1986 feature-length film debut *She’s Gotta Have It*. In the film, he was a short and skinny bicycle courier and New York Knicks fan who donned a Brooklyn cycling hat, big black-framed glasses, a Hoyas shirt, shorts, folded white crew socks, a “MARS” chain and belt, and last, but not least, the Jordan Is. In the black and white commercial for the Jordan IV shoes, Blackmon, aka Jordan’s hype-man, asks him, “[W]hat makes you the best player in the universe?” After a barrage of guesses he says, “Money, it’s gotta be the shoes,” a memorialized statement that shifted a trope rumored to be intrinsic to Black bodies—superior athleticism—to shoes. Mars’ statement aligns the consumption of the Jordan iconography with a desire to wield the “natural” strength and prowess of Michael Jordan, the Jumpman, a proxy for Black men. This “natural”

strength, however, no longer came from Michael Jordan, but the shoes he wore, emphasizing the Js, not Jordan, as the embodiment of his undeniable talent.

Between the global advertising of Michael Jordan as an outlaw, an innately skilled athlete, and a legacy of sartorially-related shootings that plagued Black communities starting in the mid to late 1980s—coinciding with the release of his highly anticipated and overpriced shoes—the discourses surrounding Jordan and the violence over his shoes were made odd bedfellows. It reached a national tipping point and *Sports Illustrated* (SI), while neglecting their involvement in the proliferation of sports fashion ads directed at Black youth, felt that they had to publish a piece concerning the trend. The title of their May 14, 1990 issue was, “Your Sneakers or Your Life.” Their cover featured a Black hand holding half of a pair of Air Jordan V in one hand and a black revolver in the other. The news media also played their part, portraying these violent crimes and socializing the public to understand them as Black problems, ignoring structural and systematic issues around classism, racism and gender that also informed the acts.¹⁷⁸ Like viral bodies, Black youth were portrayed as a contagion to be quarantined.

The beginning of Rick Telander’s *SI* article from “Your Sneakers or Your Life” captures a story about Micahel Eugene Thomas, who was killed for Air Jordan shoes on May 15, 1989. His murder was indicative of the material dangers of merging corporate brands with social identities. Telander writes,

Thomas loved Michael Jordan, as well as the shoes Jordan endorses, and he cleaned his own pair each evening. He kept the cardboard shoe box with Jordan's silhouette on it in a place of honor in his room. Inside the box was the sales ticket for the shoes. It showed he paid \$115.50, the price of a product touched by deity. ‘We told him not to wear the shoes to school,’ said Michael's grandmother, Birdie Thomas. ‘We said somebody might like them,’ and he said,

‘Granny, before I let anyone take those shoes, they'll have to kill me.’¹⁷⁹

While the price tag was important, to Michael Eugene Thomas, Jordans had meaning beyond it; they contained an evolving goal, something almost unattainable, yet worked toward and protected with his life. Catherine A. Coleman discusses the violence over, and consumption of, Js and how social meaning is inextricably tied to it: “The brand-name goods were the trappings of inclusion. These symbols represent something meaningful for those wearing them, whether it is status through the ability to buy or status through inclusion.”¹⁸⁰ Through the inseparable linking of the Nike Air Jordan brand with a globally recognized Black masculinity, a high markup and resale value, and limited production, Js have become synonymous with an authentic and youthful Blackness that symbolizes superior physical ability and durability, a unique and limited style, and class ascendance—factors and qualities that many young Black men would be reluctant to give up as well as desperate to attain.

Importantly, we can begin to understand the slippery ways that viral discourses and performances construct the ways in which we understand bodies. Thomas takes the individual-as-brand concept¹⁸¹ and, using the Jumpman logo, illustrates how the individual—read as brand—becomes a synecdoche for the group and, thus, a means to merchandise and index Blackness. Leigh Reiford uses the term “hypericonizing” to think about how Angela Davis’ image from the 60s and 70s, which appeared on posters, flyers and buttons, urging for the charges of murder and conspiracy against her to be dropped, was solidified into a thing that was mobile, sellable, and fetishized, divorced from its structures of feeling and historicity, and circulated among public culture.¹⁸² These “communities of resistance” were succeeded by “communities of consumption.”¹⁸³

Indeed, the public (re)presentation and merchandising of Black bodies can be the essence of racial and gender malpractice where codes of Black bodies are over/underdetermined for the sake of selling product.

The first section of this chapter, critically examined slave ship Brooks, how its image became viral and iconic of slavery itself, and how both aural and visual performances of rumor and bodies' positions affect the meanings of the bodies in the picture and vice versa. An examination of Willis's image, *Absolute Power*, which altered the image of slave ship Brooks, also considered how unfolding issues like alcoholism, which go beyond just stereotypes, became rumors that attached themselves to Black bodies as symbols of masculinity, femininity and mechanisms of coping with the everyday. This section uses Thomas' image to think through the many people involved in the commerce and consumption of Black bodies. Lastly, I used this section to think through the relationship between commodities and the transformation of Black bodies into things, or "thingification." Through Thomas' photo of a gold chain titled, *Ode to the CMB: Am I Not A Man And A Brother* I examine the seal on the bottom of the image of slave ship Brooks and what it means when race, gender, and commerce are in the foreground. In many ways, "thingification" is the first step in marketing products, the branding of ideas. Whomever does the thingifying significantly determines the subject's scope of meaning. For example, the meanings of the subjects within the mass-produced image of slave ship Brooks expand, with Thomas as the architect of the image, adding to their complex personhood and the "things" worth paying attention to, revealing that "thingification" is not absolutely pejorative.¹⁸⁴ We also see how the modification of viral material actually gives it longer shelf-life, so to speak.

The second section of this chapter explored branding and its residue, what is left after the pain or the pleasure of grafting a mark into the body: the keloid, the scarring of actual and figurative tissue. Using the (once) popular rumor of the Nike symbol as the unfolding action of a slave whip as a lens to understand Thomas' images, I consider the raced and gendered implications of his photos, *Branded Head* and *Scarred Chest*. Here, I also challenged the history associated with the branding of Black bodies in the United States by thinking through what it means to choose to brand oneself, using the rituals of Black fraternities discussed by Sandra Mizumoto Posey in her essay, "The Body Art Of Brotherhood," where she interviews select branded, never-branded, and branders of the Omega Psi Phi African American fraternity.

Considering literal and figurative branding, the final section reflected on the relationship and conflation between fabricated icons used to sell products by businesses and the real bodies that are both present, absent, and criminalized in those images. I explored how the icons of certain brands such as Johnnie Walker's man with a cane (referred to by Thomas as "Johnny Walker"), Morton Salt's umbrella girl, and Nike's "Jumpman" in particular, come to represent and be associated with raced and gendered bodies. The bodies represented by logos carry historical narratives that continue to haunt them as bodies in the present, with the Jumpman unable to escape the history of the silhouette, which is steeped in early constructions of race.

Hank Willis Thomas illustrates the productive and reductive ways in which we can carve meaning into visual things, to illuminate and unveil, as well as to create larger, systemic issues and concerns. By using traces of the reductive ways that Black bodies were seen, he reconstructs, if not their wholeness, their complexity. Importantly, some of

those reductive ways of seeing still remain and haunt us in the present. Thomas' conceptual photography is, indeed, a haunting—this contact with the painful, difficult, and unsettling to overcome.¹⁸⁵

Our participation as producers, performers, and spectators is what makes an average performance a viral one—an act, a behavior, which ceaselessly surfaces to the vanguard of our popular consciousness. The outcome of viral performances of Blackness in popular culture then, is that their frequency places them in the vanguard of people's consciousness, but the personhood of human (Black) beings, as a result of this frequency, is repeatedly simplified. Indeed, this flattening happens in multiple genres and cultural contexts. Surely, the ideas of the Black body also have a worldwide recognizability in history, literature, art, film, and cultural and political discourse as a significant referent. However, the ways in which the Black body is used as a conduit for criminality, the locust of deep-seated fears, and as noise—which we will witness unfold in the following chapter—cannot be underwritten.

Chapter 3, I Can't Live Without My Radio: Viral Performances of Black Masculinity in Film and Everyday Life

After the photograph/image, yet, before the television and the Internet, the radio was used to communicate messages of pleasure, emergency, and politics to a wide audience. This communication happened broadly, very quickly, over a short time—elements crucial to viral performance. In this chapter, close attention is paid to the viral performances of and around Black masculinity in relationship to the radio boombox within the viral mechanism of mass-distributed film. Looking specifically at Radio Raheem's performances in Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* allows me to examine a virtual moment that reflected the material ways Black men performed and were conflated with a conduit for sound, namely, the boombox; as well as a point in history that helped to carry Black sound, and thereby a Black imagining, across the country.

Radio Raheem's story, in many ways, reverberates when reflecting on two highly visible moments in the recent past when (young) Black men's lives—i.e. Eric Garner (2014) and Jordan Davis (2012)—were taken by police or civilians. There are indeed, semblances between how Radio Raheem is killed, via police chokehold, and the circumstances under which his death happens, playing music loudly, and the latter Black lives. Viral performances (playing music loudly or using excessive force to subdue Black bodies) occur around the viral mechanisms of distributing *Do The Right Thing* through cinemas, VHS, and later DVDs. All of these factors carve out rich acts through which to continue my theorization of viral performance, particularly in relationship to Black masculinity.

The title, I can't live without my radio, is a gesture towards LL Cool J's (Ladies Love Cool James) 1985 hit "I Can't Live Without My Radio" from his debut album

Radio, which featured a massive portable tape deck radio—known as the boombox—on its cover: the JVC RC-M90 as seen in fig. 3. The title begins to explain the pleasures and dangers in the inextricability between mobile conduits of boisterous sound and Black male bodies, particularly in the mid-1970s to mid-1980s.

DJ/Radio host, Stretch Armstrong noted that the cover of the record was “the pinnacle of the boombox.”¹⁸⁶ The album established Def Jam as a record label and the boombox generally helped to popularize Hip-Hop music, which radio hosts generally did not to play in the 1980s. Both the boombox and LL Cool J’s debut album, thus, are foundational when one considers the commercial success of Hip-Hop music. LL Cool J’s song helps us understand the function of the boombox in this chapter as a weapon and



Figure 3. LL Cool J, *Radio* (New York: Def Jam Recordings, 1985).

instrument of social interaction, autonomy, and entertainment—in some senses it was Blackness: easily dismissed as visually/sonically noisy, so loud it leaves you with no choice but to feel it, a visual and sonic attachment to and embodiment of the self that was both a blessing and a curse.

In “I Can’t Live Without My Radio,” Cool J articulates how inextricable his radio is from his daily personal and cultural life as well as how dangerous it is to wield in 1985 as a broadcasting vessel. He raps, “Walking down the street / To the hardcore beat / While my JVC vibrates the concrete...Press play everyday / Even on the subway / I would have got a summons / But I ran away...See people can’t stop me / Neither can the police / I’m a musical maniac to say the least.”¹⁸⁷ Through his lyrics, one can imagine the feeling that comes from playing a boombox out loud in public spaces—JVC vibrating the concrete. One also hears the ways in which it is a part of everyday life—pressing play everyday. Importantly, one will realize how the pedestrian uses of the boombox had been criminalized by 1985—would have got a summons but he ran away. The performance of playing a boombox in public was seen as extremely important and pleasurable as Cool J obviously would risk police encounters to do so. The criminalizing environment around playing music loudly from a boombox in the mid-1980s made those who did so seem maniacal, “musical maniac[s] to say the least.”¹⁸⁸

Music producer and sound track supervisor George Drakoulis recalled a moment that touched on the pleasures of playing a boombox in public. Drakoulis was working with Def Jam and picked up a case of product for the *Radio* album. Seeing two kids carrying a radio half of their size, Drakoulis stopped them and insisted that they take a cassette of *Radio*, they cautiously took the tape, put it in their radio, and the first track

they played was “Rock The Bells.” Then, one kid took the entire radio that they had carried between them and, with all of his strength, hoisted it onto his shoulder and walked away no longer acknowledging George, smiling. From that moment, George knew that the album would be great.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, many others such as Lisa Lisa, Rosie Perez, and DJ Eclipse would express a similar pleasure in being able to blast a song that they liked whether it be in a small park, on the block, or in the apartment/house and it did not have to be Hip-Hop. This was the high point of the boombox as a mode of being.

However, as with any pinnacle, a nadir is soon to follow. Despite the pleasure that the boombox generated, the criminalization of playing a boombox in public spaces virtually disappeared it from public practice, and thus production, by the late 1980s. The reduction in the pedestrian use and availability of the boombox is a reality that one would not realize upon viewing Spike Lee’s film, *Do The Right Thing*, where the figure of Radio Raheem was important to Lee’s fictional Bed-Stuy (short for Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn) neighborhood.

Radio Raheem becomes an exemplary case study for exploring another nuance of viral performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life: the mutation of life into art and art into life. Raheem was not the first, or the last, Black man to carry a boombox on his side or shoulder, yet, due to the mass filmic production and news buzz around *Do The Right Thing*, he became the exemplary referent for that performance—even more so than LL Cool J. Also, throughout *Do The Right Thing*, Radio Raheem’s sonic and visual dissonance in White spaces are so inseparable that his boombox acts as a device that brings our attention to the loudness of Black masculinity. Raheem represents the disruption of the sounds and looks of normalized Whiteness. He possesses a volume,

timber, and vividness of color whose recognition leads to the increased surveillance and subduing of his, and other Black men's, unmuted presence. Radio Raheem points to Black men who have played their radios loudly for pleasure, emergency, and political reasons; additionally, he conjures Black men perceived as so powerful, that their decibels, inseparable from their race, are a threat to the peace of Whiteness and the livelihood of White bodies.

This chapter will critically examine the socio-cultural role of Radio Raheem within *Do The Right Thing* from the function of his boombox to his interactions with different (groups of) characters throughout the film and how he is continually (re)presented in everyday life and popular culture. In this analysis, close attention is given to the racial associations between Radio Raheem and his music, the film's fascination with him as a sized (large) figure, and how virtual associations and perceptions materially affect his body. I also consider how his cosmopolitan Black masculinity challenges the perceptions of his body and how his Blackness sounds.

The first section of this chapter will trace the early material uses of the radio in the U.S., how the radio became the boombox, and the interplay between Black and Brown uses of the technology and its production. This analysis assists in understanding the political tensions that spawned the use of regulated radio, how deregulated radio contributed to the performance of playing music from boomboxes loudly outdoors by Black and Brown communities, and how pedestrian use of the boombox reflected conceptions of private/public space and eventually led to its demise.

Behind the scenes, Radio Raheem uses his boombox's rewind, play, and stop buttons continually throughout the film, sonically and conceptually forming a seemingly

undying performance of Black masculinity that continues to loop long after he leaves the scene. Using the buttons featured on the boombox as tags, “rewind, play, stop, and fast-forward,” the second section uses the said buttons to organize the varying performances of Radio Raheem in everyday life, film, and popular culture. This second section uses content and performance analysis to examine four different facets of Radio Raheem’s viral performances of Black masculinity in *Do The Right Thing*: 1) his performativity; 2) how his character and the assertion of his space comes into being through repetition and amplification; 3) the viral use of excessive force to subdue Black bodies; 4) how Radio Raheem is repeatedly resurrected, even after his figurative death, in popular culture and everyday life. By performance, I am considering the body itself—its gestures, speech, and stylized expressions, the social means in which ideas are created around Black men’s bodies, the sociocultural context in which the performance is taking place as well as being interpreted from, and how the bodies of different audiences (do not) react to viewing the performances I examine.

“Rewind” will discuss Radio Raheem’s referents (such as Joe Radio and Raheem Abdul Muhammad) as people and characters that emerged before the Radio Raheem that we come to know through researching him in *Do The Right Thing*. Representing the paths that Radio Raheem has traveled before, they are useful in imagining how his predecessors handled everyday life and racial politics as well as their belonging in Black communities and imaginaries.

“Play” will explore Radio Raheem’s interactions with other characters in *Do The Right Thing*. Through this exploration I think through how Radio Raheem’s Black masculinity not only belongs to the block, but also goes beyond it as an expression of

cosmopolitan Blackness. I use Radio Raheem's cosmopolitan Blackness to interpret how he sounds, not only as an expression of leisure and enjoyment alone, but as a counter to the forces of anti-Black racism and White entitlement that surrounds him and his Black and Brown neighbors. Indeed, these forces perform their loudness in a different, systematic, and more veiled way that requires one to turn their volumes up to be heard in a small way.

“Stop” uses Radio Raheem's final social and physical interaction with Sal to begin indexing the viral use of excessive force to subdue Black bodies. Different from the forms of viral performance that I have explored so far, the viral use of excessive force to subdue Black bodies has to do with how Black bodies act as visual and sonic things that instruct other bodies in how to deal with them. This instruction, however, is based on rumor and mass-produced video and images that distort the complex personhood and human fragility of Black bodies, distortions that lead to excessive surveillance and overestimations of strength and danger. The use of “Stop” is also my own appeal to cease the viral performance of excessive force for the wellness of (Black) bodies everywhere.

The final section, “Fast-Forward,” surveys the mutations of Radio Raheem in popular culture and everyday life. Using examples such as Huey Freeman on *The Boondocks* and a Nelson Mandela poster design competition, I examine Radio Raheem's outdoor mobile use of the boombox on the shoulder and in the hand as a viral performance of Black masculinity, carrying and transforming meaning as the contexts he travels to change. I also use Eric Garner's and Jordan Russell Davis' stories as real life anecdotes to examine the viral use of excessive force to subdue Black men's bodies in relationship to how they sound, which is inseparable in many ways from how they look.

Radio Raheem is an exemplary popular culture case study through which we can understand the racial and gendered politics of playing music, particularly through a portable sound system such as the boombox, in public spaces. Indeed, he became the most recognizable figure that represented Black men's innovative uses of the boombox. What becomes a product of this viral performance is a stock character in the Black and public imaginary: the Black male boombox-wielder in the streets. The repetition of this figure in everyday life and popular culture made him legible. Raheem's cosmopolitanism in the film, however, articulates a certain extracultural understanding that travels beyond the block inasmuch as it communicates an intracultural understanding that fixes him to the block where his Black masculinity is grounded. The tension between the extra/intracultural make him illegible in many ways. Mark Anthony Neal discusses Black masculinity and cosmopolitanism in relationship to the character Stringer Bell from HBO's *The Wire* and how his cosmopolitanism—how he is seen as a citizen of the world—was largely illegible in the context of the masculinities articulated on the block. Similarly, I argue that Radio Raheem, and many other Black men that allude to him, (in)voluntarily perform cosmopolitanism broadcasting a sort of performance that disrupts the norms of their perceived masculinities. The radio, as ancestor to, and component of, the boombox, is also crucial to perceiving Raheem's articulation of Black masculinity throughout *Do The Right Thing*.

The Radio

Radio programming has changed significantly since the second and third decades of the twentieth century from a more locally-focused source of news and entertainment to a more syndicated and nationally-focused source. I am particularly concerned with the

trend that destroyed the connections between radio stations and the local communities that had access to and control of them, which Charles Fairchild has referred to as “deterritorializing the radio.” The deterritorialization of the radio is a useful device in determining how the radio’s use by everyday people has changed between the radio boom and the late-80s, understanding the market forces of broadcasting (de)regulation, and how this affected Black men’s ability to express themselves through the medium of radio.

April 10th, 1912, *Carpathia* responded to the distress calls of the *Titanic*. The monumental disaster of the *Titanic* colliding with an iceberg and losing over three quarters of its population spawned a number of regulations, wireless communications being one of them.¹⁹⁰ In an effort to prevent such a disaster from occurring again, from the Radio Act of 1912 until the Radio Act of 1927, radio stations were mandated to obtain a federal license to broadcast, which was controlled by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Among many of the guidelines for possessing a license was that if a distress signal was received, it would be prioritized before any business, news, or entertainment for the public good. This was the beginning of the radio’s widespread use: forewarning people of impending danger so that appropriate measures could be taken to make sure that everyone involved was safe.

The only caveat to the government “regulation” of broadcasting was that, then Secretary, Herbert Hoover could not deny broadcasting licenses to any person or corporation. He could only choose the wave length that would result in the least interference and penalize violators of federal regulations, in other words, his hands were tied.¹⁹¹ Unlimited licenses over limited frequencies created too many competing stations for the same signals. Radio congestion ensued.

In response to the dissatisfaction of audiences and broadcasters alike, the Radio Act of 1927 was established, which limited the amount of licenses that could be issued and that it was responsible for. The Radio act of 1927, which, after it was abolished, established the Federal Communications Commission, restricted the amount of stations one corporate or individual entity could own.

In the late 1920s both the home radio and the fireplace were central social areas for entertainment and competed for families' attention throughout North America. People spent as much time fiddling with the radio as they did with the fireplace logs. They did this to achieve the most relaxation and audiovisual entertainment.¹⁹² The downsizing of radio helped it to become a common console in the American home; it became more ergonomic, disguised as desks, lamp stands, and small tables, blending technology with multipurpose use.¹⁹³ The combination of the radio with standard furniture veiled "the machine," then considered as an intrusion of the home.¹⁹⁴ "...[When] radios began to appear in American homes, music no longer was confined to one or two rooms. Victorian attempts at room specialization were gradually overridden by efforts to draw the family together and to simplify room arrangements and decor."¹⁹⁵ The radio played an important part in the collapse of private-use and public-use rooms within the American home, which were separated according to Victorian notions of the home as a sacred space.¹⁹⁶ The collapse in public and private space was an early glimpse into how the function of the radio evolved as it became more mobile.

For many Black Americans, public and private were already collapsed because homes had either historically been unable to be owned or afforded due to racial bias in home lending¹⁹⁷ or were vulnerable to egregious intrusions, such as raids, due to legacies

of racism forged in slavery and the Second Slavery experienced in post-emancipation.¹⁹⁸ Victorian notions of the home as a sacred space had to be rethought by Black Americans, creating sacred spaces in locations that were both public and private, sometimes carved out by music, prayer, and ritual. The distinguishing factors between public-use and private-use rooms, thus, decreased in Black households.

In 1920s Chicago, the early uses of the radio were predominantly by the working class.¹⁹⁹ Retailers and radio journalists were aware that workers would construct their own radios or antennas as a hobby.²⁰⁰ Workers would strive to get the maximum signal distance out of their homemade devices. Listening to the radio was an active communal event whereby in eighty-five percent of the homes families listened together.²⁰¹ The “basement clubs,” “social clubs,” or “athletic clubs” were spaces that second-generation young people would frequent to escape parental supervision and socialize to a blaring radio in the backdrop.²⁰² Thus, in contrast to bringing the family together, sometimes the radio separated it by generation.

Ethnic groups in Chicago understood the radio as a means to keep their people in touch with native culture. Until the arrival of broadcast deregulation, the radio continued to have a longstanding relationship with local communities. Since the passage of the Communications Act of 1934, the enforced regulations of early broadcasting insured that small, local, noncommercial radio stations dominated the airwaves because no more than one person or entity could own a station providing the same service in the same community with a limit of five stations per owner—the 5/5/5 rule.

The deterritorialization of the radio turned regulated broadcasting into free market broadcasting. Free market broadcasting is a type of *laissez-faire* approach to

broadcasting that involves less government regulation of corporate ownership of broadcasting stations and prioritizes more emphasis on the economic power the broadcasting industry. Public preference is assumed to be measurable by audience listenership or viewership without considering how an audience's preferences are informed by that which is broadcasted to them.²⁰³ As a result, there was a gradual increase in the corporate ownership of AM, FM, and TV stations over twenty years, from 1953 to 1974, from 5/5/5 rule to 7/7/7 rule. Then, within ten years, in 1985 it almost doubled to allow a 12/12/12 rule. Approximately seven years after that, in 1992, it more than doubled to allow a 30/30/30 rule. Four years later, by 1996, all limits were virtually eliminated via the Telecommunications Act.²⁰⁴ Companies, particularly Clear Channel, would go from "owning forty stations in 1996 to 1,240 in 2003."²⁰⁵

Coinciding with the rise of the radio's deregulation from 1975-1996 was the creation and wide distribution of the boombox, which tapered off in the mid-'80s. Just as the radio played an important role in collapsing public and private space within the home, the boom box, or what Radio Raheem calls his "box," would play an important role in collapsing public and private space outside of the home due to its portable nature. Whereas the radio was fiddled with as much as fireplace logs (in the home), the boombox became what Andre Torres—the editor of *Wax Poetics*—called "the sonic campfire," an outdoor creation of a space to congregate and exchange stories and feeling through the body and sound.²⁰⁶

Unlike the transistor radio, which was portable, had smaller speakers, and was only able to receive AM/FM frequencies, the boombox was able to do this and it also featured a tape deck—allowing its users to choose the audio that they broadcasted, with a

superior sound quality, and amplification ability. In the midst of increasing singular corporate ownership and control of radio stations and what they could broadcast, was a device that allowed anyone to broadcast—while not as far-reaching as the radio—anything they wanted as loudly as their speakers would permit. Indeed, it was this inability to have a semblance of control in the music that one listened to that was part of the intrigue of the boombox, which featured a tape deck that allowed one to broadcast whichever tape e²⁰⁷ had. In the mid-to-late ‘70s, Hip-Hop music gained popularity through people playing in their boomboxes what radio DJs and personalities refused to broadcast on commercial radio.²⁰⁸

The production of boomboxes began in Japan. Here, living space was smaller in relationship to most North American cities and, when it came to home stereos, there was less room for the larger component systems that appeared in North American homes.²⁰⁹ Initially used as a device to assist the next generation that were living in smaller urban dwellings, the unexpected popularity boombox delivered a new frontier of audio technology.²¹⁰ While boomboxes were created in Japan out of the need for a large stereo sound in smaller living quarters, when they appeared in the U.S. in the mid-1970s, they became popular with African American and Hispanic youths in a different way—often hoisting them onto their shoulders or holding them by their handles as they walked down the street blasting music.²¹¹ The transportability of the boombox and its advanced tape deck made it easy to share and create music in ways that had not been performed as loudly and as pedestrian as before. The stop and rewind button were crucial controls, allowing users to repeatedly listen to and broadcast their tapes anywhere and anytime that they wanted, untethering the stronghold of radio programming, and contributing to their

viral use—sharing tape recordings and loudly playing music/speeches outdoors. Between the mid-70s and mid-80s the production of heavier, bigger, and louder boomboxes increased alongside advancements in audio creativity and consumer demand.²¹²

Indeed, the mass-production of thousands of models of boomboxes is connected to their viral stylized use by Black and Brown youths. Mechanical production interplays with socio-cultural production, the two informing each other of how to exist in ways that neither of them could do on their own. The need for bigger and louder boomboxes was, indeed, influenced by shoulder/hand-carrying youths who blasted music from the box into the streets. Similar to the wide availability of the radio early on, which produced a crowding of the airwaves, Rosie Perez described situations where the widespread use of the boombox was a nuisance and, when played in areas that were too tight, would cause “conflicting music,” with too many people playing different music at once.²¹³

The increased pedestrian use of the boombox also led to its demise. As a result of complaints from residents across various northeastern states ranging from Massachusetts to New Jersey, in the mid-80s more city officials began to create and enforce punishments for people that played excessively loud music in public. These punishments would range from \$50-\$1000 fines, impounded radios, and/or imprisonment. One can also imagine how these punishments disproportionately affected youths of substantial color, who began using the boombox in a way that, “wasn’t meant for you to walk down the street with...”²¹⁴ Many also link the phasing out of the boombox to advancements in mobile technology such as the Sony Walkman and Discman, the plastic and quieter boombox, and Apple’s iPod—all devices that maintain music’s mobility, yet, privatize its sound. Without assuming that privatized sound is an improvement over public sound, one artist,

Tyler Gibney, credited the recent mobile music technology, which contributed to the boombox's demise, with creating listeners who "advertis[e] their unavailability for social interaction."²¹⁵ Other ways of broadcasting music, messages, and news had to be sought by Black and Brown people that affirmed and asserted our, what Anita Gonzales refers to as, "Black sensibilities,"—stylized ways of being in relation to each other and our environments."²¹⁶

Before arriving at what some of these other ways are, I will continue exploring the fiction of Radio Raheem that brings the meaning of the boombox to life in a way that the form and function of the object itself cannot. As Paul Mullins states in *Race and Affluence: An Archaeology of African America and Consumer Culture*, "The physical attributes of an object, systemic function, and intended use loosely circumscribe the symbolic possibilities of that object, but for the most part form and function do not impose particularly profound limitation on meaning."²¹⁷ The fiction of Radio Raheem gives us a lens into the meaning of his respective instrument, not only to him, but also his respective community. The character of Radio Raheem brings the tensions between Black men and the radio/boombox as an essential medium of being, communication, and expression to an apex in popular culture. In many ways, his boombox served the function of early regulated radio: forewarning people of impending danger so that appropriate measures could be taken to make sure that everyone involved was safe. His anthem, "Fight The Power," was an emergency broadcast not typically considered a priority in normal states of emergency.

Rewind: History of Radio Raheem in Everyday Life and Popular Culture

Rewinding is a mechanism that gives one the ability to reverse something that was on a forward path. After an analog tape ends, in the absence of an auto-reverse mechanism, rewind is the button that, once pushed, allows its user to begin at an earlier point. It is a means to travel back in a moment in time, often to recover something to enjoy or better understand in the present.

Radio Raheem, contrary to popular belief, was not a creation of Spike Lee. In fact, he began as a real person from Spike Lee's childhood—this guy that everyone in the Cobble Hill neighborhood of Brooklyn called Joe Radio. In the mid-sixties, Lee discusses how Joe Radio would stand on the corner with a small transistor radio, virtually attached to his shoulder. Joe Radio would be playing WMCA Good Guys or WABC featuring Cousin Brucie 24/7.²¹⁸ Importantly, understanding Spike Lee's recollection of Joe Radio, and the way in which he was never without his transistor radio, we begin to see the seeds of how inextricable the radio was to expressions of Black masculinity and identity within Black communities—with everyone calling him Joe Radio, his transistor radio was him. Lee's memory of Joe Radio emerged decades later as the character Radio Raheem in *Do The Right Thing*.

The first time that a Raheem with a radio appears in popular culture is not in *Do The Right Thing*, but almost a decade earlier on *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) at the end of 1980. I found this out while perusing my twitter feed in 2011 and seeing one of Chuck D's (@MrChuckD)—part of the Hip-Hop group Public Enemy—tweets. On September 22, 2011 he wrote, "Eddie Murphy broke through on a skit on SNL in 1980 as a character named Raheim (sic) & ended the skit with a giant BOX player that jarred the cast."²¹⁹

Chuck D is referring to when Murphy played a Black basketball player named Raheem Abdul Muhammad who was invited to an interview on an SNL comedy sketch named “Weekend Update.” He was being interviewed for weekend sports by Joe Piscopo about a fictional scenario in which a judge in Cleveland ruled that all Cleveland basketball teams must have a minimum of two White players. The scenario is a sarcastic blow to the notion that basketball is a Black sport, so Black (and Black supremacist) that there is systemic discrimination against White players. A racial quota is proposed as a resolution to the racial bias. Raheem, the interviewee, wore an afro and donned a black and yellow varsity jacket. Piscopo asks him, “What’s the story Raheem?” Poking fun at the stereotype of a dumb Black athlete, Raheem begins, “I been a junior at Cleveland high going on seven years now.” He continues on a rant about racial appropriation:

We ain’t got much, I say at least let us have basketball. Is nothing sacred? Anytime we get something going good, y’all got to move in on it. In the sixties we wore platform shoes, then y’all had to wear platform shoes. In the early seventies we braided our hair, then in the late seventies y’all had to braid yo’ hair. Now it’s 1980, we on welfare and by the end of the next year, y’all gon’ be on welfare too. [Camera does a closeup on his face in the midst of rampant audience applause]. I don’t see a judge saying that every two bathroom attendants got to be White. All I’m sayin’ is that y’all stay on the hockey courts and the polo fields and let us stay on the basketball courts. ‘Cause if God wanted Whites to be equal to Blacks, everybody’d have one of these [he pulls a huge boombox from underneath the table and places it in front of him, as seen in fig. 3.1, as he glares with lips pursed unintimidated by the camera in front of him or the news anchor to his right].²²⁰



Figure 3.1. *Saturday Night Live*, “Weekend Update,” Season 6, Episode 3, Produced by Jean Doumanian (New York: Time Life Video, 1980), Photograph, June 10, 2013.

The SNL satire amplifies issues around intellectual property and cultural appropriation as much as it questions the possibilities of those notions. Everything that Raheem names as something going good that Whites move in on can be traced to Eastern European (i.e. platform shoes and welfare), or Eastern Asian (i.e. the boombox) origins, with braids as the only exception; the subtext being: no performance is original enough for anyone to claim ownership to.

Raheem Abdul Muhammad’s satire also exposes the flaws in current notions around affirmative action and colorblind approaches to solving systemic racism. When Murphy suggests that no one is trying to create racial minimums for service jobs—one of the few sectors that affirmative action benefitted on behalf of Blacks—it stands as a critique to anyone who espouses “reverse racism” within opportunities that create significant increases in class and social mobility, but would not raise equal concern for

positions that offer less significant class and social mobility. Important for this project, and indicative in Murphy's statement about the myth of racial equality, is the notion that the boombox is an essential part of the material lives of Black people, Black men, and Black masculinity in particular.

"Weekend Update" exemplifies how comedic performance can make sense of how technology produces a way of understanding concepts, ideas, and even individuals and their cultural background. What Murphy does by saying, "if God would have wanted Whites to be equal to Blacks, everyone would have one of these (boomboxes)," brings our attention to how signature this musical instrument was to Black life. The common occurrence of, or association with, Black men in everyday life using boomboxes in the mid to late-1970s and 1980s to play music outdoors cannot be understated. Discussing this interplay of technology with identity, Tara Rodgers explains that varying forms of embodiment became constituted in forms of audio technology as well as what they were called.²²¹ Indeed, these boomboxes came to be known as "ghettoblasters," dangerously associating Blackness and Brownness with a given ghettoness (or loudness/noisiness/ability to disturb) and the specific ways in which Black and Brown people, particularly Black American men, used boomboxes that differed from White norms. The boombox, called the "blaster" here, becomes interlaced with homogeneous neighborhoods possessing severe barriers to exit, what is known as the ghetto.²²² "Weekend Update" was an exemplar of this connection in comedic performance.

The SNL episode represents the indexing of Raheem in popular culture and everyday life as a disruptor of White norms as he puts America's racial perceptions on blast and takes over the news interview. Importantly, it sets the stage for his rapid

ubiquity in popular culture henceforth as Radio Raheem, troubling, or pleasuring, visual and aural fields with Blackness and the boombox. Using his speech for political critique, his boombox as a part of his identity and as a device to amplify affect would be represented in *Do The Right Thing*'s Radio Raheem, forever the reference to Black men carrying their boomboxes in the streets. Thus, while Radio Raheem was not the first Black man to carry a boombox, he would become the most recognizable Black man carrying a boombox, a result of the viral mechanism of distributing film—mass-producing moving images able to be viewed nation/worldwide.

Aurally, the name Raheem evokes African American and/or Arab maleness. In the U.S., it is a commonly used name for Black men. Choosing the name “Raheem,” Murphy is purposefully aligning himself with Black maleness and masculinity in the U.S. He uses, “why did He give *us* this,” (emphasis mine) in an attempt to identify with/as a collective. While his position as the talking head for Black folk is problematic, Murphy is tapping into a performance that was so widespread in the mid-70s and 80s that it could be called viral. With the advent of the boombox in the mid-70s, Black folk were not the only ones blaring audio loudly outdoors, but they potentially coined, and certainly popularized, the carrying of the boombox on the shoulders and in public; thus, making it fashionable and functional.

It is the point at which the radio²²³ becomes portable in the form of a boombox—this potentially clamorous conduit of sound, controllable in terms of the user's agency to choose the song he or she plays (i.e the cassette tape)—and also audible to the extent of its ability to carve out a loud and mobile aural sphere²²⁴ that the boombox as a weapon and an instrument is possible, which will be further explored through Radio Raheem's

interaction with characters throughout *Do The Right Thing*, the destruction of his boombox, and the varying forms of Black masculinity that refer back to Radio Raheem long after the film is over.

Play (Loudly): Radio Raheem in Do The Right Thing

Play is a button on a boombox that can be pressed to listen to its corresponding audio material. It is a verb that denotes performance through the participation in an activity either repeatedly or ephemerally. To play is to compete against, or counter another player's actions. To play is to represent something theatrically or on film. Importantly, to play, is to engage in leisure activity. By pressing play on a boombox and loudly broadcasting the sounds, Radio Raheem activates the latter, repeatedly producing opportunities for social interaction, critical thought, and enjoyment.

Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* takes place in a fictional 1989 Bed-Stuy on Stuyvesant Ave. between Quincy Ave. and Lexington Ave., it's 100 degrees outside, and considering the steady deregulation of radio from 1975-1996—culminating in the Telecommunications Act,²²⁵ as well as the crack epidemic of the 1980s, this Bed-Stuy community seems more fictional than real (i.e. no visible signs of crack users/houses,²²⁶ a Black radio personality playing Black artists of his choosing, and impeccably clean streets). Thus, the previous examples of how the radio was used in different locales and times adds insight, as opposed to anachronism, to the already disorienting nature of this fictional work of art. However, the racial tensions that the movie conveys are no less real than they are today, especially with the history of redlining and gentrification in urban areas occupied by Blacks.²²⁷

The neighborhood is largely Black, containing not only African American residents, but residents from elsewhere in the African Diaspora. It is also noticeably multi-ethnic with American descendants from southeastern Asia, Italy, and Latin America. There is much tension between, on one hand, the younger and older generations of Black people who recognize that there are no Black-owned businesses, and on the other hand, the business owners,²²⁸ the Italian and southeast Asian descendants of Bed-Stuy. Racism, space, and entitlement to space are important issues at the crux of many of the conflicts in the film.

Following a scene where ML, Coconut Sid, and Sweet Dick Willie were being surveilled by police slowly driving their police car past where they all were sitting, ML disappointingly and angrily goes on to “break it down” to the two other Black men as they sit on chairs outside: “A mothafucking year off the mothafucking boat and...[the Koreans] already got a business²²⁹ in *our* neighborhood, a good business, occupying a building that has been boarded up for longer than I care to remember.” ML recognizes the neighborhood as a Black neighborhood, albeit one with increased police surveillance and without Black businesses—which begs the question why this is so.

Coconut Sid replies, “It’s got to be because we are Black.”²³⁰ Ain’t no other explanation.” Coconut Sid garners a cultural explanation that points toward structural issues of systemic racial discrimination as central factors in Black disenfranchisement. It is as George Lipsitz sarcastically asserts in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, ““We [financial institutions] can’t give you a loan today because we’ve discriminated against your race so effectively in the past that you have not been able to accumulate any equity from housing and pass it down through the generations.””²³¹

ML responds, “I will be one happy fool when we open our own business right here in our neighborhood. I swear to God I will be the first in line to spend what little money I got.” Then Sweet Dick Willie says mockingly, “You know you mothafuckas always talkin that Keith Sweat shit *I’m gon...* you ain’t gon do a goddamn thang, you hear me, but sit ya’ll monkey ass on this corner. But I’ll tell you what *I’m gon* do, you hear me. I’m gon go over dere and give them Koreans some more of my money. The fuck out my goddamn way it’s Miller time.” From the tensions raised here, we can already see issues concerning redlining, gentrification, and marginalization that are haunting and disillusioning Black residents whose issues are not heard. Indeed, these are racial emergencies that are not considered priorities, which lead to disasters of titanic proportions.

In this fictional microcosm of the world we live in whose anti-Black racism is so loud, yet cloaked in silence, *Do The Right Thing* uses Radio Raheem to elucidate a way of asserting one’s self in the world by being heard loudly. Radio Raheem, then, not only captures Lee’s fantasies for Black cosmopolitanism amongst Black men, but also the way in which Black men carrying boomboxes was already a viral performance. He executes the viral performance of masculinity that was “Play (loudly), Stop, Rewind, Play (loudly)” — this repeated act of playing his favorite song through his boombox, this act that makes it so that every time you see him, you hear him as though his song never stopped, as though the performance was seamless. It was a performance that Raheem returned to so many times, he became known as Radio Raheem. Throughout *Do The Right Thing* he is never without his black and red Tecsonic Promax J-1 Super Jumbo Audio box with kente cloth rapped around the handle for added cushion, leather red,

green, yellow and black Africa medallion over his “Bed-Stuy Do Or Die” t-shirt, LOVE and HATE gold knuckle duster rings, camo shorts, and Nike Air Revolutions.

A couple of scenes were telling about the relationship between the Black and Brown youth in *Do The Right Thing* and Radio Raheem and all of their relationships to boomboxes. In the midst of a different kind of viral performance of Black city-youth, we are brought into a scene where the teenagers from the neighborhood scrape cans on the sidewalk to remove the lids. As the camera pans out, there is water gushing out onto the street and girls standing and playing in it with their shoes. One of the older Black teens—Ahmad—excitedly opens the fire hydrant and another teen—Punchy—uses the lidless cylinders to control the current of water as it gushes out of the fire hydrant to soak everyone. We hear “Fight the Power” at the same time that we see Radio Raheem. Cee taps Punchy on the shoulder, “It’s Radio. Radio, man.” Punchy and Cee respond, “What’s up Radio!” Raheem readies himself to walk past the teenagers who immediately recognize him from the block, reading him as familiar, even as he stands out, almost estranged from the rest of the adrenalized teens.

He does not need to say anything, but expresses, in his demeanor seen in fig. 3.2, that they need to relax and allow him to pass without getting wet. As a sign of respect to Radio Raheem, Cee and Punchy sit on the hydrant to repress the water.



Figure 3.2. Spike Lee, “Radio Raheem Bites Lower Lip,” *Do The Right Thing*, directed by Spike Lee, (1989; Universal City: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2009), Photograph, August 2, 2014.

The same respect is not given to the proceeding

Italian passerby, Charlie, as a child on the block yells out, “You ain’t got no business in this neighborhood anyway!” Punchy blasts Charlie with water despite his insistence that, “there’s going to be a lot of fuckin’ trouble if you get this car wet.” The police arrive and officer Long turns the water off, disrupting an act that took the youth beyond the smothering heat of the block. The water, like sound, is something that penetrates the illusion of indoors and outdoors, an assertion that the block did not belong privately to anyone. After the man and his convertible are soaked, the implication is that as much as one tries to create this notion of private space, everything is always already outdoors and public.²³²

Through the behavior of the Puerto Ricans, and particularly the Blacks, in *Do The Right Thing*, one can see that both groups compete for dominance in the aural sphere through their music. In one scene, Mookie, dedicates a Salsa song titled, “Tu y Yo,” by Ruben Bladés, to his Latina girlfriend, Tina. The Puerto Rican men sitting on a stoop

enjoy the broadcasted song and are playing it on top of a car out of their small boombox. Radio Raheem stumbles upon their music session. Instead of asking them to turn their music down, which recalls moments where expressions of Black and Brown bodies are attempted to be muted, Radio Raheem turns the volume up on his box. All the men on the stoop are enraged by the aural encroachment and one of them yell, “I want to listen to my Salsa music!” While holding the rest of them back, Steve yells to the group, “Chill!” He then shouts to Radio Raheem, “You think you got it like that bro?” In support, his friends yell, “blow it away!” Steve proceeds to increase the volume of the Salsa music. As seen in fig. 3.3, Radio Raheem confidently increases the volume of “Fight The Power.” Unable to compete, Steve, as seen in fig. 3.4, turns his volume down and disappointingly concedes, “you got it bro.”



Figure 3.3. Spike Lee, “Radio Raheem Turns Up The Volume,” *Do The Right Thing*, directed by Spike Lee, (1989; Universal City: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2009), Photograph, August 2, 2014.

The competition that Raheem engages in with the Puerto Rican men playing Salsa



Figure 3.4. Spike Lee, “You Got It Bro,” *Do The Right Thing*, directed by Spike Lee, (1989; Universal City: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2009), Photograph, August 2, 2014.

music is a nod to the material uses of the boombox in Black and Brown communities.

Not only is playing it as loud as possible a performance of masculinity, and a general form of entertainment, but when Raheem wins, he experiences a sudden victory over the racial tensions in the community. This victory was signaled not only by the peaceful exchange, in which the loudest sound system got to play, or him throwing his fist into the air, but by the little Black boy that runs up to him and gives him a five. While the material use of the boombox—using it for competition and playing music loudly—harmonizes him with the block, possessing the loudest sound system is a source of enjoyment that takes Raheem beyond the block, connecting him to a larger aural ethics unlimited by the confines of racial discrimination, gentrification, and radio deregulation. The respect displayed between him, after turning his music up louder, and Steve who turns his

boombox down and concedes, “you got it bro,” speaks to the type of cosmopolitanism of which Radio Raheem is a part of, one that revolves around an aural ethics where sound systems and belief systems interplay. The loudness with which he plays “Fight The Power” is just as, if not more, important as the lyrical content it contains. The loudness, as well as the content, is an assertion of a Black public sphere.

Expanding on the idea of Jürgen Habermas’ public sphere²³³ the Black public sphere is defined by the Black Public Sphere Collective first as a critical social imaginary.²³⁴ This imaginary “draws energy from the vernacular practices of street talk and new musics, radio shows and church voices, entrepreneurship and circulation.”²³⁵ They continue, “It marks a wider sphere of critical practice and visionary politics, in which intellectuals can join with the energies of the street, the school, the church, and the city to constitute a challenge to the exclusionary violence of much public space in the United States.”²³⁶ Radio Raheem’s cosmopolitan Blackness represents this merger where the energies of the street and the intellectual can converge into an explosion of sound, an articulation of the Black public sphere. Radio Raheem’s blasting of “Fight The Power” as an assertion of a Black public sphere will, in and of its boisterous self, fill in a silence that Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere generated: the possibility of a public sphere that is created by those who are or have historically been propertyless or considered as property.

Not only did Radio Raheem create, or add to the notion of, a Black public sphere, but he also deconstructed the notion of private and public. If we use the earlier example of the Victorian-influenced Americans using their radios within the home—which Habermas considers as inextricable from the private—we can begin to understand the way in which Radio Raheem, and perhaps the Black public sphere, deconstructs the

private. By taking the radio, the boombox in this instance, out of the home and onto the streets, Radio Raheem converges the private with the public sphere, thus, revealing the interdependence/changeability of each sphere. I read Radio Raheem's music as creating a counterspace to the exclusionary violence of restrictive public/private spaces. As critical theorist Nancy Fraser reminds us, "Virtually from the beginning, counterpublics contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternate norms of public speech."²³⁷ His sound system was, indeed, his belief system, which emphasized a broad vision of social interaction and dialogue aimed at fighting oppressive authority through song, or as Chuck D so eloquently raps in "Fight The Power," "swingin' while I'm singin'."²³⁸

In the beginning of the movie, Sal's eldest son, Vito, plays music so loudly in his headphones that he cannot hear his older brother, Pino, give him directions. Nonetheless, no one except for Vito could hear the music. This scene represented a different kind of aural sphere for the ways in which it privatized what could be heard, affecting no one but the individual, closing Vito off from social interaction with his family or the block. Yet, Sal did not try to subdue Vito's sound or ask him to turn his music off. This contrasts greatly with the type of aural sphere that Radio Raheem conveyed when he blasted his music, which encouraged social interaction (or conflict) instead of disallowing it, affected more than Radio Raheem, and interacted with and enlivened the block.

Following a scene where Public Enemy's "Fight The Power" is blasting in the background, Radio Raheem turns his volume down to greet Mookie and conveys a metaphorical boxing match between love, which was engraved in his right knuckle duster ring, and hate, which was engraved on his left knuckle duster ring. As seen in fig. 3.5,



Figure 3.5. Spike Lee, “It’s A Devastating Right and Hate Is Hurt,” *Do The Right Thing*, directed by Spike Lee (1989; Universal City: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2009), Photograph, August 4, 2014.

love wins after hate
is “on the ropes.”
Radio Raheem,
relaxing his face and
smiling, told
Mookie, “I love you
bro.” It resembled a
scene from the
movie *Night of the*

Hunter where Reverend Harry Powell, a serial killer that marries women and murders them, discusses the story of right hand left hand, the story of good and evil, illustrating it with the tattoos of the letters g-o-o-d and e-v-i-l on his fingers engaging in a hand-wrestle where love wins, as seen in fig.

3.6. He explicitly revealed, perhaps for the first time in the film, his knowledge beyond the block. His (re)presentation of a scene from a 1955 black and white film aligns him with a cosmopolitan Black masculinity that stands out from popular



Figure 3.6. Charles Laughton, *The Night of the Hunter*, directed by Charles Laughton (1955; New York: Criterion Collection, 2010), Photograph, July 20, 2014.

conceptions of Black men in the streets. Raheem’s monologue is very much a disruption of the performance of the boombox-blasting intimidating troublemaker that he may have

established thus far. Exposing this deeper side of his personhood is the only time that he voluntarily turns his volume down.

The notion of the interplay between sound systems and belief systems clashes both times that Raheem encounters Sal. Interactions between Raheem and Sal are points in the film where the disagreements between White and Black performances of aural space reach the apex of their conflict. Radio Raheem's music is sonically revolting—both in the resistance it incites and celebrates as well as for the dis-ease it creates in Sal's aural sphere.

Raheem walks directly into the next scene, he turns his volume up, hardens his face, expressing a stoicism, and the camera pans out as he opens the door to Sal's pizzeria. He calmly says, "Two slices." Sal loudly asserts, "No service 'til you turn that shit off!" He continues, "Turn the shit off...you are disturbin' me, you are disturbin' my customers [even though the customers, who would mostly be Black, show no signs of being disturbed]!" When Radio Raheem stops his boom-box, Sal continues, "You come into Sal's, there's no music, no rap, no music, no music, no music. Capisce? You understand?" Raheem's first interaction with Sal involves a concession of his music for a slice of pizza. We see how Sal's interpretation of Raheem's aural sphere is framed as a disturbance. Sal further defines his own aural sphere in a relaxed tone to Raheem, "you come into Sal's, there's no music, no rap, no music, no music, no music. Capice? Understand?" Sal establishes that the parameters of his aural sphere are framed by an absence of music, insulated from the consonance and dissonance of the blocks that surround him, benefitting from the currency of Blackness without being affected by its currents.

In the last scene of the film, Radio Raheem and Buggin' Out partner together and visit Sal's famous pizzeria together. It's night time. In classic L-cut fashion, we hear Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" and see the expressions of distraction and disbelief on the faces of the Black customers and Sal's sons before we ever see Radio Raheem or Buggin' Out. Radio Raheem's music blares out of his box, "Fight the Power!" as Buggin' Out Spits on Sal's floor as seen in fig. 3.7.

Ignoring the display of disrespect from Buggin' Out, Sal angrily asks, "What'd I tell you about that noise?" Sal's question reveals how he sincerely feels about Raheem's music, beyond disturbing him or his customers, it's noise. Buggin' Out says, "We want some Black people on that mothafuckin wall of fame NOW." The wall of fame featured



Figure 3.7. Spike Lee, "Fight The Power...Spit," *Do The Right Thing*, directed by Spike Lee (1989; Universal City: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2009), Photograph, August 7, 2014.

famous Italian-Americans such as Frank Sinatra, Al Pacino, and Joe DiMaggio. Instead of focusing on representation in the form of Black businesses as ML from the older

generation had earlier, Buggin' Out focused on visual recognition on Sal's wall of fame. In the midst of so many signs of Blackness—Buggin' Out's outfit of Jordan IVs, leather red, black, and green Africa medallion and wristband, and kente shorts and shirts, Smiley selling photos of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a Mike Tyson mural—Buggin' Out desires tokenism, aka the wall of fame, instead of robust economic involvement.

Sal angrily responds to Radio Raheem, "Turn that jungle music off we ain't in Africa!" For him, this music has a racial tone, timber, and cadence suggesting that there is race in wavelength, a seeing and a being that happens and comes forth in sound. Sal evokes widely circulated notions about Black bodies, as well as the continent of Africa, as primitive, wild, and uncivilized and attaches those bigoted notions to the music that Raheem plays. Sal also, inadvertently, reveals how he conceptualizes his aural sphere, and indeed Whiteness, as civilized and tame. I read this scene as Sal emphasizing the inseparability of "cultures of visualization" from the "construction of sonic meanings."²³⁹

Buggin' Out attempts to refocus the argument to issues of Black representation, "Why it gotta be about jungle music? Why it gotta be about Africa? It's about them fucking pictures!" Sal disagrees, "It's about turning that shit off and getting the fuck outta my place!" For Sal it is about regaining control of his aural sphere, which has been infiltrated by Radio Raheem's sound system. Radio Raheem barely opens his mouth this whole time and yet he dominates the point of the argument like his sound does the aural space, which belongs to no one. Sal's son, Vito, yelled, "Radio Raheem!" to which Radio Raheem replied, "fuck you!" Sal inserted, "and fuck you too!" Radio Raheem continues and screams at Sal, "this is music, this is my music!" Here, Radio Raheem challenges the

ease with which Sal is dismissive of his music; he also claims ownership of it in the midst of so many things in his neighborhood that were not owned by Blacks. In response, Sal yells, “fuck your music!” Radio Raheem then hoists his boombox on Sal’s counter and challenges, “well turn it off then.” Buggin Out adds fuel to the fire and screams, “We closin’ you guinea bastards for good...until you get some Black people on that motherfuckin’ wall of fame!” Deeply offended by the threat to close him and the racial slur, Sal grabs his bat and responds, “You fuckin’ close me? You Black cock sucker. I’ll tear your fuckin’ nigger ass! You Black cock sucker! You nigger motherfucker!” and then, as seen in fig. 3.8, proceeds to smash Radio Raheem’s box with a wooden baseball bat.



Figure 3.8. Spike Lee, “You Nigger Motherfucker,” *Do The Right Thing*, directed by Spike Lee (1989; Universal City: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2009), Photograph, August 10, 2014.

Amidst everyone silently standing in disbelief, Sal confirms, “I just killed your fuckin radio.”

Stop: Radio Raheem and the Viral Performance of Subduing Black Bodies

One presses the stop button to cease all leisure, competitive, and representative activity that ensues when one is allowing something to play. After stopping, one may never play again, refusing to engage further with what they already experienced by playing. To stop means to have had enough. To stop limits the possibilities of what lies ahead. It is also a moment where everything that preceded is reflected upon and taken in, a sort of praxis in preparation for what will follow when one resumes activity.

Sal's confirmation is not just aimed at Radio Raheem, but also at the young Black patrons from the community who, in addition to Radio Raheem, took ownership of the boombox because the music was for everyone who could hear it and affirmatively feel it. None of the insults made Radio Raheem get physical, but seeing his boombox destroyed coupled with Sal's confirmation of its destruction prompted him to choke Sal both inside and outside the pizzeria, saying, "You don't fuck with my box!" By destroying Raheem's box, Sal destroyed (an important part of) his belief system, he destroyed a counterspace to the exclusionary violence that residents in his neighborhood experienced including disproportionate police surveillance, which excluded them from belonging in their own neighborhood, to redlining, which excluded them from getting loans to buy property in their neighborhood.

The entire neighborhood gathered around for the fight between Radio Raheem and Sal on the sidewalk in front of the pizzeria. Amidst the Mayor (nickname, not occupation) yelling, "Break it up!" and Pino yelling, "You're gonna kill him," Raheem kept his hands wrapped around Sal's neck—his life literally between the LOVE and HATE knuckle duster rings on Raheem's right and left hands.

Eventually the police arrive and perform the subduing of Raheem. Officer Long—the same police officer that turned off the water earlier—chokes Raheem with his police baton, an act that, since 1993, has been banned (even though barely enforced) by the NYPD.²⁴⁰ The point at which Raheem stops resisting, officer Long continues to choke him as though he was no longer choking another human, but his fear, to death. The camera zooms in to Raheem's feet, which were kicking as though he was being hung by his neck and gasping for air. This recalls scenes of mob violence to Black bodies, yet, instead of a voluntary White audience, an involuntary Black and Brown audience mainly witness this lynching.

Recognizing fragility where the police officers only see brute strength, Coconut Sid yells, “God damn it! You’re killing him. Let him go!” even though “Radio Raheem”—as the Black man whose boombox was an extension of his being—had already been killed by Sal when he destroyed his boombox, unable (or perhaps uninspired) to live without his radio. Raheem's lifeless body is dropped onto the sidewalk, his right hand with the knuckle duster ring that reads “LOVE” sits just as lifeless in front of his face. Instead of calling for an emergency medical technician, a Latino policeman—officer Ponte—kicks Raheem's side, screaming, “Quit fakin' it!” as if to suggest that Raheem's brute strength and goliath-like appearance was too great to be subdued by a baton chokehold—an unfortunate perception of Raheem's Black body that (to them) justified their use of excessive force. To conclude the performance of subduing Radio Raheem, the officers all act as though Raheem is still alive as one of the officers almost whispers, “Get him to the car,” to hide their indiscretion from the rest of the community. The police then leave with Raheem's body in the backseat of their car while

the neighborhood—including the male Korean storeowner—trail the car on foot as long as they can in a sort of concern for what the police did to him.

Enraged Black and Brown people, at this point, surround Sal's place. Punchy yells out, "He died because he had a radio!" Cee bursts out, "Damn man! It ain't safe in our own fuckin' neighborhood." Coconut Sid replied, "Never was. Never will be." Sid's revelation signals his experiences of residential insecurity as an older Black person and how he is disillusioned about the possibility of attaining a secure neighborhood as a result. Ahmad angrily asks, "You see how they had him in a choke hold man? I know that choke hold. It kills people, man." I read Ahmad's knowledge of the choke hold as a repeated murderous act that he has seen more than once, an enactment of the viral performance of subduing Black bodies. This aggressive practice cannot be divorced from viral performances of Black masculinity in popular culture. Indeed, some of the very things that incite a police officer's aggression toward Black bodies (and the bodies of their allies) are views of Blacks as inherently well endowed, superhumanly strong, and possessing rapacious appetites for sex, violence, and criminality that emerged from rumors and mass-produced images of them. This reality around representation drives home Buggin' Out's earlier insistence of being represented on the wall of fame.

Mookie throws a garbage can through Sal's window and the neighborhood breaks out in a looting of Sal's famous pizzeria. Their actions may seem extreme if Radio Raheem's death was isolated, however, to index it in the subduing of so many other Black bodies helps us to read this scene as a tipping point in the community, the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. The camera shows the top of the outdoor windows of Sal's Famous Pizzeria. They are embroidered with the words, "Pizza Heroes Calzones

Sausage,” suggestive here not only of the food that will be lost to Bed-Stuy, but its heroes as well.

Fast-Forward: The Mutation of Radio Raheem in Popular Culture and Everyday Life

Fast-Forward brings one to the most present performance of a recorded act. Fast-Forward allows one to skim through things quickly so as to survey them as opposed to capturing every element. One can also hear how, even through the distorted pitch of the original act, winding almost out of control, the performance remains in the loop. Every fast-forward on one side of the tape rewinds the other side, producing a concurrent going back and forth in time.

Radio Raheem—just as the Black boombox-wielders that he referenced—proves to be an undying performance of Black masculinity. The way in which Radio Raheem survives and is revived in the popular imagination and Black popular culture signals his meaning in African American communities as a folk hero of sorts.²⁴¹ Radio Raheem’s character, indeed, continues to be performed and retold in Black popular culture. It is as though people refuse to accept his death, or maybe identify with what he represented: the insistence to hear and be heard; also, how he was perceived—as a disturbance, unarmed, yet, dangerous—continues to coexist.

For instance, the adult cartoon *The Boondocks*, which is based on the comic strip of the same name and follows the unfolding drama/life of the Freemans—a Black family that moved from Chicago’s South Side and settled in the fictional White suburb of Woodcrest, MD—(re)presents Radio Raheem’s narrative on an episode titled, “The Block is Hot.”²⁴² During an unusual winter heatwave, “hotter than the barrel in Dick Cheney’s Gun,” Huey Freeman (a fictional version of Huey Newton as a child), walks out of his

aluminum-sided house dressed in a P-coat and scarf, while he plays Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" from his boombox, which looks like his suitcase.

Fig. 3.9 briefly illustrates the beginning of this scene. As the music blasts, White people are exercising (running and walking) and walking their dogs—acts that have become rapidly ubiquitous with White privilege, entitlement, and leisure. Riley (Huey's brother) re-animating Punchy's character from *Do The Right Thing*, opens up the fire hydrant, attaches a can to its opening, and aims it across the street to his White neighbors' dismay, yelling, "C'mon everybody, what you waitin' for!" Huey highlights the differences in race, class, and dense cities versus sparse suburbs inherent in Riley's performance, reminding Riley, "White people have pools!" Amidst all of this, Uncle

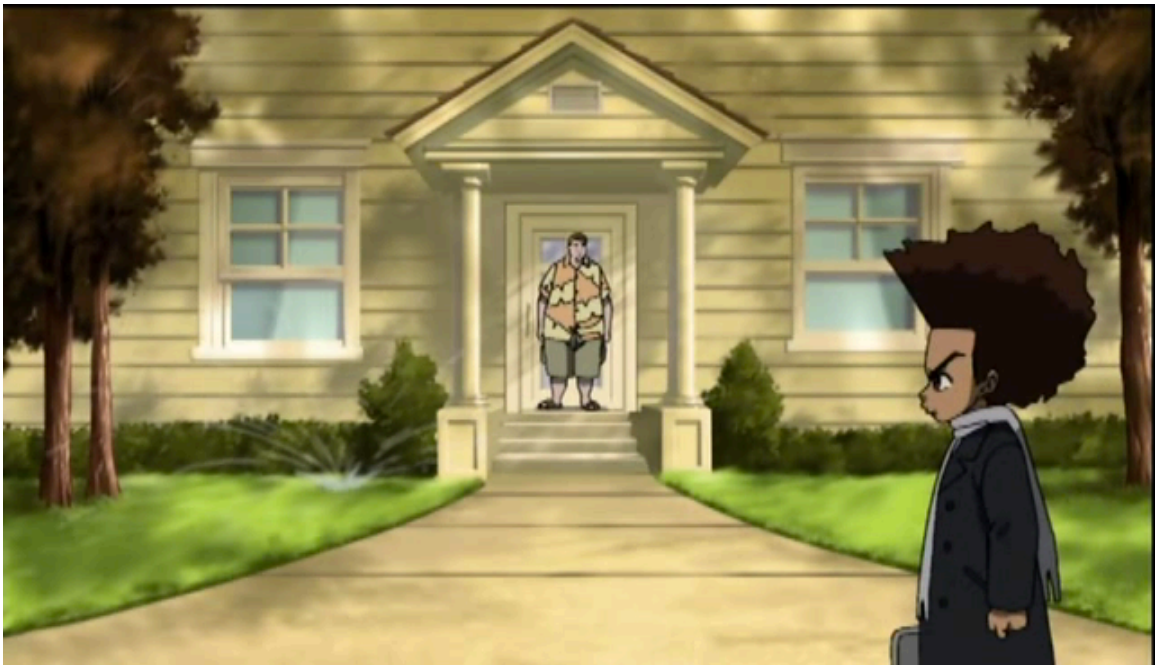


Figure 3.9. "The Block Is Hot," *The Boondocks*, directed by Calvin Lee (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2006), Photograph, 25 July 2014.

Ruckus (a Black White nationalist) tells Riley, "You quit playin' with the White man's water boy," and the tells Huey to "Turn off that goddamn Black-African-Congo-jungle

noise!,” emulating both officer Long—to a lesser extent—and Sal—to a greater extent—as an African American. Uncle Ruckus then calls the police on Riley only to ironically be mistaken as the threatening Black male he, in fact, identified on the scene. After he pulls out his wallet to show identification, an officer yells, “Gun!” and everyone shoots at Uncle Ruckus who responds, by disidentifying with Blackness, “Wait, not me, I got Indian in my family.” The policeman’s reaction signifies on the notion of Blackness as arming, a visual embodiment that alerts one of the presence, or potential, of a threatening weapon. As a viral performance of Radio Raheem, *The Boondocks* not only repeats his narrative with signal difference, but it expands and reduces its meaning, giving us a short satirical glimpse into what could unfold by taking Radio Raheem into the modern suburbs.

In Hip-Hop music, Radio Raheem is often mentioned in the first verse. He is often revered for the way in which he stood up against the polarizing forces of anti-Black racism, White entitlement, and asserted an unapologetic loud expression of himself that was not concerned with outward gazes. For example, the first verse of the song, “Pump up the Volume,” by The Cool Kids begins with,

“Feel like summer '89 in Do The right Thing
Got a big ass radio walking down the street
With the Spike Lee Nikes on Buggin’ Out the streets
Hand full of gold rings like Radio Raheem...”²⁴³

This group—consisting of Chuck Inglish and Mikey Rocks—born in the 1980s, is interested in bringing the eighties back and evoke Radio Raheem’s memory to do so.

Here, Radio Raheem is not only an index of the Black men who blasted radios in the streets that came before him, but the decade of the 1980s itself.

Radio Raheem is referred to again in the first verse of the song, “Good Morning” from Kanye West’s third album, *Graduation*, which is part of a three-album series that uses school—dropping out, registering, and graduating—as a theme. He raps, “I mean did you ever see the test / You got Ds mother fucker Ds!”²⁴⁴ In his verse, West recalls the situation where Radio Raheem’s boombox stopped due to low batteries and he communicated his need for D batteries, expressing, “Ds mothafucka...Ds!” to the Korean store owners who did not understand him. Kanye West, however, evokes this scene to explain a school report card, referencing Radio Raheem after he debuted fifteen years earlier.

J-Dilla’s posthumously completed album *The Shinning* featured a reference to Radio Raheem on the song titled, “E=MC².” In the second verse, Common raps, “Since the early 80s / I rocked the planet daily / Radio Rasheed / This is how I do when I write things / The party for your right to fight scenes.”²⁴⁵ Here, Common merges his and Radio Raheem’s identity into one, “Radio Rasheed,” identifying with him as someone who travels the earth executing great parties and concerts, which are loud by nature. Playing on the title, *Do The Right Thing*, Common uses the homonym “write” to explain how he writes things as a Hip-Hop artist that resemble his latter lines. His line, “The party for your right to fight scenes” blurs the lines between leisure activity and political resistance, recalling the idea of singin’ while swingin’ from Public Enemy’s “Fight The Power.”

In Hassan Mackey and Apollo Brown’s *Daily Bread* album, Mackey raps on a song titled “Tell Me,” “They say the music is too loud but / Radio Raheem’s thing / Is

keeping Hassan attached to his dreams.”²⁴⁶ I read his lyrics to suggest that the loudness at which he plays his music, which he associates with Radio Raheem—indicative of audacity, boldness, and courage—resounds with Hassan more than those who would desire him to reduce his volume. It is this freedom of expression that inspires him to pursue his goals in life.

In the realm of visual art, a South African and Zimbabwean self-taught artist, graphic designer, activist and contemporary illustrator, Sindiso Nyoni (aka R!OT), submitted a cut-out design called *The Boxer*, as seen in fig. 3.10, for the Mandela Poster



Figure 3.10. Sindis Nyoni, “The Boxer,” 2013. From: “Sindiso Nyoni on Behance,” *Behance*, accessed July 18, 2013, [http://www.behance.net/gallery/The-Boxer-\(Mandela-poster-project\)/9346799](http://www.behance.net/gallery/The-Boxer-(Mandela-poster-project)/9346799).

Project. The project was intended to honor Nelson Mandela’s lifelong contributions to humanity. In the image, which merges Nelson Mandela’s features with signature elements

from Radio Raheem, Nyoni gives Mandela a high-top fade, a boombox on his shoulder, illustrates the words “Fight The Power” in the corner and creates a gold knuckle duster ring on Mandela’s fist that reads “Uthando,” which means love. It gestures toward the way in which love defeats hate, part of both Radio Raheem’s and Nelson Mandela’s ethos. His design made it into the final 95 out of 700 submissions. Here we witness Radio Raheem’s cosmopolitan Black masculinity being communicated transnationally by an artist who sees a similar strength, courage, and love in the late international figure in the fight for humanity—Nelson Mandela.

More recently, in 2014, Chicago’s D.S. Wentworth Elementary featured an installation dedicated to Radio Raheem. Figure 3.11 is a photograph of said installation



Figure 3.11. Avery R Young, “Black Wall 2 (for Radio Raheem),” 2014. From: D.S. Wentworth (Phillips Rm), *Facebook*, accessed June 14, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10204149982254402&set=a.1245464901356.2037791.1371394407&type=1&relevant_count=1

titled, “Black Wall 2.” Students led by teaching, visual, and performance artist Avery R. Young, used images and texts to examine Hip-Hop context, culture, and audience.

Children born over a decade after the popularity of *Do The Right Thing* are not paying homage to Mookie who indecisively threw the garbage can through Sal's window, or the elders like Mother Sister who watched over the neighborhood or The Mayor who drank beers and protected the neighborhood in his own way, but Radio Raheem, who lived to loudly express himself and resist placation; who died because of how he was popularly perceived—a superhumanly strong, Black, and dangerous disturbance to the peace.

In a more haunting representation of Radio Raheem's legacy, July 18, 2014, Spike Lee posted an unlisted YouTube video titled, "NYPD Puts Deadly Chokehold On Staten Island Man," visually and sonically drawing parallels between Eric Garner's and Radio Raheem's deaths.²⁴⁷ I did not include a still from the video because Spike Lee did not publicly list the link, meaning that one had to actively click the link to see it rather than passively or unintentionally have it play through a Facebook feed and trigger unnecessary psychic trauma. Lee mainly used a cutaway filmic technique that sharply goes back and forth between the scenes leading up to and including Eric Garner's and Radio Raheem's deaths to bring attention to their similarities. Both of the Black men had the air choked out of them at the nexus where their Black and Brown neighbors saw surrender and the sense of emergency dissipated and White police saw a loud, sized, and superhumanly strong Black man, characteristics that they considered as life-threatening. A difference is that, unlike Raheem, Garner was not physically threatening anyone; yet, his resistance to being touched by police officers who did not announce that they were arresting him and, harder to prove, his Black masculinity, provoked a similar deadly response to subdue his body—a response where even the fight for breath is considered as resisting arrest.

The routine nature of the deadly responses to both Garner and Raheem is difficult to separate from the racial fantasies and indifference toward Black life of the NYPD officers. Both men, due to systemic stereotypes about their Black masculinity, were already criminalized before the police officers arrived on the scene, instructing the officers in how their bodies were to be handled. Almost like agents from the criminal justice agency “Precrime”—an agency from Philip K. Dick’s science fiction novel, *Minority Report*, that punishes people for crimes before they are committed—police officers apprehended both of these Black men in deadly ways that their actions did not call for.²⁴⁸ Blackness, then, becomes the false, yet believable, evidence of crimes that will be committed by Black bodies who, “‘If allowed to remain free [or alive], will at some future time commit felonies [or misdemeanors].’”²⁴⁹

As many other people and concepts throughout the film, Radio Raheem existed long before he arrived on the scene and, as such, persists long after the scene ends.²⁵⁰ Whether it was as Joe Radio, Raheem Abdul Muhammad, or the keeper of the drum—using the beat for every aspect of existence: creation (life, harvest, and celebration) and destruction (war and death),²⁵¹ Radio Raheem was a synecdoche for them. His death was also the consequence of the viral performance of excessive force to subdue Black bodies.

Indeed, in the final scenes of *Do The Right Thing*, Steve, who conceded to Radio Raheem earlier in the film, shouts out, “It’s murder. They did it again, just like Michael Stewart.”²⁵² His assertion, “They did it again,” is crucial to an understanding of viral violence—this incessant doing again that, through repetition, becomes the natural and inhumane way of subduing Black bodies. The repeated (lack of) consequences that police²⁵³ (and civilians) face for using excessive force to subdue Black bodies instruct

“them” as much as the viral violence toward Black bodies that they witness. A Black man then shouts out, “Murder. Eleanor Bumpurs. Murder!”²⁵⁴ What begins to emerge are citations that reference the unnecessary and egregious killing of Black life in order to subdue Black bodies. If characters from the fictional neighborhood continued, they would inevitably arrive at our present moment, yelling out names like Latasha Harlins, Renisha McBride, and Ayana Stanley-Jones, Mike Brown, Trayvon Martin, and, of particular relationship to Radio Raheem’s death, Jordan Russell Davis.

Fig. 3.12 titled, “Radio Jordan,” is an image that manifests certain feelings that I had both when I first heard about Jordan Davis, the mistrial, and during the “loud music trial” of Michael Dunn. Already doing work on Radio Raheem, Jordan Davis’ encounter haunted me as a frightening instance of life imitating art. It was specifically the mistrial, however, that ultimately inspired the production of “Radio Jordan.” Ta-Nehisi Coates’



Figure 3.12. Radio Jordan, (Photograph by Gabriel Peoples), February 26, 2014.

reflection on the mistrial after his interview with Jordan Davis’ mother captures the unwritten rules that were implied in the court that day. Coates writes, “...the killer was

convicted not of the boy's murder but of firing repeatedly as the boy's friends tried to retreat. Destroying the black body was permissible—but it would be better to do it efficiently.”²⁵⁵ My feelings centered on the interrelationship of viral performances of Black masculinity and the viral performances of excessive force to subdue Black bodies.

Similar to the way in which Radio Raheem's music was deemed as more disturbing than Sal's racial slurs, more violent than Sal killing his radio, or how Raheem's perceived brute strength and criminality outweighed officer Long's judgement to not choke the life out of him, I witnessed how Jordan Davis' music was deemed as more threatening and louder, his visible identity as a young Black teen more troubling, than the ten shots fired by a White Michael Dunn at a Dodge Durango filled with four unarmed Black male teens. In many ways, Michael Dunn, like Sal, was unable to separate the (Chicago Drill) music that he heard from the young teenager that he saw. Davis' Blackness, even though cosmopolitan, visually reinforced the incessant expressions of street thugs that Dunn associated with the thumping bass that he heard to the point where he imagined a shotgun being present. Playing loud music, something that gave Davis and his friends so much enjoyment, was used, in the end, to inaccurately profile them as dangerous current or pre-criminals.

During the “loud music trial,” Dunn's fiancée, Ms. Rouer, testifies that, during the evening of his confrontation with Jordan Davis, Dunn said, “Oh, I hate that thug music.”²⁵⁶ What Michael Dunn said substantiates my earlier claim about the inseparability of cultures of visualization from the construction of sonic meanings, seeing what one hears. Dunn saw a criminal Black masculinity based on what he associated, not even with the lyrics, but, in his own words, with “just bass.”²⁵⁷ Similarly, without

distinguishing the diversity of lyrics and issues addressed in “Fight The Power,” Sal understood Hip-Hop music as jungle music, which escalated to Sal calling Radio Raheem a “nigger motherfucker.” In both cases, sound was negligently assessed and displaced onto a visual Blackness.

The “thug music” that Dunn heard was Davis and his friends playing Chicago Drill²⁵⁸ music whose themes (similar to Trap music) are not only a reflection on street life, but a premeditation of scenarios (i.e. selling drugs, murdering a specific person or group, having sex or being in a relationship with a person, and making something of one’s self), which makes it both a representation of life and real life. The word “Drill” began with Pacman, a late Chicago rapper, and it was meant to retaliate on your enemy. Chicago rap duo L.E.P. Bogus Boyz describe “drill” as slang with a wide range of meaning from women beautifying themselves to street wars.²⁵⁹ The music itself varies from Trap and Twerk-oriented rhythms to Ghattotech/Juke rhythms popular in places like Chicago, Detroit, Baltimore, and New Jersey, unique for the ways in which it integrates all of them. Repeated sonic features of Drill songs are heavy bass, gun shots, and the haunting ring of tolling bells—a slow ringing of a bell, often associated with death. Its name, “Drill,” also recalls the repeated exercise and inundating nature of its lyrical and sonic content. The specific drill song that was played and led to an altercation between Davis, his friends, and Dunn was titled, “Beef (feat. Fredo Santana & Lil Durk),” by rap artist Lil Reese.

In “Radio Jordan,” Jordan Davis’ body is merged with Radio Raheem’s body, suggestive of how people in Jacksonville, FL, particularly Michael Dunn, saw him as a larger than life young Black male, which was unfortunately arming even though Davis

was unarmed. Similarly, even though Radio Raheem was physically sized, his music made him more goliath-like, increasing his volume in many ways. Nonetheless, no matter how goliath-like or thug-like music makes a certain person in another's imaginary, it will never justify treating them as actual goliaths or thugs with imagined superhuman strength and deadly projectile weapons, which happened to both Radio Raheem and Jordan Davis respectively.

Davis wears an Obey hat in fig. 3.12, which is explained by Shepard Fairey—the creator of Obey fashion—as “an experiment in phenomenology.” He continues, “Phenomenology attempts to enable people to see clearly something that is right before their eyes but obscured; things that are so taken for granted that they are muted by abstract observation.”²⁶⁰ Considering this definition, the Obey hat that Davis wears comes to signify much more than just a fashion symbol. What is clear, but at the same time obscured, is that figurative perceptions have dire material affects on Black men's livelihoods, White entitlement is made possible through subduing Black bodies, and obedience to maintaining the peace will not change how Black bodies are seen. “OBEY,” in this juxtaposition with Black men's bodies that were materially affected by how they were figuratively seen and physically heard, acts as an oxymoron, encouraging disobedience in the face of anyone or system requiring you to turn your volume down.

I made the photograph black and white to suggest that this type of loud expression, as well as violence toward Black bodies, is old; yet, its legacy is extended into 2012 and beyond from 1989 and before. Twice, while watching the scene of Radio Raheem being killed, an eavesdropping passerby was shocked. Two different people asked me, which I will paraphrase, “again?” Indeed, there is a repetitiveness to this type

of violence toward Black bodies that makes 1989 indistinguishable from the present as much as it signals that this type of violence is not new. Black and white also signifies on the racial bodies involved in both encounters with Jordan Davis (being Black) and Michael Dunn (being White) and Radio Raheem (being Black) and Sal (being White).

While some similarities between Radio Raheem's and Jordan Davis' stories prompted me to render the image, their lives are very different. For one, Radio Raheem is fictional and merely representative of real Black men's bodies, whereas, Jordan Davis was, and dare I say is, real and representative of Black men's bodies. In *Do The Right Thing*, for example, we never get to know who Raheem's parents or guardians are or what his goals and ambitions are beyond playing "Fight the Power" all day. Whereas, Davis' mother described him as someone who was, indeed, cosmopolitan. Davis had Mexicans, Panamanians, and White people in his family, he lived in a nice three-story home in the suburbs, and he was aware of the level of consciousness in Jacksonville, FL—likely the same consciousness that rendered him illegible as the young Black man that he was.²⁶¹

Radio Raheem and Jordan Davis, however, are similar in telling ways. Davis' mother, due to how he was raised, imagines that he was defending his friends. In response to being asked to turn his music down by Dunn, he likely critically asserted, "'We're not bothering you. We don't know you. You don't know us. Why can't we play our music as loud as we want?'"²⁶² What began as a form of Black sensibility, playing music loud with friends, became a counter to Dunn's entitlement of the gas station that they both occupied. Even a song such as "Beef" could be understood in this scenario and through the lens of Davis' cosmopolitan Blackness as resistance to, camaraderie against,

and proclamation of the figurative murder of White entitlement.²⁶³ In many ways, he was in line with an underlying intent of Drill music: to retaliate on one's enemy—an enemy that, including Dunn, had loudly assaulted his space, his expressions, and existence as a Black man in North America long before he arrived on the scene. Retaliation to Dunn's assault took the form of unapologetically turning music up loudly in the face of his false politeness and White entitlement. Both Raheem and Davis were playing music loudly, not just for themselves, but for their blocks, their friends, and in the line of Black men before them who asserted themselves through the aural sphere for everyone to hear. There was a way in which, despite both of their knowledge of racism in the worlds they lived in, Radio Raheem and Jordan Davis did not allow another's hatred or entitlement to render their agency submissive and turn down their volumes.

Jordan Davis' and Radio Raheem's lives, indeed, inspire us to turn our volumes up. For example, during day one of the "loud music trial" @swhiteAKA3 wrote on Twitter, "I will be playing my radio very loudly on purpose today #NeverForget #JordanDavis."²⁶⁴ It is not only the fact that Jordan Davis was a bright young man with a promising future that we will #NeverForget him, but the online sharing of his photos, the indexing of him with other Black men that have suffered similar Precrime fates, and the idea that he would not placate himself to satiate White entitlement. Despite the real danger that exists from being Black and playing one's music as loud as one desires, the audacity to do so is an exercise of freedom, which I define as an absence of fear with an awareness of danger—an act that both Davis and Raheem performed in their lives that we have come to know. They each had the chutzpah to refuse turning their volumes down to make others comfortable.²⁶⁵

“Radio Jordan” not only imagines Raheem’s legacy in the very things that affect Black livelihood, but also how his boombox travels, transforms, and mutates. Indeed, using speakers in cars and trucks are also things that are used in performances of Black masculinity related to playing music loudly outdoors. Since the boombox was criminalized, another logical place, which was always there, was the car’s or truck’s sound system. The cultural act of playing these mobile sound systems loudly in public, indeed, counters the deafening loudness of White entitlement, White privilege, and anti-Black racism that masks itself in silence. These assaults to Black wellness become amplified every time Black and Brown people are targets of Precrime and their bodies and expressions are violently excluded from spaces possessively invested in Whiteness. Turning our volume up to disrupt the silence around the Precrime of Black and Brown bodies, disproportionate surveillance of Black and Brown Bodies, and White privilege, White entitlement, and White nationalism is what we must do in order to be heard.

“Radio Jordan” is the unlisted upload that I never uploaded, the comment that I never posted, and the rumor that I never circulated. By framing “Radio Jordan” with my thoughts, I disengaged with the type of circulation that can easily lead to amnesia around the circumstances that birth performances before they become uncontrollable. In other words, by centering the burden, I intentionally try to anticipate circumstances where everything but the burden is engaged with. In this way, while I engage in the viral performance of Black male boombox wielders, I am also raising the visibility of their vulnerability, their seeking of pleasure, and how they challenge power through the power of their sound. Indeed, the act of making the image is also a mode of critique, of remix, of repetition with signal differences. Here, remixing functions as a critical technique of

thinking, revealing, and exploring ideologies. It is a reminder that we need to keep on fighting, not only the power, but the powers that be with the power of our sound systems, which include not only our boomboxes and car stereos, but our tongues and our art, electronic posts and retweets, vessels that can be used to broadcast wellness and dialogical social interaction. Broadcasting vessels, indeed, continue to be crucial to struggles against racism and discrimination of all sorts and even though Radio Raheem's boombox was destroyed, the Internet may hold much hope for amplifying his message: fight the power!

Chapter 4, This Song Will Never Die: The Memeification and Amplification of Race, Sexuality, and Class through Viral Media

July 28th, 2010, 3:10AM in Huntsville, Alabama's Lincoln Park public housing, Kelly Dodson woke up to a stranger in her bed attempting to rape her.²⁶⁶ She screamed and her brother Antoine Dodson, hearing this, ran upstairs to help. Seeing his hands wrapped around her neck, he pulled the stranger off of Kelly. While Dodson was attending to Kelly, the man escaped their home.²⁶⁷ The Dodsons called friends and family first, alerting them that someone had broken in. The Dodsons then called the police and upon their arrival went to stay at a relative's home. 8AM the same day, Kelly and Antoine Dodson went back to their home and reported what happened to housing management who "thought it was a joke...was making fun of it and was actually laughing in [their] face[s]." ²⁶⁸ Later that morning the local Huntsville, Alabama NBC affiliate, WAFF-48 news, came to cover the story of the home invasion. The news crew was welcomed and approached the Dodsons who, at this point, were eager to tell their story.²⁶⁹

The following day, July 29th, 2010, WAFF-48 published a live news story online titled, "Woman wakes up to find intruder in her bed," which chronicled the events above. Within *r/funny*—a Reddit community for funny things within Reddit.com—Reddit interactor,²⁷⁰ "panhead," posted a link that connected to WAFF-48's online video of the story, which has since disappeared on WAFF-48. Panhead's link was titled, "This actually aired on my local news today. 'Obviously we have a rapist here... so hide yo kids, hide yo wife, and hide yo husband 'cause dey rapin' e'rybody out here.'" ²⁷¹ The post shows that 93% of the Reddit interactors who voted upvoted. Similar to Facebook "likes" and Twitter "retweets" and "favorites," upvoting increases the visibility and popularity of Reddit posts, in this case, WAFF-48's interview. Shortly after panhead's post, YouTube

interactor Z01D1111 posted WAFF-48's online video of the interview to YouTube.²⁷² From WAFF-48 News to Reddit to YouTube, the live interview spread uncontrollably. Ultimately, it went viral.

In the live WAFF-48 interview, Kelly Dodson told Elizabeth Gentle—the White news reporter—that her daughter was with her while being sexually assaulted. However, from the edited soundbite heard in the live broadcast, Kelly only proclaims, “I was attacked by some idiot out here in the projects.” Then, rolling her neck, Kelly Dodson asserts, “he tried to rape me, he tried to pull my clothes off.”²⁷³ Despite the seriousness of her home invasion and the sexual assault attempt, most of WAFF-48's story focused on her brother, Antoine Dodson. In response to the crime, when Antoine Dodson, seen in fig. 4, was interviewed, he emphasized that the intruder did, in fact, exist and was not a figment of his sister's imagination: “Well, *OBVIOUSLY* we have a RAPIST in Lincoln



Figure 4, “ANTOINE DODSON. THIS IS JUST TOO FUNNY!,” YouTube Video, 2:03, originally from an interview by WAFF-48 News, posted by “WSHH,” August, 3, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXPgjsB0Xm0>. Photograph, October 18, 2014.

Park!” He then cautioned others about the rapist: “He’s climbin’ in yo’ windows, snatchin’ yo people up so y’all need to hide ya kids, hide ya wives, and hide ya husbands ‘cause they rapin’ er’body out here!” Then, he offered a passionate, odd, and threatening warning to the perpetrator involved: “We got yo’ t-shirt, you done left fingerprints and all, you are so dumb, you are really dumb, for real.” He continued, “you don’t have to come and confess that you did it, we lookin’ for you, we gon’ find you. I’m lettin’ you know na (now),” and reinforced that warning with the confrontational, “so you can run ‘n’ tell that.” Rolling his eyes to his left, he continued, “homeboy.”²⁷⁴

What followed was a cascade of viral online coverage of the news story, the most popular being the auto-tuned YouTube music video of the news story, which has garnered 124,153,482 + views to date. The excess attention from popular media resulted in everything from friends dressing up as Antoine for Halloween (wearing a red bandana and black a-shirt), to a painting by Dave MacDowell titled, “Hide Your Husbands!” of Antoine in a dress holding a lit cigarette in his right hand and Colt 45 in his left,²⁷⁵ to a metaphor for claiming tributes for the Hunger Games.²⁷⁶ The ubiquitous references to this performance in popular culture and everyday life signal it as an undying representation, “this song will [literally] never die,” as one YouTube interactor, AwesomeAostin, remarked.²⁷⁷ Antoine Dodson is the first Ghetto Witness²⁷⁸ to have such an explosive affect on popular culture and everyday life, which is also illustrative of how viral performance works on an embodied, mechanistic, and representational level. For a moment, in a sea of viral performances, Antoine Dodson’s body becomes the point of consensus around which queer Black masculinity is understood.

In this chapter I address viral performance's relationship to the "thingification" of Blackness in the (re)presentations of Kelly and Antoine Dodson in popular culture in three major ways. First, I explore the trivialization of rape and its relationship to the marginalization of Black women; in addition, I evaluate how a centeredness on Black men in representations of Blackness further estranges Black women. Second, I consider how queer Black masculinity is (un)framed through viral mechanisms that are crucial to how Antoine Dodson becomes (mis)understood, as an embodiment of quintessential queerness. Third, I examine how Antoine Dodson has become the referent for the Ghetto Witness archetype; unpacking how viral performance interplays with language through a mass production of Black street vernacular for spectacular consumption. Through performance analysis, critical discourse analysis, and netnography, this chapter will elucidate how a serious issue such as Black female sexual assault and the emotional response to it can be transformed into a thing that is virally performed as comedic spectacle. Viral mechanisms, which amplify the simplicities and complexities of performances, are not a means alone, but one of many lenses through which to "...call attention to the complexities inherent in the production of cultural artifacts, particularly those surrounding Black people."²⁷⁹ My investigation reveals the chaos and order of viral performances—not knowing when or how the next person will interpret, remix or spread an act further.

To explore the case study of the Dodsons, the meaning of their viral performance and the cultural mechanisms through which it was disseminated, I will examine the textual and (audio)visual details of a select group of viral sources. My examination will unveil how textual and (audio)visual material adapts to, and adopts, the Dodson's story of

domestic and discursive violence. Using performance and critical discourse analysis, I give attention to (Part I) the original newscast; using netnography—which employs participant-observation in situated websites online to gather data about cultural or communal ways of knowing that are computer-mediated—I examine (Part II) the most-viewed remix video of the original newscast in the context of YouTube and WorldStarHipHop (WSHH); and (Part III) the memeification—or the “extensive creative user engagement in the form of parody, pastiche, mash-ups, and other derivative [memetic] work”²⁸⁰—of the original newscast is examined across two different websites, namely Reddit and Bossip,²⁸¹ to survey interactions in the form of a response video,²⁸² comments,²⁸³ images,²⁸⁴ and web content categories²⁸⁵ that have replied directly to, or mimetically adapted something from the original WAFF-48 newscast. Together, these texts illuminate how the Dodsons are scripted, how they script themselves, and what the tensions between scripted and scripter reveal in an atmosphere where their discursive bodies are incessantly circulated. The critical discourse analysis, performance analysis, and netnography reveal how the Dodsons, and in a larger way, Black masculinities, come into being in popular culture and everyday life through their transformation into mass-produced things—including objectified things as well as things that matter, things inspired by what is unlivable to go towards new possibilities for livability.

Critical discourse theorist, Norman Fairclough, explains that discourse consists of “three dimensions”: analysis of texts, how texts are produced and consumed, and the sociocultural context of the text.²⁸⁶ Fairclough uses “text” linguistically (which consists of the written, oral, and visually spoken) and semiotically (which consists of photographic images, visual layout of images and their settings, and their sonic

accompaniments).²⁸⁷ His critical attention to sociocultural context of the text as its circumstantial context, the structural practices the text is situated in, or the larger society and culture the text is a part of, provide a model for my engagement here.²⁸⁸ In one example of critical discourse analysis, Fairclough examines excerpts of text from select TV shows²⁸⁹ focusing on the relationships and tensions between informing and entertaining, institutional distance from and proximity to on-air personalities, and the construction of presenter and audience identities.²⁹⁰ Most important for my considerations in this chapter, Fairclough's analysis suggests that newer practices of media are shifting toward relaxing the borders between entertainment and public affairs by using colloquial language, such as "the direct discourse of others, including an attempt to simulate the voice of the (real or imaginary) original."²⁹¹ Overall, critical discourse analysis supplies a means of examining intersectional forms of knowledge and theory, as well as social identity and social interactions exhibited in linguistic and semiotic texts.

The democratization of technology and the increasingly interactive ways through which media is (co)produced online—i.e., personal blogs, YouTube's slogan and practice of "Broadcast[ing] Yourself," and (un)solicited responses to broadcasting online—has loosened the boundaries between presenter/expert and audience, necessitating new ways of interrogating the discourses therein. In the second half of this chapter I am interested in capturing what the people said, what rumors were being (re)created, and what discourses were being (re)generated in select spaces online concerning what transpired in WAFF-48's initial coverage of the Dodsons. This can be most effectively done through what Robert V. Kozinets calls netnography.²⁹²

Netnography—conducting the study of communities and cultures over the World Wide Web²⁹³—was initially used in marketing research as a way to explore consumption and cultural activities online. By combining netnography with the conventions and methods of cultural anthropology, namely ethnography, and the concerns of cultural studies, it has evolved as a way to understand sociocultural life as it is distilled through the everyday outlook of interactors who communicate in situated settings online. As such, netnography is instructive in my research, examining how people interact with and produce things in situated spaces online that affect and are affected by everyday life outside of those situated spaces.²⁹⁴

I take on the role of a lurker. Importantly, a lurker can later become a more involved member in online communities, taking on the role of a newbie, maker, interactor, or networker.²⁹⁵ Often degrees of each role are present in communities online and netnographers have to choose which of these they will participate in to gather data. The interactions that I observe on YouTube and WSHH are situated in what Kozinets calls “cruising communities”—“online gatherings that are known for their weaker social relationships and the low centrality of any particular kind of consumption activity.”²⁹⁶ As such, interactors tend to comment directly on something that a maker posts or another interactor has commented on and then they move on to interact with something completely different or disappear. The cruising communities’ interactions are, thus, sustained over shorter periods of time. The ephemeral nature of the discussions and de-localized framework of the websites make more sense of my relationship to the cruising communities as a lurker, but unlike cruisers and similar to viral performance, I repeatedly return.

The interactions that I observe in this chapter unfold in spaces online where, besides their politics, people's identities are disguised or revealed through usernames and avatars—or the digital representation via image(s) or name(s) of people's selves in real life (“IRL” as it is said online). As such, along with their usernames, I often refer to interactors gender-neutrally as “e” instead of “he” and “she.” Representation by avatar or username requires that I directly analyze the discourses that are being exchanged between interactors online. As a result, besides that which is shared at the interactor's discretion, I will not be able to engage in particular kinds of naming or ethnographic descriptions (such as, while he laughed, the dark-brown-haired sixteen year-old boy with caramel skin, wrinkled royal-blue jeans, and a white V-neck T-shirt posted...). This does not mean that race, gender, age, and other supposedly visual and cultural cues do not influence interactors or are not unearthed in how they make sense of what they produce and/or respond to. Indeed, interactors' discourses construct and maintain relationships to race, sexuality, and class in salient ways that are as enriching as visible or sonic cues.

For my purposes, I propose that Netnography allows me to more seriously examine people's relationships to online content, which can unveil larger cultural phenomena. The remix video, *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, was made popular through remixing, in a palatable form, an already in-demand newscast and given longer shelf-life, at least in part, from interactors' comments and their subsequent sharing and sampling—all necessary elements for performance's virality. Indeed, a performance's virality is “produced in and by the relationship between audiences and performers and not aroused in listeners[and/or watchers] by the performer alone.”²⁹⁷ Therefore, netnography will allow me to gain insight into the relationship between interactors and this

performance on the sites where this video, and its related content, have gone viral. Being attentive to the ways in which news reports, music videos, memes, and interactors dialogue with one another and interplay with larger ideas around sexuality, race, class, and gender, I can convey the inter-referential texts of Antoine Dodson's "seamlessly produced performance."²⁹⁸ To understand the unraveling of this complex performance and its performatives in the realm of mass media (WAFF-48 news) and popular social media (YouTube, WSHH, Reddit, and Bossip), indeed, requires a close examination of tropes and trends within these spaces, which produce an understanding of, not only this performance, but also a larger cultural comprehension of race, sexuality, gender, and class in a repeated and robust way.

Part I

"Woman wakes up to find intruder in her bed": Trivializing Sexual Assault, Marginalizing Respectability and (Re)scripting Sexuality

The title of this newscast, which precedes the colon of this section's frame, is how WAFF-48 named the newscast that chronicled the home invasion and sexual assault of Kelly Dodson, the woman who woke up to find an intruder in her bed(room). What was mainly featured in the newscast was not the "woman," however, but the woman's brother, Antoine Dodson, which set in motion an entire stream of uncontrollable events. Using critical discourse analysis, I investigate three important things in this section: 1) the visual language and sonic vocabulary of WAFF-48's news coverage of the Dodson incident and what it does to trivialize Kelly Dodson's sexual assault; 2) how Kelly Dodson is erased through what is included/excluded and foregrounded in the story of her

sexual assault; and 3) I examine how the foregrounding of her brother, Antoine Dodson, plays a critical role in marginalizing Black respectability politics and (re)scripting his sexuality.

The WAFF-48's newscast begins with a White male anchor, dressed in a suit and tie, who outlines Kelly Dodson's story as a "terrifying moment for a woman who woke up to a strange man in bed with her." The use of "strange man" brings attention to the features of the criminal rather than the crime. His emphasis on the strangeness of the man begins the work of deemphasizing and lessening the strangeness and horror of home invasion and sexual assault for Kelly Dodson. Normalizing the home invasion, the anchor scene is followed by the visual enlarging of a google satellite map, which penetrates into the scene of the crime from a macro view of Alabama to a micro view of a street where Lincoln Park public housing is located. The efforts by WAFF-48 to give a picture to the scene of violence, when coupled with the casual nature of this display, normalizes the intrusion of private space, marking public housing as always already public and, thus, unwarranting of the security of private housing. Not to mention that poor Black bodies are always already outside the realms of privacy and vulnerable to surveillance and penetration (be it by a camera, a penis or a bullet).

WAFF-48 reporter Elizabeth Gentle is at the scene of the crime and looking directly into the camera with investigative authority. Overiewing the story, Gentle recounts Kelly and Antoine Dodson's struggle with the intruder, yet, remarks that the intruder left behind evidence of his "visit." Indeed, calling the intrusion a "visit" brings a nonchalance to what was certainly a violent felony. Her casual remark, combined with the satellite image, illustrate and narrate the Dodson's residence as a place which is not

intrudable. Gentle's vocabulary suggests that their residence is as a private space that is always already public, already accessible. Following this logic, one can arrive at a scenario in which it is impossible for Kelly Dodson to be intruded upon; where the interest of the state, and the general public, trumps privacy.

Discussing the collapse of African American public and private space, historian Elsa Barkley-Brown uses the examples of bullpen confinement and raids on Black homes in Richmond, VA at the turn of the nineteenth century, to discuss the way in which, as time progressed, all space was made public and "subject to the interest of the state."²⁹⁹ Indeed, what Brown points toward is a specific view of Black bodies, and the spaces they occupy, as always already in the interest of a larger public, which undergirded the political struggles of Richmonders in the nineteenth-century. The legacy of this view of Black bodies and their geographies has persisted in different forms from the Tuskegee experiment in Macon County, AL to the stop and frisk policies of the NYPD, and most recently, the targeting of Black bodies for minor offences (like Manner of Walking violations) in Ferguson, MO where geography was integral to conceptions of race and the indiscriminate ways in which Black bodies were treated. As tenants of public housing, the state literally owns the Dodson family's residence, which is always subject to its interests, and serves to amplify the systematic collapse between public and private space that already exists in African American spheres. WAFF-48's vocabulary and visual frame sustain the narratives that suggest the spaces and places Black bodies are situated in do not deserve care/privacy. Thus, this terrain is ripe for the type of dismissal the Dodsons experience.

Speaking in place of Kelly Dodson, Elizabeth Gentle narrates the struggle between her and the intruder as the camera pans her bedroom revealing broken items on her bed and floor. Gentle then begins to describe Antoine Dodson's intervention in the scuffle, but allows him to speak. Using "vox pop" Gentle is unseen, yet, her microphone is present in front of Antoine Dodson's face. He "disses/threatens" the sexual assaulter. What follows is a twist of his neck, hand gestures, which act as an extension of his speech, and a roll of his eyes to the left. In one way, we bear witness to Antoine Dodson's execution of an eloquent queer performance of Black masculinity in the defense of his sister, Kelly Dodson, while she disappears into the background of the video and story all together. On the other hand, we witness a representation of Black queer stereotype, which for some represents a perfect storm of distraction from a daunting reality.

The more that Kelly Dodson is relegated to the background of her own story, the more that Antoine Dodson is foregrounded and respectability becomes marginalized, even challenged. The simultaneity of Antoine's performances—gestures, Black street vernacular, and racial timbre—pronounce and unwillingness to be preoccupied with the White normative gaze, unconcerned with how he is perceived by a largely White audience. I argue that this type of indifference to gaze happens to be a key characteristic of Ghetto Witnesses.

Indeed, Ghetto Witnesses tend to be situated in racially homogenous spaces with high barriers to exit wherein the trauma, or thing that they witnessed or participated in, happened. It is their precise situatedness that fosters a feeling of home where racial sensibilities need not be censored and street vernacular is used narrativistically. This

street vernacular is fetishized in a way that increases its value, giving recorders incentive to seek out Ghetto Witnesses for the reward of high ratings, views, and likes.

Surely, there are other viral Ghetto Witnesses that anticipate Antoine Dodson.³⁰⁰ Some antecedents were persons—long before hashtags, YouTube, and the Internet—to whom people would turn to gain expert knowledge about niche happenings in the ghetto. While these Ghetto Witnesses had the privilege of speaking, and being believed, their words were interpreted in viral ways—circulating through rumor and broadcasts—that narrowed their personhood and the perceptions of those in their communities. The danger lies not only in viral interpretations, but the fact that virality enframed the Ghetto Witnesses as experts, which has a legacy in today’s performances of the same archetype.³⁰¹ This unwarranted expertise gives them an authority, not only over their particular story, but over the meaning of the ghetto, which ultimately undermines the complexity while it increases the visibility of ghettoness and the bodies that embody it.

In an NPR interview following this story, Antoine Dodson revealed that people were contacting him saying that he, “was making their city look bad...was making their community look bad.”³⁰² In an interview on Judge Alex! he also revealed that Black communities were saying, “Oh, he’s slow, he’s dumb...he’s ghetto, he shouldn’t represent the community in this way.”³⁰³ It is important to note that the critical reactions to Antoine’s Black street vernacular performance come out of the general embarrassment from the ways in which public performances of Blackness become reified and representative of Black communities as a monolith, which popular media outlets support. Thus, on one hand we may understand how public reaction to Dodson is never just about

his performance, but the multiple performances which have gone viral and framed black communities in similar ways.

Nonetheless, Elizabeth Gentle responded to these respectability accusations in a clever fashion, which separated WAFF-48's staging of the events: "some have contacted our newsroom saying that interviews with people like Antoine reflects poorly on the community. To that I say, censoring people like Antoine is far worse."³⁰⁴ Gentle, as the reporter who assists in staging this moment, divorces WAFF-48's responsibility from the concerns of respectability that follow by advocating for freedom of speech. In turn, Gentle aims the respectability concerns at the survivors and witnesses who gave their testimony. To avoid complete misdirection, one has to realize, as political scientist Stephanie Greco Larson has asserted, that, "...racial minorities continue to appear in certain types of stories more than others" and to question who determines that.³⁰⁵ Without more complex and in-depth coverage of events such as these, media outlets maintain these reified perceptions of Black life that threaten the wellness of Black bodies.³⁰⁶ Kelly Dodson, knowing the racial, sexual, and class climate, anticipated that the media attention would "make him [Antoine] look like a fool."³⁰⁷ Indeed, in this moment Kelly Dodson recognizes the power that the media has in derisively positioning her brother's appropriately amplified performance.

Still, the future of this emotional performance in the media would be subject to large scrutiny and embarrassment, enacting a sort of crucifixion of what I am calling the Ghetto Witness. This archetype, and more particularly this Bed Intruder brand, makes Antoine Dodson visible, even though, in many ways, he remains illegible. I use illegible here as Mark Anthony Neal discusses it in *Looking for Leroy* to describe "those Black

male bodies we can't believe are real.”³⁰⁸ The tension between the high visibility and illegibility of Antoine Dodson's body is what connects the two. Similar to the bling aesthetic of diamonds, Antoine Dodson's spectacularity, “literally blinds audiences (and critical readers) to the complexities that ‘lay in the cut.’”³⁰⁹ In the cut lie possibilities that trouble the historical imaginary the U.S. has of Black bodies.

The reactions to Antoine as Ghetto Witness, charged with “making the city and community look bad,” are the same ones that often maintain the silences around the sexual acts of violence that Antoine suggests are “swept under the rug.”³¹⁰ In Kimberlee Crenshaw's “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” she grapples with this issue around silencing violence within Black communities. In writing about intervention strategies with battered women of color, Crenshaw discusses the narratives around Black and Brown communities that frame them as inherently violent, which are linked to older ideas around barbarism and savagery, that, in turn, silenced women's political priorities. Thus, to combat the larger narrative of the violent and savage Black community, Black and Brown women took the burden of silence around the violence, sexual and otherwise, performed on them by Black and Brown men.³¹¹ In the case of Kelly Dodson, media corroborates in such silencing and actually diminish the potential for Antoine Dodson's advocacy for Black women (arguably a Black feminist-like move) to not only challenge the perpetrator of sexual assault and the violence therein, but to defend his Black sister as a woman with honor.

Preceding and fanning the flames of Antoine Dodson's inflammatory outburst, what lied outside of the purview of the news broadcast was a girl on the “sidelines” that was never interviewed. In this unidentified girl's attempt to look respectable, according to

Antoine Dodson, she responded to the reporter, “oh, well this had never happened to us in this neighborhood, nuh uh, this had only happened to y’all.”³¹² Her unrecorded response, recovered through Antoine’s retelling, suggests that it was the fault of Antoine’s family that enabled Kelly’s attempted rape. In this classic blame-the-victim move where responsibility is stripped from the perpetrator and anything systematic, the relationships in Black communities are sanitized as innocent and peaceful, making this crime appear as anomalous. Indeed, it was not only Black people who later saw the broadcast, but another person on the scene of the crime who was concerned with how she and her environment were being portrayed by the news media. If nothing else was responsible for the way in which Antoine Dodson reacted, her response *obviously* sent him into a frenzy.

Even so, Antoine Dodson’s refusal to remain silent provides a popular venue, namely online, to talk or at least think about sexual violence beyond, and specific to, gender in Black communities, its social links to masculinity and patriarchy, and its structural ties to (a lack of) security and the inaction of the state in spaces like public housing.³¹³ His statement is layered with the cadences of southern African American speech, stylized gestures, and uncommon perspectives on sexual violence, situating him within a queer performance of Black masculinity. Antoine Dodson’s caution toward his neighbors and warning to the perpetrator tests and transgresses the bounds of African American norms around masculinity and silence around inter-community sexual violence; yet he also supports the patriarchal performance of protection and, albeit unknowingly, subordinating feminine women’s voices that are reinforced through Black masculine norms.

Despite bringing sexual violence in Black communities into the forefront of popular culture and mass media, challenging the parameters of Black masculinity, and resisting the White normative gaze, Antoine's excessive visibility renders his sister invisible. Furthering this notion, a couple of days after the interview, Elizabeth Gentle emphasizes that Antoine and Kelly Dodson are both victims and "like any victim, they have the right to speak out," even though it was Antoine who mainly got the chance to speak out.³¹⁴ Without specifying what the Dodsons are victims of, Gentle also insensitively compiles their victimization as identical, suggesting that enduring a sexual assault is tantamount to experiencing home invasion and engaging in self-defense. WAFF-48, not Antoine, largely erases Kelly's narrative through their framing of the scenario and what they chose to include and exclude. Their choices give a glimpse into how gender roles, condoned by WAFF-48, structure Black women as marginal. WAFF-48's structural actions (or linguistic and visual choices) wrote out Kelly's ability to prominently speak as the one who had to endure the sexual assault, and wrote in Antoine's performance, enabling the ability to speak of the one who ultimately thwarted the sexual assault. By emphasizing THEIR "right to speak out," WAFF-48 news engages in a neoliberal³¹⁵ gesture that divorces structural responsibility from personal responsibility; thus, they removed themselves from the performance and gave the illusion of choice and autonomy with the way in which Kelly Dodson's story was depicted, which focused more on Antoine Dodson's rage than her distress.

Antoine's rage, nonetheless, is a tipping point that is couched between a long history of the repression of sexual violence in Black communities as well as his sister's, his, and his community's encounters with sexual violence. His rage also disrupts any

notion of respectability politics, and rightly so as there is little to be silent about concerning sexual violence. The fact that Kelly Dodson's assaulter is a stranger who broke in through the window eliminates the ability to create the usual questions that marginalize her experience, "what were you wearing, do you have sex with multiple partners, and were you flirting with him" that dismiss the legitimacy of her claims of sexual violation as a Black woman and remove responsibility from the violator. The inability to ignore the gravity of the situation was bypassed by exaggerating the focus on Antoine Dodson's rage rather than his sister's feelings on being sexually violated. In the break between the formality of WAFF-48 News and Antoine Dodson's informal rage, Black street vernacular, and stylized gestures, lies comedy. WAFF-48 deliberately highlighted this space, exaggerating Antoine Dodson's take on the story resulting in a grotesque effect, changing the misfortune into a comedic spectacle.

(Re)scripting Sexuality, Ignoring the Call to Act

As José Esteban Muñoz warns us, "Comedy does not exist independently of rage...rage is sustained and it is pitched as a call to activism, a bid to take space in the social that has been colonized by the logics of White [or Black] normativity and heteronormativity."³¹⁶ The dis-ease of comedy, is made when the abnormal is placed in a completely normal situation, tickling onlookers and listeners into laughter. Indeed, there is a repetitive ease to norms whose patterns are disrupted when challenged, which creates an uneasiness. What decides what is and is not normal is always subjective. However, the unfortunate norms here are Black bodies as victims of violence in the always already overly-violent, poor, and Black occupied public housing, the Black male gay body as promiscuous and feminine, and the formality of an interview from an authoritative news

source; having said that, Antoine Dodson becomes the abnormal thing as an openly then-gay³¹⁷ effeminate Black man who is also the strong Black male protector—performing that protection without reserve for the formality of the interview. The rage of Antoine’s performance, despite how it silences his sister and makes a spectacle of him by WAFF-48, is also the creation of spectacle by Antoine himself. His spectacle acts with the purpose of no longer “sweeping” acts of sexual violence “under the rug” in Black communities, at the very least in Lincoln Park public housing.³¹⁸ Indeed, his performance is a call to activism.

In his NPR interview, Antoine states “It’s been a lot of complaints, even before my sister attack; it’s been a lot of people complaining about how people was getting raped in the projects and people just sweeping it under the rug and not talking about it.”³¹⁹ After pointing out this preexisting viral violence, he asks the important question, “what do we need to do as people to keep our community safe?”³²⁰ By “community,” Antoine Dodson suggests that men and women are vulnerable to sexual violence. Supporting this notion, in a CBS interview with Shira Lazar, Antoine Dodson revealed that he was a “rape victim.”³²¹ Considering this fact, when Antoine warns everyone that their husbands could get raped too in the original news broadcast, it points towards his direct or indirect experiences with male-to-male sexual violence. Antoine Dodson retains perspectives around sexual violence that fall outside of heterosexual presumptions and activate a broader rape activism than that conventionally portrayed in dominant media.

Inasmuch as WAFF-48 news enforced patriarchy and normative notions of masculinity through letting the man speak for the woman, Antoine is also challenging that regime by responding to and publicly raising awareness around sexual violence against

bodies in public housing, particularly Lincoln Park. He also supports his sister's assertion that the perpetrator was an idiot, "we got your fingerprints...you are really dumb, for real." The defense of his sister's honor operated against wrongheaded notions of Black women's inability to be sexually assaulted or raped due to their inherent promiscuity,³²² which is, in total, Black queer feminist work.³²³ The queerness of the performance—twisting his neck and the high inflection in his voice—also (re)scripts his sexuality, challenging masculinized norms around what it means to be a protector and a Black man, a role popularly occupied by a different kind of body, a White masculine man's body.³²⁴ As a result, Antoine Dodson performs a disidentification with Black queerness, both embracing a fierce³²⁵ effeminacy and pushing back against the idea that his fierceness and intimidatingly protecting his sister cannot co-exist. This idea of a strong (enough to protect his sister) effeminacy combats wrongheaded notions of homosexuality as woman-like, and thus, inherently weak and heterosexuality as man-like, and thus, inherently strong.

Performance Studies scholar E. Patrick Johnson writes that, "unlike the motivations of Black heterosexual men, Black gay men's performance of heterosexuality has less to do with the *need* or desire to repudiate the Other as much as it does with an attempt to expand the discourse of the heterosexual Other to include a Black gay subjectivity."³²⁶ I would add, as Marlon Bailey has described as "Realness" in a Michigan Public Radio interview, that in everyday life, quintessential heterosexual behavior is also a means of survival.³²⁷ Deriving Realness as a category from ballroom culture in Detroit, Bailey suggests that LGBTQI Blacks suffer violence simply based on how they are seen. As a result, behaving as though they are not gay, through attire and corporeal signifiers,

ensures that they can get home safely and “avoid homophobic and transphobic discrimination and violence.”³²⁸ As Antoine Dodson said in a *Tosh.0* interview in response to being gay and living in public housing, “when you’re Antoine Dodson and you have a lot of mouth, it’s not too many people that’s gon’ challenge you.”³²⁹ By Antoine Dodson articulating himself as he does in the WAFF-48 interview, he creates a mantle of toughness. His attitude, thus, is a means of survival that challenges and reinforces prescribed gender roles within the context of the insecurity and vulnerability of Lincoln Park public housing,³³⁰ a place which had not been modernized since it opened in 1961,³³¹ and sits on the flood plain of Pinhook Creek—meaning it is flood-prone.³³²

Antoine Dodson Goes Viral: Performance, Netnography, and Circulation of a Black Queer Icon

Even though the originating story and geographical setting matter, for the political reasons that they do, Antoine Dodson provides a powerful case study for how a singular performance can morph into representative texts of a violent offense and for entire communities. He is the primary witness for his sister’s attempted assault, but is also witnessed by many to be what a Black queer subject looks and performs like, this is co-performative witnessing. In this next section, using netnography, I am interested in how Antoine Dodson, as a Ghetto Witness, is interpreted across online spaces which travel popular news and provide commentary for world events which pertain to blackness and Black people. (here you frame what moves us from interpretation of the scene of action to its viral parts)

Netnography—a way of tracing performances, ideas, and ideograms through cultures online—allows me to trace how Dodson’s body and performance moves in

repetition, with signal difference, across virtual online communities. This becomes important as the *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, the Gregory Brothers'³³³ remix video of the Dodson newscast, gained the most currency across social media. Importantly, as the latter song gained its traction, it was thought to be a rip-off of another viral media product that followed it: *Annoying Orange—Kitchen Intruder*. As of October 21, 2014, this re-make of the re-make, which was read as an original (antecedent to the original broadcast and the Gregory Brothers' remix), has garnered 12,962,665 views by interactors on YouTube. Mentions of the Annoying Orange video on the comment feed of the *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)* video reveal that interactors were not only led to the Gregory Brothers' remix, but believed it was mimicking Annoying Orange³³⁴—pictured in fig. 4.1. Their queries raise an important discussion about origins and adaptations, key considerations when considering the many ways in which a viral performance travels. Virality can, indeed, reorder knowledge, making what came first look like an unsatisfactory simulacra of itself. In other words, the Kitchen Intruder remix of the Dodson's broadcast is made to appear as the original; framing the Dodsons as a mere imitation of a thing, an orange.



Figure 4.1. *Annoying Orange - Kitchen Intruder (Bed Intruder Spoof) with AutoTune Remix!*, YouTube video, 2:14, uploaded by “Annoying Orange,” November 23, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pezdRcVe04c>. Photograph, October 20, 2014.

Even though YouTube was the first site to host *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, its viral circulation raised many questions about what is original, what is remixed, and how we distinguish between the two when everything that we know of to be “original” is made up of elements that already existed. In the essay “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” gender theorist Judith Butler examines the idea or assumption of an original gender that drag performance imitates. She writes, “...there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but *gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original...*[gender] produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself.”³³⁵ Butler posits that more than being an act of putting on the clothes popularly associated with other genders, drag performers constitute how all genders are reenactments. Here, viral performance becomes a technology of gender and race, complicating our notion of an origin from which a performance emerges. Indeed, even YouTube interactors expressed confusion over where the video came from that continued well into 2014. Their confusion points to the nonlinearity of viral performances—the way in which viral performances have a contrapuntal temporality, or (in)dependent points of origin.³³⁶

Expressing this type of confusion and confidence over origin, YouTube interactor blezard2011 remarked, “This is the song from the annoying orange :@.”³³⁷ The annoying orange song that blezard2011 is referencing is named, *Annoying Orange - Kitchen Intruder (Bed Intruder Spoof) with AutoTune Remix*.³³⁸ The song is a remix of the WAFF-48 news story on the Dodsons and *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*. It is a news story narrated by a red bell pepper anchor and eggplant newscaster about an attempted slicing. A fruit named Nancy Nectarine was sleeping on her counter when

someone came into the kitchen with a butcher knife and tried to “slice her peel off.” Her friend (not brother), annoying orange, tried to save her by spitting seeds, but not before the knife-wielder sliced through a kiwi and three limes. Annoying orange, dressed in a red bandana, finally responds, “well obviously we have a knife in the kitchen.” He cautions people to hide their kids, wives, and husbands because he’s “slicing everybody out there.” He then threatens the knife-wielder, calling him an apple. After the news version of the story, the auto-tune remix of it came on, which featured a sped up version of the same trap music from *BED INTRUDER SONG!!!* (now on iTunes):

(Chorus)	Run and tell that
He's climbing in your	Run and tell that
windows	Knife, Knife Knife Knife
Choppin' your people up	Knife
Choppin' Choppin'	(News reporter interrupts)
So you better	I guess that's just one
Hide your kids	more good reason why you
Hide your wife	should lock your doors at
Hide your kids	night
Hide your wife	Ah, Ah, Ah, Aaaaah
Hide your kids	(Eggplant newscaster line)
Hide your wife	The knife got away leaving
And hide your husbands	behind evidence
'Cause he's slicing	(Nancy Nectarine line)
everybody out there	I was attacked by some
(Bridge)	idiot in the Kitchen
You don't have to come	(Annoying Orange verse)
and confess	You're an apple
We're looking for you	You're an apple
We're gonna find you	You're an apple
We're gonna find you	Knife
So you can run and tell that	(Chorus repeats once) ³³⁹

Having seen Annoying Orange first, blezard2011 mistakenly thought that the parody of *BED INTRUDER SONG!!!* (now on iTunes) by an anthropomorphic orange was the source and that *BED INTRUDER SONG!!!* (now on iTunes) was the outcome. An

interactor named jackred5 was driven to respond to blezard2011 saying, “@blezard2011 it's the original one; annoyingorange took it.”³⁴⁰ Indeed, disguising points of origin is one of the effects of virality, concealing necessary narratives and complicating the rumors that are often what public attachment is built on.

The stakes for Antoine and Kelly Dodson, and the larger project, here are that we have proxies—an orange and a nectarine—for their bodies that have lost all signifiers to the race, sexuality, gender, class and geography crucial to their production that becomes parodied. Indeed, their Black bodies lie in the shadow of this performance. The presence of Black bodies allows for productive discussions or comments that bring up, reinforce, and question how structures of power affect those bodies and the social groups that they intersect with. By turning Antoine Dodson into an Annoying Orange and Kelly Dodson into a Nancy Nectarine, we witness cues taken from WAFF-48’s coverage of the Dodsons’ story to make light of a serious situation through caricature and soundbite. The Dodsons are transformed into things again—from an online news video, to an online Hip-Hop video, to fruits—in many ways simplifying or all together erasing their personhoods. Indeed, this type of thingification apoliticizes a performance produced from the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and class and geography. Viral performance not only distorts the Dodsons’ story and bodies, but delocalizes them, removing them from the setting, a necessary catalyst in the performance, further concealing an origin. Yet, as discussed in the first chapter, sometimes what lies outside of the frame of a performance can tell us other things that what lie within the frame cannot.

YouTube interactor Zceed receives thirteen likes when writing, “Thumbs up if Annoying Orange bring’d (sic) you here [to the *BED INTRUDER* song (*now on*

iTunes)].”³⁴¹ The consensus given by the likes that Zceed’s comment receives indicates how that which is an adaptation can bring one closer to a source. Besides the use of “spoof” in the title, which could have spurred curiosity in what was being spoofed, *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)* appeared in the list of suggested videos in the column to the right of the main video, providing an entryway into what was being cited. Thus, the formatting of YouTube creates its own inter-referential mechanism, which keeps viral performances alive, while also instigating the disordering of these performances.

Hip-Hop music has certainly led me along this path of contrapuntal temporality through the way in which it samples music. By using copies of older sounds, music producers make new music. Even though I may be unfamiliar with the sampled music, I have, nonetheless, discovered entire recordings, of which, a Hip-Hop song may have sampled seconds of and have gone on to enjoy them just as much as the remix. Had it not been for sampling, or copying, I may have never discovered that which was copied. Thus, while viral performances may be contrapuntal in their origins, their inter-referencing can serve as a connection that links them, increasing each of their visibility and currency. Here, virality can be understood as analogous to the copying with significant difference that occurs within the sampling culture of Hip-Hop music and an uncontrollable consumption of that sampling (through listening to, viewing and sharing it). While Hip-Hop music is not alone in its use of sampling in the recording industry, sampling’s central role as a catalyst for Hip-Hop as a musical art-form make its cultural spaces ripe for viral performances.

Part II

Viral Performance and its (Un)framing of Sexual Proclivity and Vernacular Queer Black Masculinity on WSHH and YouTube

Seeing the synergy between virality and Hip-Hop sampling, it is no coincidence that one of the spaces I “lurk” is World Star Hip Hop (WSHH), a space inflected with Hip-Hop tonalities. While *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)* traveled into many webspaces as a result of it being sampled, here I wish to focus on interactors’ marginal and popular responses to the song on YouTube and WSHH websites and their relationship to considerations of race, class, and sexuality. I specifically examine *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)* on YouTube and its reposted version of the same video retitled, *Antoine Dodson - They Rape'n Everybody Out Here [Auto Tune Edition]*,³⁴² which received 400,000+ views on WSHH. These two spaces are significant sites where the narratives of Kelly and Antoine Dodson gained much traction. They also map how varying interactors interpreted the viral performance. I am particularly concerned with how interactors’ commentaries amplify the attention toward Kelly Dodson’s sexual inclinations as a straight Black woman and Antoine Dodson’s vernacular queer Black masculinity. Indeed, the practice of sampling—using pre-existing music, style, and bodily gestures to constitute something original—in Hip-Hop cultural spaces makes something new out of something old as much as it summons the past into the present. By using Hip-Hop to remix the WAFF-48 newscast, the Gregory Brothers tap into this tradition whose very composition unsettles origin stories as much as it creates them. The (un)framing of Kelly and Antoine Dodson performs differently within YouTube and WSHH because each website is designed differently.

Within the WSHH and YouTube websites that feature the Gregory Brothers' remix, discussion is encouraged and video-sharing and aggregation are central, yet, interactions carry a different tone and ideological framework within each site. A principal reason why interactions vary on each site is because both have a different *architecture*—the physical (structure of the space) and ideological frame (encompassing the texture of the space)—in 2010.³⁴³ Indeed, design is never neutral. An interactor's comment can reflect as much on the ideology of a site itself and what it (dis)allows as it does on the interactor. This section will briefly explore the physical and ideological design of WSHH and YouTube in preparation for the netnography that follows.

The Architecture of WSHH (fig. 4.2) and YouTube (fig. 4.3)

WSHH, dubbed by its president Lee O'Denat as the "CNN of the Ghetto," is a video aggregation site that allows its interactors to communicate with its videos and each other through sharing their thoughts about said videos and each other in comment boxes provided for them.³⁴⁴ O'Denat was inspired by the success of YouTube signing with Google and had a great respect for the "DVDs in the hood," which turned into WSHH.³⁴⁵ Indeed, this frames WSHH as ideologically concerned with the interests and everyday joys and perils of life from socially and economically marginalized communities. Just as one should not expect all joy or all peril from CNN coverage, yet, peril seems to be the most sensationalized, WSHH follows a similar path. The huge difference between WSHH and CNN, however, is that WSHH does not feature an anchor guiding their audience through its sensationalized perils. With their own original and exclusive content like Hip-Hop music videos, and now documentaries, and soon to come comedy shows, WSHH is viewed as one of the best aggregate sites for visual Hip-Hop content online. Its position

makes it particularly fitting to examine varying perspectives on the bed intruder song from people who traffic in that type of music online.

On WSHH videos are created or copied by interactors who sample everyday life by using recording devices, such as cameras and phones, to record and archive audio-visual moments. After sharing these moments with the WSHH moderators, if chosen, they are featured in video boxes on the site. Similar to the man selling DVDs in a barbershop, some recordings tend to be amateur. Nonetheless, there are also less pedestrian and more professional recordings that are featured like musical performance videos. To share, one uploads their video to a file storage site (such as sendspace or wetransfer) or video-sharing site (such as YouTube) and sends their video link and description to a WSHH email address. The WSHH administrators and moderators subjectively determine whose upload gets selected and posted to WSHH. Once the video is posted, interactors may discuss it and respond to one another in the comment box provided.

In 2010, interactions could only be made as a guest, immediately anonymizing an interactor's visible identity as "guest" as opposed to something more unique. The likely effect of this was an increase in unfiltered opinions from interactors, which changed the bluntness and care with which ideologies about WSHH's content were shared. Indeed, it was this setting that created a certain amount of unfiltered responses that have become expected within WSHH's comment section since the website began in 2005.

WSHH's overall color-scheme emphasized shades of black with contrasts of white and red, as seen in fig. 4.2. It featured a space-grey background with a gradient into



Figure 4.2. “World Star Hip Hop Freaks,” *sbmotorparts.com*, August 10, 2010, http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_6bw5m6fZShI/Swn9AXiSxqI/AAAAAAAAACqs/fpyKDbfQvCs/s1600/worldstarhiphop.png

black from its top to its bottom. To the left of its center, the background gradient was overlaid by a video box in a thin black frame. The top border of the video box contained its title in a white Impact-style font over a dark-grey backdrop. Branding the lower-right of each video featured on the site was a WSHH logo: a five-point star with a glowing red and white center followed by the letters WSHH in an Impact-styled font. Both the star and letters were filled with a light-gray gradient that sparkled with red animations followed by a smoking bullet-hole (or ash-burn). WSHH’s logo, like much of the content it is famed for, summons violence.³⁴⁶

Beneath the video box were buttons to share the video via twitter and myspace, and “Like” via Facebook, all means for the interactor to be a tastemaker as well as social marketing tactics to bring people to said video. Beneath the buttons was an area stating, “Leave a comment,” with a white comment box beneath it, under which one could see every previous comment. The position of the comment box at the nexus of the video and

previous comments encouraged interaction not only with the video, but with other interactors. To the right of the video box was a similarly designed detail box containing the video's description, when the video was added, and the total views of the video and an advertisement. Under the description in the detail box was a similarly designed layout containing a list of recommended videos.

The users of WSHH in the first quarter of 2012, in comparison to all Internet users, were “disproportionately African-American.”³⁴⁷ The users also “tend[ed] to be childless, moderately educated men in the age range of 18-24 who browse from school and home.”³⁴⁸ A recent study by the Opportunity Agenda, “Media Market: Media Consumption Trends among Black Men,” was made to provide insight into the consumption of media by African American men. The study revealed that, besides reflecting the habits of the general adult population (visiting YouTube, ESPN.com, and Yahoo! for example), WSHH was among four music sites of the top ten mass-media Black oriented content sites that were the most popular among African American men.³⁴⁹

Today, WSHH's visible design, though largely the same, is more like YouTube's, seen in with its black gradient background is now anti-flash white. To interact, you must have an avatar name through Disqus, which is a website that allows one to interact and comment within thousands of other online platforms through a common interface and unique avatar. Even though one can still create an online identity separate from their actual one, the fact you must now have an avatar lowers the ease of anonymity that existed when *Antoine Dodson - They Rape'n Everybody Out Here [Auto Tune Edition]* was published on WSHH.

YouTube's slogan, and ideology, has always been "Broadcast Yourself." From its inception in 2005 to 2009, that slogan was a part of the logo until 2010 as you can see in fig. 4.3. YouTube's emphasis on allowing individuals to broadcast themselves democratized audiovisual broadcasts where one could create their own online channel that featured specified content for an audience. While the TV encouraged passivity, where one's programming was at the will of said TV channel, YouTube encouraged interactivity, where one could create and find e's own programming at whatever pace e desires. Indeed, the Gregory Brothers had their own channel, "schmoyoho," where they featured their Auto-Tune the News show and broadcasted the Dodson's incident while integrating themselves within the video.

YouTube features a background of anti-flash white. To the right of YouTube's logo is a search bar and next to it are links to browse or upload, encouraging visitors to

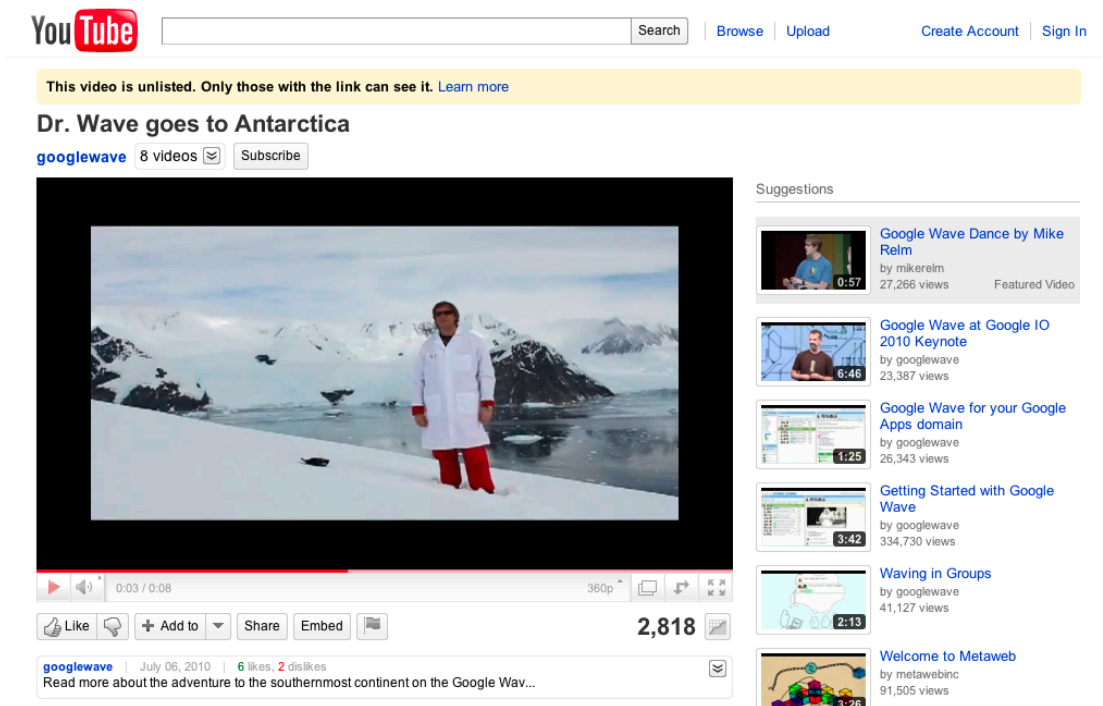


Figure 4.3. "Tis the season to send a personal video greeting!," December 15, 2010.
http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2010_12_01_archive.html

find or share their own content in that order. If one is signed in, E's user name is on the upper right with an option to sign out. Interactor avatars are custom with whatever image the interactor chooses including the default light blue square with a basic silhouette of a human body (almost like the upper-half of a men's bathroom silhouette). By allowing users to interact through accounts that they setup through gmail, YouTube oriented itself toward being more of a social network for video sharing and subscription than simply a space for video aggregation.

The final central white box is for "ALL COMMENTS." It provides a grey-outlined box that reads, "respond to this video." Again, the locale for all comments is at the nexus of the video and the previous comments, encouraging an engagement with both. After interactors comment, anyone who owns a YouTube account can like or dislike the comment, moving the comment to the top or bottom of the comment feed for that day, increasing or decreasing its visibility, which encourages interactors to make comments that will be "liked" or risk obscurity. To the right of the central boxes, as seen in fig. 4.3, is a column of recommended videos where one can see a snapshot of related videos, their length, their uploader, and how many views they have received.

YouTube reaches more U.S. adults age 18-34 than any cable network and 80% of traffic comes from outside the U.S.³⁵⁰ YouTube's personalities, who possess channels with subscribers to their videos, have been said to be disproportionately minorities when compared to mainstream television, where the stars are largely White.³⁵¹ In 2012 Haley Tsukayama, reporter for the Washington Post, wrote, "Among the 20 most-subscribed-to channels on YouTube, eight feature minorities. Most are Asian American. Many more Black and Latino shows populate the top 50."³⁵² Indeed, performances by non-White

YouTube users and features have a significantly high currency³⁵³ for their consumption by online interactors and spectators. These statistics are particularly telling when six out of ten of the videos on the Gregory Brothers' YouTube channel, schmoyoho, feature Black Americans or their voices in their top video uploads (as of August 2014). If schmoyoho did not take advantage of the capitalist gains from commodifying Black performances and turning them into things, their channel would not be as virally successful as it is today.

Unlike WSHH where videos have to be approved before they are uploaded to the site, on YouTube, interactors handle a significant burden of the broadcasting; thus, before their video could be viewed by anyone, the Gregory Brothers, like any other interactor, only needed to log in to their YouTube account and upload it. Three days after the WAFF-48 news report on the Dodson family aired, the Gregory Brothers turned the already sensationalized framing of WAFF-48's news story on Kelly Dodson's attempted rape into an episode, "12b," of their Auto-Tune the News series³⁵⁴ without anyone's permission. Here enters, *Auto-Tune The News: BED INTRUDER SONG!!!* Since, it has been changed to *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, signaling the choice to brand the song and sell it. Both the newscast and the autotuned version were turned into a mélange of fan-edit videos, none reaching the popularity of the Gregory Brothers' rendition.³⁵⁵ The Gregory Brothers further narrowed WAFF-48's focus on Antoine's rage by making more of a spectacle of it, and deepening the silencing of Kelly Dodson. Indeed, this further lessened the seriousness of what happened to her, transforming her story into an "...almost forgotten strand in the narrative."³⁵⁶

The Gregory Brothers eventually contacted Antoine Dodson (it is not clear if they spoke with Kelly Dodson) and asked if he wanted to receive half of the profits from the song on iTunes. Initially, Antoine Dodson hesitated in making a decision. Antoine Dodson's hesitation is important as it conveys his awareness of the stakes between making money from, making fun of, and creating awareness from his family's pain, rage, and courage.

A little less than a year after everyone, including Antoine Dodson, made a fair sum of money, someone in a press conference with him and the Gregory Brothers asked what his first reaction to the song was. Anticipating Antoine Dodson's response and announcing his awareness of staging Antoine's impassioned performance in the queue of their comical news (re)presentations, one of the Gregory Brothers insisted to him, "It's okay if you say we were jerks." Letting the pain and seriousness of his news interview be known, Antoine Dodson described his first reaction to the music video as, "Is somebody trying to be funny? Is they taking this to be a joke?"³⁵⁷

The latter rhetorical question echoes the sentiments in Antoine Dodson's first (and earlier) Facebook fanpage post that he created two weeks after the publication of *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*. In his Facebook post he stated, "HEY GUYS! Today I just want to say for the people who think that they can make me look crazy or hurt my image. THINK AGAIN I don't care how much you offer. You are not going to make me or my family look stupid so runandtell dat homeboy."³⁵⁸ His comment received 644 likes since February 2014. These two pivotal comments speak to the vulnerability and cultural currency of the Dodsons as Ghetto Witnesses. The Dodsons are people whose sincere testimony also stands to be widely sampled as comedic and as Aisha Harris

—a *Slate* culture blogger for Brow Beat—phrased it, “derisively memeified,” due their sonic and optic dissonance in the normalized field of vision and sound. Indeed, the Ghetto Witness has emerged as a new archetype out of the technologic ability to visualize and sonically project people’s vernacular recounting of events, traumatic or otherwise, in documentary formats that appear live, informal, and unadulterated. Antoine Dodson’s comments appear to be well aware of this trend.

Despite the vulnerability that Antoine Dodson’s performance presents to his family, he agrees to receive half of all profits between him and the Gregory Brothers. Here, the Gregory Brothers used their class, racial privilege, and musical expertise in the memeification and use of the Dodson family’s pain, rage and courage, and the way in which it was articulated through a Black street vernacular performance. The transaction highlights a larger historical trend. E. Patrick Johnson writes:

Black bodies in pain for public consumption have been an American spectacle for centuries. The history moves from public rapes, beatings, and lynchings to the gladiatorial arenas of basketball and boxing... White men have been the stagers and consumers of the historical spectacles I have mentioned, but in one way or another, Black people have been looking, too, forging a traumatized collective historical memory which is reinvoked, I believe, at contemporary sites.³⁵⁹

Indeed, YouTube is a contemporary site where spectacles of pain (and pleasure) are performed and consumed by all people in differing ways and White men still possess a large stake in their staging and consumption. Some of the ways in which Kelly and Antoine Dodson’s performance are (un)framed, as a result, were not only raced, classed, and sexed, but also traumatic to people who viewed it—haunting spectators with yet another tale of sexual assault and Blacks, effeminate Black men in particular, as comic

relief. Even though WAFF-48 news staged the event, the Gregory Brothers became collusive in that staging and distributed it, with signal differences, to a wider audience, monetizing its value.

Their rendition of the newscast, *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, would go on to sell 300,000+ copies on iTunes,³⁶⁰ be performed by Antoine and the Gregory Brothers at the 2010 BET Hip Hop Awards, be the most viewed YouTube video of 2010 with the original television interview as the People's Choice "Video of the Year."³⁶¹ The contract between the Dodsons and the Gregory Brothers complicates an understanding of the song as sending, what Antoine Dodson called, "a positive message...like an alert," by further using it as a product that sells far more than awareness about sexual assault.³⁶² The profits resulting from Antoine Dodson's business investments such as songs, t-shirts, and a sex offender application helped him to move his family out of public housing showing how, in Antoine Dodson's words, "a blessing came out of a bad situation."³⁶³

Many of the YouTube interactors sarcastically comment on the remix video, labeling those who disliked the video as rapists, drawing consensus on disliking the video after 1:15, or simply repeating verbatim what was said in the video. Many of the WSHH interactors mention their desire to get the song as a ringtone, how hilarious it is, and also repeat the words verbatim from the video. However, one must vigilantly question the politics of race, class, sexuality and memeification that arise in some of the marginal comments that interactors make about the performance, which gain large consensus, go unopposed, and are at times challenged. The issues of derisive representations of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life and challenging the absoluteness of these

very notions come to a head in these viral acts. These two tensions lead me to consider not only how technologies amplify the pejorative, but also breed and carry ideas situated in livability and complexity.

The (il)legibility embodied by the Dodson is exemplified by their presence in the Gregory Brother's Trap song, *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*. My attention is drawn to how the Gregory Brothers choose to audio-visually represent the Dodsons as Ghetto Witnesses on YouTube and how that shapes their (il)legibility to interactors. The Dodson's visual representation in the WAFF-48 newscast acts as a cue for what is associated with the sound of Trap music: Black bodies, thugs, drugs, excessive poverty, violence, and a desire to overcome the struggles that arise with them. I move here to investigate the sampling of the WAFF-48 newscast for a Trap music video and how it does work to make Kelly and Antoine Dodson highly visible and (il)legible.

The *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)* remix video, which sampled the incidents from WAFF-48's newscast, was the first way in which I was led to the incident that WAFF-48 covered. Just as annoying orange led some interactors to *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, the same song led me to the WAFF-48 newscast. The Gregory Brothers' remix video memeified the television interview described at length in the beginning of this chapter, a different take on "Rap as CNN for Black culture." A glaring difference between the interview and the remix is that the remix begins and ends with snippets of Antoine's interview while Kelly's is briefly sandwiched in between (literally one line). Recalling that the initial newscast featured Kelly first, already she is being written out of the video, revealing that while viral performance amplifies the visibility of its actors, it also distorts them, almost effacing them from the narrative.

Antoine Dodson opens the music video, telling the interviewer:

“Well...*OBVIOUSLY* we have a RAPIST in Lincoln PARK!” Shortly after, the catchy Trap music comes in on a 4/4 rhythm, mid-70 beats per minute, buzzing electronic bass and staccato piano keys at the forefront, sparse kickdrums and sprinkled snares in the backdrop, and hand-claps, and then the choral auto-tuned motif (integrated with the Gregory Brothers’ voices) begins:

(Antoine Dodson Chorus)	Run ‘n’ tell that homeboy /
He’s climbin’ in yo	Home, home, <i>homeboy</i>
windows / he’s snatchin’ yo	(Antoine Dodson Verse)
people up /	We got your t-shirts and
tryin’ to rape ‘em /	you left fingerprints and
so you need to /	all / You are so dumb /
hide ya kids / hide ya wife /	You are really dumb /
hide ya kids / hide ya wife /	For real
hide ya kids / hide ya wife /	(Elizabeth Gentle)
and hide ya husbands /	The man got away leaving
cause they rapin’ er’body	behind evidence
out here / You don’t have	(Kelly Dodson)
to come and confess /	I was attacked by some
We lookin’ for you /	idiot in the projects
We gon’ find you /	(Antoine Dodson)
We gon’ <i>find</i> you / So you	So Dumb / So Dumb / So
can run ‘n’ tell that / Run	Dumb / So!
‘n’ tell that /	(Chorus Repeats Once). ³⁶⁴

Throughout the song, gestures that were used to express the no-nonsense attitude and queerness that Antoine Dodson was putting forth in the newscast—the way in which he uses the “neck roll” with his afro blown out, for instance—become transformed. After video editing, Antoine Dodson’s face almost functions as a bouncing ball assisting spectators as they follow the unwritten lyrics. *BED INTRUDER SONG!!!* (now on *iTunes*) breaks down into a bridge at the close of the second chorus and, through its repetition, musically emphasizes a performance laced with Black street vernacular.

This Black street vernacular is where Dodson performs his threat to the sexual predator, “You don’t have to come and confess / We lookin’ for you / We gon’ find you / We gon’ *find* you / So you can run and tell that / Run and tell that / Run and tell that homeboy / Home, home, *homeboy*.” It is not just the slang that is street, vernacular or Black, and not even the threat, but the telling him, “Now you can run ‘n’ tell that homeboy,” after encroaching the camera space and rolling his eyes and neck to his left. His neck/eye gesture in combination with “Run ‘n’ tell that” are the stance and fighting words that precede a Black street vernacular fighting ritual. More than being a reference to Denise Lasalle’s 1972 song “Now Run And Tell That” or a song in the 2007 musical *Hairspray*, here, we see how “stancetaking and styling can operate as both verbal and embodied tools in the production of a form of covert denigration.”³⁶⁵ In this particular case, Antoine tells the sexual predator to go and inform his family about how he was threatened and to bring them so that they can get their “asses beat” too. This stance recalls, and even amplifies, moments where not only the individual involved, but the individual’s entire family, is provoked to fight.

E. Patrick Johnson discusses the attraction to, and currency of, Blackness, which is useful in considering incentives to memeify this Black performance. He writes, “For their part, Whites construct linguistic representations of Blacks that are grounded in racist stereotypes to maintain the status quo only to then re-appropriate these stereotypes to affect a fetishistic ‘escape’ into the Other to transcend the rigidity of their own whiteness, as well as to feed the capitalist gains of commodified Blackness.”³⁶⁶ By repeatedly highlighting certain sections of the newscast, the Gregory Brothers linguistically and gesturally represent Blackness, amplify that representation by making its soundtrack Trap

music, and by harmonizing with that representation—clapping while singing: “you can run ‘n’ tell that”—forever attach themselves as part of the Other’s (read the Dodson’s) entourage.

Trap music, coined in 2003 by rap artist, T.I., as “Trap Muzik” is a Southern United States (Texas, Georgia, and Tennessee) style of Hip-Hop music inspired by the struggles of making/dealing drugs that has been an unofficial genre of music since the early 1990s. The rap lyrics of Trap music often range from the paranoid to megalomaniacal, reflective of the states of mind that can emerge from a lifestyle of dealing drugs. The Atlanta, Georgia word “Trap,” before it was officially a genre of music, represented the (often blighted) location where drugs were made and dealt and the lifestyle that comes with that job. “Trap” also functioned as a critique of the dead-end nature of that business—as Big Boi from the Atlanta rap group Outkast reflected, “So now you’re back in the trap / Just that, trapped / Go on and marinate on that for a minute.”³⁶⁷ Musically, Trap is often denoted by “booming 808-style sub-bass kick drums” and “sixty-fourth-note hi-hats” created on drum machines, deep synths, and “cinematic strings.”³⁶⁸

Trap music, thus, is derived from situated (often blighted) places and the psychic, spiritual, and physical struggles to survive of certain (Black) bodies within those places; as such, Trap music functions as a witness to particular kinds of life in the African diaspora and how that seeing/imagining sounds. Since the linguistic is imbricated in performance, the visual summons the aural—what Fred Moten describes as, “a seeing that redoubles itself as sound” or “visible music.”³⁶⁹ Here, the use of Trap music by the Gregory Brothers further ties race to both corporeal and aural signifiers.

Browsing through the Gregory Brothers' other *Auto-Tune the News* videos, there is not always a correlation between the music chosen and the identities of the performer(s). However, the fact that Trap music was created as the perfect music to (re)present Antoine's warning should not be easily dismissed. Considering the Ghetto Witness trope that Antoine indexes, one also has to question why the Gregory Brothers chose Trap music instead of other musical forms. In an interview, the Gregory Brothers later revealed that they were particularly attracted to the musicality of Antoine's warning.³⁷⁰ The Gregory Brothers' attention to the cadence of Antoine Dodson's speech and their familiarity with Trap music signaled to them how Antoine and Kelly could both fit within a Trap music themed video, which, as a genre, already has mass appeal. Interactors recognized how well the interview was integrated with Trap music and their magnetism to Antoine's rhythm, directness, and vivid particularity was echoed and promoted. Indeed, the use of Trap music, itself a particularly viral musical sub-genre, increased the virality of the performance. In essence, viral material (Dodson's performance) met a viral music genre and created a robust viral product, which would translate into both money and fame.

A YouTube interactor called MaNgAnlmE stated, "this is why i love black guys. They can rap even when they dont (sic) realize it."³⁷¹ After posting this comment, MaNgAnlmE received seventeen likes, making it one of the top comments for *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)* on the afternoon of January 26, 2011. These other unnamed YouTube interactors in their "likes" agree with the assumption that there is some natural quality to the way that Black men deliver their speech that makes them genetically predisposed to being able to rap. MaNgAnlmE's notion about Black people's

predisposition to rap is steeped in inaccurate ideas about Black bodies as proxies for entertainment. More than the notion of the natural ability of Black people to be musical or rappers, what ties MaNgAnlmE's comment to the Gregory Brothers' is that a unique musicality—a particular rhythm, melody, or tonality to Antoine's speech—was deemed as remarkable and attractive. Reminding others of the musicality of the WAFF-48 newscast, YouTube interactor airstrike141, received three likes after commenting, “the original video actually sound (sic) like hes (sic) trying to rap already.”³⁷² One can, indeed, get lost in the rhythm as Antoine Dodson moves his head from side to side—as if to accent his syllables—and achieves varying pitches, a way of expressing his affect regarding his sister's violation and his disdain for the respectability politics of the lady on the “sidelines.”

The Gregory Brothers' decision to use Trap music as background music for this remix video, however, inadvertently caricatures the Dodson's location, class, and race. Antoine and Kelly Dodson are transformed into unintentional singing rap artists behind an African American genre of music inspired by the income-driven necessity to sell drugs in the Southern United States. In an interview, Michael—of the Gregory Brothers—reveals a little known fact about the *Auto-Tune the News* series, “Sometimes in our videos, we include a lot of singers, and when we do, we might arbitrarily use a beat that we're going to shape them all to. But Antoine, you know, he kind of owned the song—this was going to be all him—so I wanted [the beat] to be specific to that.”³⁷³ In essence, Michael immediately saw a song in the Dodson's interview that highlighted Antoine (not Kelly) Dodson and instead of arbitrarily choosing a beat, he intentionally chose a Trap motif to remain authentic to Antoine's performance. Here, the struggle of a young, Black,

working-class, Alabaman family is dangerously correlated with the sound of Trap music.

Trap music signifies poverty, Blackness, and blighted locales, virally representing these classes, identities, and geographies through its widely circulated lyrics and imagery, which takes advantage of viral mechanisms, such as video-sharing web sites and television broadcasts. This viral genre does unspoken work for the Gregory Brothers in making Antoine Dodson legible. Nonetheless, they also make him illegible in a significant way as the bodies associated with Trap music do not normally exhibit performances of Black queer masculinity. Through this “miscasting,”³⁷⁴ the Gregory Brothers not only create comedy, but widen the spectrum of bodies that can effectively perform (or fail at performing) Trap music; who, indeed, regulates the authenticity of Trap performances? Admittedly, we begin to see how this trauma transforms into an interview, which is now inseparable from Hip-Hop music as Antoine Dodson’s address to an unnamed intruder becomes the lyrics to the latest Trap song.

Many other interactors on WSHH and YouTube only responded to the video of the Trap song *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, and not each other, praising the song for its brilliance and coolness, asking others if they stopped watching the video at 1:15, and whether the intruder had been found. While these remarks outnumbered the responses I will interrogate here, and speak to the Gregory Brothers’ talent at making the gravely serious comedically palatable, the interactions that lie in their shadow tell how this viral performance is outstanding and trendy in ways that impact the wellness of Black bodies. A closer look at comments marginal to the many that were written reveal haunting assumptions about Kelly Dodson’s sexual desires. Here, I explore how interactor responses challenge and support prevailing racist, sexist, and heteronormative

discourses surrounding Kelly Dodson's Black womanhood on WSHH; producing a netnography of YouTube that distills similar discourse from the first year's comments, I will also explore the ways in which conceptions of the sexual desires of Black women are intimately tied to conceptions of the sexual desires of Black men.

Soon after the *Antoine Dodson - They Rape'n Everybody Out Here [Auto Tune Edition]* was published on WSHH, a comment concerned with the dynamics of rape in relationship to Kelly Dodson emerged. One interactor posted, "his sis doesnt (sic) look like a rape victim..she probably wanted it." ³⁷⁵ The WSHH comment about Kelly desiring her assault evoked the stereotype of the licentious Black woman who, even when sexually assaulted, such an act could never be against her will. The notion of Kelly as Antoine's sister, again, places her only in relationship to him, which allows us to witness an effect of what WAFF-48 news set in motion: emphasizing Antoine and deemphasizing Kelly. Also, commenting that Kelly does not look like a rape victim is symptomatic of the popular assurance of what a rape victim looks like and the larger ways in which women's bodies, and Black women's bodies in particular, are not given the chance to be perceived as vulnerable to sexual violence. The significance of the above WSHH comment is that it was questioned by another WSHH interactor, forming a dialogue that broke up the other monologues on the comment wall.

While the sexual and racial ideology used to justify the attempted rape was haunting, one interactor faced it and challenged the notion that Kelly Dodson desired her own sexual assault. In response to Kelly not looking like a rape victim, another WSHH interactor commented, "What Kinda cr*p is that? Seriously? Who WANTS to be raped?...JERK!!!!" ³⁷⁶ By not limiting rape to particular genders, e³⁷⁷ does some critical

work in thinking about rape beyond its heteronormative discourse and who fits the description of rape victim. E also takes the previous person to task about treating the acts of force and violence like consensual sex. It is clear that Kelly Dodson's scenario—where her home is invaded and her body assaulted by an uninvited stranger—eliminates the possibility of rape fantasy. The assertion behind e's question, that no one wants to be raped demonstrates how viral performances do not simply amplify issues pertaining to the denigration of race, gender, and class, but through circulation the acts create conditions whereby one can learn of and challenge those very denigrations.

I contend that comment areas on websites such as WSHH and YouTube enable the possibility that the original interactor who mistreated the claim of sexual assault by Kelly Dodson could see alternative perspectives. This possibility is where perspective-altering potential that affirms Black life lies in the realm of memeified viral performance. In *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* Susan Manning explores race, gender, sexuality, and of particular interest here, spectatorship and reception, in mid-twentieth century American theatre dance. Manning describes a process she terms as “cross-viewing,” which elaborates how spectators of a performance can see other subjectivities—from different social locations than their own—observing the same performance in dissimilar ways, in turn, influencing cross-viewers to interpret the bodies in motion, or how to watch them, differently. In other words, cross-viewing is the watching of other people watching.³⁷⁸ This cross-viewing, she writes, “has the potential to alter how publics read bodies in motion and thus to effect social and artistic change.”³⁷⁹ Comment areas on video-sharing sites allow interactors to participate in an act of cross-viewing, whereby, they witness another's comment or use of abusive power, with the possibility of

reinforcing, challenging, or transgressing what they cross-viewed. Despite my optimistic contention, I would suggest that the frequent sexist/racist/classist comments in this video's comment areas on WSHH and YouTube constitute a challenge to critical anti-racist discourses, which are less frequent as many interactors' responses to the video are not in conversation with another interactor, engaged by someone else or, as it is with YouTube, merely liked.

Within my fieldnotes, I kept noting that there was a particular concept that received many "likes" and only emerged from YouTube commenters, which alarmed me: that a little Black baby boy in the background of the WAFF-48 coverage of Kelly Dodson's story was the rapist. For example, there are a number of top comments that refer to the 41st-43rd seconds of the video, alerting others that they can see the rapist during those seconds of the video, and then other users liking those comments. Indeed, the way in which the original newscast was rendered centered a Black baby boy in a grey



Figure 4.4. “ANTOINE DODSON. THIS IS JUST TOO FUNNY!,” YouTube Video, 2:03, originally from an interview by WAFF-48 News, posted by interactor “WSHH,” August, 3, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXPgjsB0Xm0>. Photograph, January 19, 2015.

and yellow striped shirt at the precise moment when Kelly was saying, with one hand on her hip, “I was attacked by some idiot in the projects” (as seen in fig. 4.4). The little boy was literally opening the door to the cadence of Kelly saying, “projects.” Playing off of the “hide ya wife, hide ya kids, and hide ya husbands” phrase that Antoine said, and the Gregory Brothers

transformed into a mantra, YouTube

interactor Laplap9370 received 68 likes for asking, “did any body notice that little boy from 0:41 to 0:43 he is the rapist!!! he is trying to rape the others.....so,ya (sic) need to hide you (sic) kid....just your kid...home boy!”³⁸⁰ Describing what the Black baby is doing, Irockgame1 received 24 likes remarking, “at 0:42 there is a rapist entering the house. lol.”³⁸¹ Linking the title of the video to the little boy, baradona10 received 59 likes saying, “0:41 the little kid is the bed intruder!!!!!!”³⁸²

The consensus around these remarks, posing the baby Black boy as the rapist, link the comments from YouTube to the pejorative comment from WSHH for the ways in which they are all tied to Kelly Dodson desiring her own sexual assault. Discussing the link between Black women’s perceived promiscuity and Black men’s perceived compulsive sexual urges, Patricia Hill Collins suggests that the stereotype of Black men as rapists reinforces the Black woman as whore archetype.³⁸³ This semblance enumerates

how Black baby boys are disallowed their childhoods, needing to grow up and be accountable adults far too soon, and criminalized (and sexualized) before they can tell the difference between right and wrong or express sexual desire.³⁸⁴ These comments, as a result, function to reinforce the mythical Black rapist and the mythical Black whore archetypes. Even though the Black bodies in this moment are absolutely survivors of trespassing, both of their home, their neighbor's home, and their bodies, interactors attempt to criminalize them, making them the agent of their own trauma. From these examples, we see how the (re)framing of Kelly Dodson as a sexual predator also allows for her vulnerability as sexual prey.

Here I will continue a netnography of the dangerous comments that interactors on WSHH and YouTube shared, but will shift attention to those concerning Antoine Dodson's sexuality, which both compound and trouble popular notions around Black gay bodies. In my analysis of WSHH comments, I am particularly cautious about the neoliberal impulse to label Black cultural spaces as overly-homophobic or homonegative, which make Black groups absolutely responsible for a structural homophobia or homonegativity of which they are a part and not the absolute whole of. Nonetheless, from my survey of the first year of top rated comments from YouTube and WSHH, "gay" and "fag" were used respectively in largely denigrating ways. Indeed, there are a spectrum of interactions that repeat themselves with marked difference, signaling to me an ideological consistency that I cannot ignore. Matthew W. Hughey and Jessie Daniels posit, "Given that racist [and homonegative] language has (1) changed form to become more subtle and (2) moved backstage to private areas, one might view the intersection of racist [and homonegative] discourse and the internet as a third space betwixt and between the public

and private spheres.”³⁸⁵The following comments are exemplars of this denigrating tendency as well as how interactors, through their use of discourses from bodies IRL on YouTube and WSHH, betray the anonymity that online identity provides.

On November 3, 2010 YouTube interactor jcords40oz received two likes for sarcastically commenting on Antoine’s sexuality: “He’s not gay at all... Lmfao.”³⁸⁶The user’s attention to Antoine’s sexuality was denigrating for the way in which “he’s not gay at all” takes on a sarcasm followed by the comedic “Lmfao.” If we take comedy to emerge from the placement of the abnormal in a normal scene, and since we do not traditionally see Black effeminate men as being able to protect anyone, let alone themselves, we might begin to understand why jcords40oz could “laugh his fucking ass off.”

The latter remark as comedic also has to do with the ease through which normalized sexuality is understood. While there is no correlation between effeminacy and a particular sexuality, for jcords40oz Antoine Dodson’s effeminacy immediately betrays his sexuality. The obviousness of, and attention to, Antoine Dodson as gay suggests the inability to understand race as always constitutive of gender, class, and sexuality. Indeed, the ways in which gayness is disaggregated from Blackness compounds the racial discourse where the authentic Black subject is male and heterosexual.³⁸⁷

Jcords40oz’s remark also views Black gay men in the trope of “Negro Faggotry” that filmmaker, activist, and poet Marlon T. Riggs describes as caricature, “entertaining us in the castles of our homes—like court jesters, like eunuchs—with their double entendres, their dead-end lusts, and, above all, their relentless hilarity in the face of relentless despair. Negro Faggotry is all the rage!”³⁸⁸ Indeed, considering Blackness and

homosexuality together, through the lens of cinematic and televisual representations, a trope begins to emerge that views Black gay men as comic relief: Negro Faggotry. In a scene of despair, with the assaulter still unaccounted for, Antoine Dodson's sexual desires become most visible and laughable to his audience. Antoine entertains, transforming a serious situation into one of amusement due onlookers' inability to reconcile that which has never been estranged to begin with: Black effeminacy—read as gay.

Differently from disaggregating Blackness from sexuality, circa 2010 a WSHH interactor considered Blackness and sexuality as inseparable, albeit as an insult, and commented, “WHY DO THIEY (sic) SHOW THESE IGNORENT (sic) BLACK f*gS ON TV MAKI (sic) BLACK PPL (sic) OOK (sic) BAD!!!!!!”³⁸⁹ As this interactor shares his embarrassment about, or observation of, Antoine Dodson, he echoes sentiments aligned with respectability politics. E's rhetorical question also interplays class, naming Antoine Dodson ignorant, and race, naming Antoine Dodson Black, with an insult toward his perceived sexuality, naming Antoine Dodson a fag.

Through the interactor's use of fag, e also dangerously situates effeminacy within a derogatory understanding of a queer sexuality. E. Patrick Johnson describes what is behind the (in)congruity of behavior with sexuality: “Because femininity is always already devalued in patriarchal societies, those associated with the feminine are also viewed as inferior. Given the ways in which effeminacy in men is read as a sign of homosexuality, particularly in the United States, it follows that homosexual men are devalued.”³⁹⁰ Antoine's behavior—(mis)read as effeminate and then as homosexual—is devalued in a way that cannot be disconnected from his Blackness. Specifically here, his gender performance (also read as having classed inflections), makes Black people “look

bad.” This notion of “looking bad” speaks to a processing of potential embarrassment, a threat to both raced and masculine pride; neither of which Antoine Dodson’s performance is concerned with.³⁹¹ The Black feminist intervention that Antoine Dodson’s performance made is obscured by the immense attention to his sexuality, and importantly, his race.

While aspects of Antoine’s performance summoned politics around respectability and raced and masculine pride, one WSHH interactor offered an alternative view. In response to the interactor above who referred to Antoine (and possibly Kelly) Dodson as ignorant, e says, “I don’t think the individuals were ignorant. He came correct.” This interactor expresses a Ghetto-centric ideology that, as Robin Kelley suggests in *Race Rebels*, re-contextualizes perspectives from “a collective identity shaped by class consciousness, the character of inner-city space, police repression, poverty, and the constant threat of interracial violence.”³⁹² Kelley goes on to suggest that through Ghetto-centric constructions negative stereotypes of Black men become contextualized, criminal acts are reconstituted as resistance to work, and fearlessness is used to quantify masculinity.³⁹³ The interactor’s comment is situated within a Ghetto-centric view of the viral performance. E’s positionality offers a lens through which Antoine Dodson properly approaches this situation with respect not only for his sister, but for racial, class, and gay pride as well.

While respectability politics clash with Ghetto-centricity, they also function to resist an American scientific racism of the mid-nineteenth century, which suggests that racial differences within the human race are hierarchically speciated. Nineteenth century ethnologists John C. Nott and George Gliddon³⁹⁴ remark on an illustration from their sweeping ethnological survey titled, *Types of Mankind*, that contains an “Algerian Negro”

and “Saharan Negro” on its top row and a “Gorilla” on its bottom row. They write, “The palpable analogies and dissimilarities between an inferior type of mankind and a superior type of monkey require no comment.”³⁹⁵ Nott and Gliddon’s juxtaposition of images suggested that Negroes (and their descendants) were unequivocally related to gorillas in ways that other races of mankind, due to their superiority to Negroes, were not. Even though their racist notions have long since been debunked, the way in which they influenced how North Americans saw race in the mid-nineteenth century still linger, only confident enough to emerge in the most anonymous of settings, like WSHH’s comment walls.

Praising the aesthetic value of the video *Antoine Dodson - They Rape'n Everybody Out Here [Auto Tune Edition]*, circa 2010 a WSHH interactor writes, “THIS SONBG [sic] IS A CERTIFIED BANGER!” The same interactor then takes an insulting yet, given the praise of the beginning of e’s comment, unexpected turn writing, “YOU NAPPY HEADED JIGGABOOS [sic] ALWAYS GIVE ME A LAUGH ON THIS MONKIE [sic] SITE! -JOHN BOY.”³⁹⁶ John boy deploys “jiggaboos”—an early twentieth century derogatory characterization of a Black person possessing cliché’d Black attributes, such as wooly hair, dark skin, and big lips—to derisively label the people who are popularly featured in the videos on WSHH and *Antoine Dodson - They Rape'n Everybody Out Here [Auto Tune Edition]* in particular.³⁹⁷ The website WSHH is described by said interactor as a “monkie site,” a remark that proposes the website’s low-tech content/design and its interactors are untamed and uncultivated in comparison to other sites online. Indeed, the construction of WSHH and the remix video as a low-tech and unsophisticated space and

production evokes characterizations of the World Wide Web as cultivated, tamed, and high-tech that tend to relegate Black bodies to its margins.³⁹⁸

By evoking nineteenth-century American scientific anti-Black racism and twentieth-century anti-Black derogations, John Boy confirms the idea that digital spaces, as raceless and genderless as their interactors can represent themselves to be through anonymous/disguised profiles, still “have ethnocentric inflections when [the World Wide Web is] uncritically presumed to be a kind of universal reality.”³⁹⁹ Online virtual worlds, have been discussed as locations where one can discard issues around their bodily subjectivity (including prejudice) by becoming whomever E wants, even if E is simply known as guest.⁴⁰⁰ Virtual interactions, however, no matter how disembodied, chart discourses that emerge from bodies IRL that experience privileges and inequalities that drive choices concerning if they can interact and how they interact in virtual life.⁴⁰¹ Evidently, “The Internet and other computer-based technologies are complex topographies of power and privilege, made up of walled communities, new (plat)forms of economic and technological exclusion, and both new and old styles of race as code, interaction, and image.”⁴⁰² In this case, John boy is communicating a White supremacist discourse that emerged out of the experience of White bodies in contact with Black bodies IRL in the nineteenth and twentieth-century, in turn, potentially betraying e’s racial and social positionality. John Boy’s unopposed comment also reveals much about the xenophobic, or at the very least, the anti-dialogical architexture between interactors present within WSHH.

The latter bigoted comments may come off as purely figurative with little to no impact on the real bodies they reference. However, considering a sweeping study by the

Opportunity Agenda, “Social Science Literature Review: Media Representations and Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys,” it becomes clear that the media’s “distorted pattern of portrayal” of Blacks generally, and Black men particularly, has causal affects on public attitudes toward them.⁴⁰³ Indeed, “The caricature of black masculinity has long been both the thing that excuses white oppression and stimulates the fear that motivates it” of which Blacks themselves are not immune.⁴⁰⁴ If John Boy is an employer, a judge, or a police officer, his attitudes would, more directly, affect the hiring or promotion, the sentencing or dismissal, or the degree of arrest of a Black person. Certainly, the recent federal investigation of the Ferguson police department conveys how less fragrant public attitudes, such as African Americans in Ferguson, MO lacking “personal responsibility,” cause African Americans to “experience disproportionate harm under Ferguson’s approach to law enforcement.”⁴⁰⁵ The investigation reveals the way in which discursive bias and stereotyping influences behavior, which adversely affects African Americans in Ferguson, MO. These adverse affects in Ferguson, MO range from multiple citations in a single incident, lower chances of case dismissal by Municipal Judges, and force used at disproportionately high rates.⁴⁰⁶ It is, indeed, dangerous to believe that because lawful racial discrimination ended we can be complacent about racism’s discursive existence and causal relationship to behavior, whether it be spoken, emailed, or posted to a comment wall.

Interactions on comment walls convey how what happens outside of the frame of any performance will reveal its reality as fervently as, if not more than, the enframed bodies will. The discourses used by the interactors depict a different picture of the pressures and issues that the bodies within the camera’s lens face than the bodies reveal

on their own. Hank Willis Thomas' *Frames* series is a contemporary exemplar of this idea.⁴⁰⁷ In the images, someone holds a frame in front of people or objects and Thomas takes a picture that includes the frame and what is outside the frame. By doing this, Thomas shows us how what is centered by the camera, or frame, is very limiting and an incomplete picture, leaving out other factors involved in scripting the enframed performance. For example, in one image from the Million Woman March, named *Three* [fig. 3], three women smile directly at the camera while they center themselves within a wooden frame, outside of which everyone else's attention is elsewhere.⁴⁰⁸ Stopping at the frame, one might imagine that the three women had a crucial position in the Million Woman March, yet, an interpretation beyond the frame shows how inconsequential they might have been.

Here, Antoine Dodson's performance functions as the three women smiling directly at the camera, while the interactors' attention is both there and elsewhere. Interactors, indeed, bring attention to minor and major details within and outside of the remix video that were not necessarily centered by WAFF-48 or the Gregory Brothers, yet, hold tremendous significance and affect how Kelly and Antoine Dodson are discursively perceived. The repeated ways in which Antoine Dodson's performance travels beyond the frames of the camera (or video box) are also significant to the remix video's success as a viral performance. Antoine Dodson's performance intersects with diverse discourses and affects, emphasizing how other things script what is occurring within the camera. As much as racial and sexual aspects of Kelly and Antoine Dodson are framed and limited by certain perceptions and mechanisms, they are also unframed by the same technologies.

Part III

The Genealogy of the Ghetto Witness:

Memeification of *BED INTRUDER SONG!!!* (now on iTunes)

Memos function as shadows. They are both happening outside the frame and derivative of the performance within the frame, thereby making new frames through which to understand the so called original performance. Memeifying—the creative derivation of a performance with slight variation—Antoine Dodson amplifies the visibility and hearability of new bodies he is in proximity to and, for my purposes, sets up a genealogical conversation for the Ghetto Witness. Indeed, tracing the circulation of derivations of Antoine Dodson’s performance exposes a pattern where certain behaviors become seemingly primed for media consumption—viral material. Here, I will examine the ways in which Antoine Dodson has been memeified both visually and vernacularly. I engage a brief netnographic survey of the first year of comments that concern Antoine Dodson in a different YouTube remix video named, “Sweet Brown - Ain't Nobody Got Time for That (Autotune Remix);” next, I do a performance analysis of an image that was a curation of the most popular Ghetto Witnesses from 2010-2013; lastly, I end with a brief discourse analysis of a vernacular derivation of the saying “hide ya wife, hide ya kids, and hide ya husbands.” As performatives are produced in relationship to Antoine Dodson’s performance from WAFF-48, it becomes important to decipher them since the apparatuses of digital media (re)present (un)livable things about race, class, gender, and sexuality that pervade everyday cultural experiences online and IRL.

Kimberly “Sweet Brown” Wilkins, a Black woman from Oklahoma City, OK, was interviewed by NBC news affiliate KFOR-4 because five units in an apartment complex

caught on fire, of which she was a resident in, and survivor from, one of them. Smiling every so often, she recounts the following in the interview: “I woke up to get me a cold pop. And then I thought somebody was barbecuing. I said oh lord Jesus it’s a fire!” At this point in her brief interview, her son walks in the background, covers his entire face then removes his hands, shaking his head no. As her gold tooth glimmers in the camera, she continues, “Then I ran out, I didn’t grab no shoes or nothing Jesus.” Shaking her head and gesturing her pointer finger down toward her feet she continued, “I *ran* for my life!” Her son is walking back now, and he looks directly in the camera, cheeks raised, and not laughing. Clutching her chest she continued, “And then the smoke got me. I got bronchitis.” She shakes her head rapidly saying, “Ain’t nobody got time for that!” Once she finishes her testimony, she bursts into laughter as she looks right, which is where her son is.

What is subversive, or does not go down easily, about the video is the way in which Sweet Brown’s son roams in the background as she amusingly, even smirking throughout her testimony, tells the news reporter her side of the story. The entire time that her son was pacing, he expresses the kind of helpless shame that children feel when their parents humiliate them in public. He also represents the embarrassment that Black communities feel toward the iconicity of these kinds of performances that, even though they may be real on that individual’s level, come to authenticate them as an entire racial group. Essentially, we have the presence of the humiliated group and the body performing what that group is ashamed of in the same performance, which rarely, if ever, happens in the index of Ghetto Witnesses that I reference in this chapter.

Kimberly Wilkins' nickname summons a consumable and addictive Brown and places her in a more direct relationship with what Kyla Tompkins calls the "trope of black edibility" and the associations of Blackness with sweetness.⁴⁰⁹ Black edibility deals with the image of the Black body when "metaphorized as food."⁴¹⁰ However, "Sweet Brown" is what Kimberly Wilkins goes by, not what a YouTube or WSHH interactor named her. Thus, Kimberly Wilkins' self-application of her nickname, at the most critical, hints at an awareness of the historical consumption of Black bodies in popular culture (which her son visually performs), or, at the most pedestrian, hints at her personality as a kind Black woman.

After the initial newscast went viral, The Parody Factory—a YouTube channel specializing in parodies—made a gospel-themed music video mashup. Their use of gospel music was a nod, not only to Sweet Brown's Blackness, but also her references to Jesus throughout her interview. Gospel music was a "by-product of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century black 'folk church.'"⁴¹¹ The declarations of Ghetto Witnesses fit within the gospel tradition considering that, "The official doctrine of the folk church encourages spontaneous expressions through improvised song, testimonies, prayers, and praises from individuals."⁴¹² Similar to Trap music being used to set the scene for the remix of the Dodson's testimony, gospel music is used here as a Black genre of music that prepares listeners for a particular kind of embodied verbal testimony, one of triumph over obstacles. Indeed, gospel music often precedes, and occurs during, a testimony in church and The Parody Factory, with their use of hand-clapping, foot-stomping, and a choir during Sweet Brown's testimony, tap into this tradition in their remix video of the KFOR-4 news interview. Gospel music acts as a sonic and visual witness to testimonies

of people who struggle against obstacles to living righteously, and in this particular case, just living.

Nonetheless, the video also featured clips from dozens of movies and obscure videos filled with people clapping their hands, people and monkeys dancing, and most importantly for my current analysis, Antoine Dodson barbecuing with Don King as seen in Figs. 4.5, 4.6, and 4.7.⁴¹³ While this video contains plethora material to interrogate, particularly the use of dancing monkeys, keeping on the topic of the memeification of the *BED INTRUDER SONG!!!* (now on iTunes), the fact that Antoine Dodson appeared in the middle of “Sweet Brown - Ain't Nobody Got Time for That (Autotune Remix)” barbecuing with Don King struck me. The memeification of Antoine Dodson in the “Sweet Brown - Ain't Nobody Got Time for That (Autotune Remix)” begins to center him in what I am calling the archetype of the Ghetto Witness. Not only are these memes viral



Figure 4.5. “Sweet Brown - Ain't Nobody Got Time for That (Autotune Remix),” photograph captured from a YouTube video, 1:56, posted by theparodyfactory1, April 13, 2012, accessed May 10, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFEoMO0pc7k>. Photograph, June 11, 2014.



Figure 4.6. “Sweet Brown - Ain't Nobody Got Time for That (Autotune Remix),” photograph captured from a YouTube video, 1:56, posted by theparodyfactory1, April 13, 2012, accessed May 10, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFEoMO0pc7k>. Photograph, June 11, 2014.



Figure 4.7. “Sweet Brown - Ain't Nobody Got Time for That (Autotune Remix),” photograph captured from a YouTube video, 1:56, posted by theparodyfactory1, April 13, 2012, accessed May 10, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFEoMO0pc7k>. Photograph, June 11, 2014.

performances of Antoine Dodson’s tirade, but with each (re)production, they reinforce his body as the primary referent for the Ghetto Witness.

The image of Antoine Dodson emerges as a thought bubble from Sweet Brown as she is saying, “I thought somebody was barbecuing.” Don King and Antoine Dodson stare at the spectator, heads clearly photoshopped onto other Black men’s bodies, as if to suggest Black male bodies are interchangeable. This photoshopping move, indeed, recalls the duplication mechanisms of the Intel ad discussed in the introduction, a move that frames Black male bodies as anonymous. Both King and Dodson represent two Black men from the ‘hood, whose masculinities, not to mention blown out hair, stand out in queer ways. There is also the subtle hint of Antoine Dodson as a fighter and Don King as his promoter, conspiring to make a deal for a boxing match against the man that assaulted his sister. Here, the viral is intertextual. The cultural capital of Dodson’s visual imagery is deployed to enhance the viral energy around Sweet Brown. Indeed, these two images—

exemplar of the Ghetto Witness—operate in the public sphere largely as fodder for the public consumption of comedy and the candor of Black street vernacular.

Antoine is rendered into this scene of the Sweet Brown remix like a Black collectible. It becomes clear how “culture as commodity carries its past into its present in ways that insist that we reckon with the logics of blackness...”⁴¹⁴ This rendering demonstrates how digital mechanisms allow images to perform anachronistically, a temporality that, according to Kara Keeling indicates Black subjectivity, disrupting the linear chronologies that European cultures lay claim to.⁴¹⁵ The thought bubble emerging from Sweet Brown citationally connects her to Antoine Dodson. This reference situates Dodson’s past in Wilkins’ present moment, urging us to reckon with how his body is performing in popular culture and everyday life two years later. YouTube interactors on The Parody Factory’s page also indicate how Antoine Dodson’s body is being used to enframe Sweet Brown in particular ways.

After the first month of the remix, interactor MadXMaverick said, “she’s the new bed intruder guy.”⁴¹⁶ By referring to Wilkins as the “bed intruder guy,” MadXMaverick’s statement, points toward the Dodsons’ remix video, and the Sweet Brown video as the reincarnation of it. MadXMaverick’s framing prioritizes Wilkins’ race and street vernacular as things that tie her to Antoine Dodson. Another user, mynameissparkle1, later posted, “The new Antoine Dodson.”⁴¹⁷ The latter comments convey “BED INTRUDER SONG (now on iTunes)” and Antoine Dodson as proxies for the archetype of the Ghetto Witness. Even though Antoine Dodson is only a point along an extensive line of Ghetto Witnesses, the way in which the newscast, “woman wakes up to find bed intruder in bed,” and auto-tuned remix, *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, were

archived through uploading and sharing, commenting and (re)presenting, and critiquing and historicizing, made it widely accessible and archived, something that could be cued up, re-watched like it was new, and studied, enabling it to become more referential than prior Ghetto Witnesses to the extent that the new Ghetto Witness is always already the new Antoine Dodson. Further cementing my assertion that Antoine Dodson has become the exemplar Ghetto Witness, one interactor curated the most viral Ghetto Witnesses between 2010 and 2013 together in one image.

The image, “The Justice League,” in fig. 4.8 was created when Reddit user, *superboysean*, uploaded it to *Imgur*—an online image hosting service—and shared it on *Reddit.com* on May 11, 2013.⁴¹⁸ “The Justice League” features Antoine Dodson,



Figure 4.8. *Superboysean*, “The Justice League” *Reddit*, May 11, 2013, http://www.reddit.com/r/funny/comments/1e4zjf/the_justice_league/.

Kimberly “Sweet Brown” Wilkins, and Charles Ramsey⁴¹⁹ alongside each other, all frozen in moments of viral public testimony. Antoine’s facial expression appears like he is in the middle of saying, “you are really dumb,” Brown appears to be saying, “I got bronchitis,” and Ramsey seems to be saying, “dead giveaway!” Superboysean’s post does the work of indexing the trope of the Ghetto Witness through another rendered viral performance of them in popular culture: the creation, sharing, and upvoting of the image, “The Justice League,” on Reddit.

While “The Justice League” evokes notions of the Ghetto Witness as American superheroes and superheroines, its indexing also contains a mockery and challenging of those notions. If anything, here “The Justice League” represents America’s antiheroes and antiheroines—the forgotten, the perceived criminals, the welfare recipients on the grind—people who do not occupy the role of protector or savior in the popular imagination. In many ways, they become the joke because—by way of their race, class, and sexualities—they cannot be the heroes and heroines they reference, barely able to save their families, let alone their dignity, from harm. We do not get the hero, we get a Black queen—an effeminate gay male—that services our (mis)understanding of what we know Black queer men to be. We do not get the heroine, we get a headscarf-wearing mammy/aunt figure that reinforces our (mis)understanding of what we know a heterosexual/asexual mature Black woman to be. We do not get the hero, we get the self-described, ““scary looking black dude,”” strengthening our (mis)understanding of what we know a mature Black heterosexual man to be.⁴²⁰ In essence, these figures are antiheroic because they visually and sonically trouble popular power fantasies of a White-heterosexual-male-protagonist-saving-grace.

As antiheroes and antiheroines, Dodson, Wilkins, and Ramsey stand to critique America, expose it as an unsafe place where one needs to hide themselves from sex offenders, run for their lives from fires, or know that something is terribly wrong when a White person shows unsolicited affection or need. They come to us as they are, without masks or uniforms, and they reflect, as plainly as possible, on climactic moments in their lives. They alert us that no hero will be there to save anyone—the ambulance, the police, and the fire truck will not respond in time because of who they are responding to, where they are located, or where they live—and one will perish if one does not save or fend for themselves.

These are not the American, Amazonian, and Atlantean heroes and heroines representative of the Justice League, these are the American casualties from Huntsville, AL, Oklahoma City, OK, and Cleveland, OH that are representative of the detrimental ways that pedestrian Blackness is perceived in popular culture; if anything, they are X-Men. Even still, considering how White, male, heteronormative, and integrationist the main cast has been and continues to be,⁴²¹ Dodson, Wilkins, and Ramsey are the Morlocks of the X-Men—mutant (illegible) bodies, the marginalized of the marginalized, standing as Others as well as Other to Black people; Others that trouble the popular visual and aural fields of perception, challenge and raise critical questions of society, while their disenfranchisement that makes them so spectacular creates problems for them as individuals and groups. Dodson's, Wilkins', and Ramsey's socioeconomic and sociocultural conditions are marginalized through the very mechanisms of viral performance that amplify their optic and aural dissonance.

Importantly, (anti)heros/heroines are situated, highly concerned with matters that are closest to home. Additionally, the high barriers to exit, which make the ghetto such a trap, intensify the situatedness of Ghetto Witnesses. Indeed, Antoine Dodson, Kimberly Wilkins, and Charles Ramsey each have such an intertwined relationship with, and vulnerability in, their communities that what happens to the neighborhood, whether it be sexual assault, a fire, or a kidnapping, directly affects them. Surely the news reporters are witnesses as well, editing the facts and audio to convey their larger story. However, Elizabeth Gentle, or other reporters, who often go unnamed, are able to exit and go on to the next story. The Ghetto witness must live with, and be thingified by, the narrative they have become known for.

Part of what Ghetto Witnesses become known for are the vernacular phrases that they (re)produce. Kimberly “Sweet Brown” Wilkins popularized “Ain’t nobody got time for that!” Charles Ramsey popularized “Dead Giveaway!” Antoine Dodson coined and popularized the phrase, “hide ya kids, hide ya wife, and hide ya husbands.” True to the chaos of viral performance, Antoine Dodson’s phrase was memeified, this time into Bossip categories—tags primarily used to index news items on Bossip.com. Bossip, an online magazine whose name merges gossip with Blackness, mainly reports on things concerning, or that might have currency among, Black people in the U.S. The result is the extension of this viral performance through the reporting of gossip and rumor. Bossip’s use of the “hide ya” phrase reveals the ways in which Dodson’s body is understood through his Black queer vernacular and beyond the enframing of his performance on WAFF-48 news.

While the “hide ya kids” and “hide ya wife” tags feature plethora news articles all the way up to the present, “hide ya husbands” tags are nonexistent. “Hide ya kids” featured news with titles such as, “Funny Or Foul? A Gallery Of ARMED Fathers Posing With Daughter’s Prom Date,” “Another Day, Another Female High School Teacher Popped For Being A Freak,” and “#BringBackOurGirls: Michelle Obama Joins Social Media Movement To Return Kidnapped Nigerian School Girls Via Twitter.” “Hide ya wife” featured news with titles like, “For Discussion: If You Caught Your Friend’s Husband Kissing Another Man... Would You Tell Her?,” “Smooches Hooches: WNBA Baller Diana Taurasi Plants A Juicy Kiss On Opposing Player During Game! [Video],” and “What The Hell?? Racist And Drugged Up Dad Axe Murdered His Family With Brown Eyes, But Spared Youngest ‘Pure Aryan’ Daughter!” Even though, “Hide ya husbands” was not a featured tag used to index news on the site, there were two titles that mentioned it: “Hide Ya Kids And Hide Ya Husbands!: Sisqo (The Dragon) Is Back!!! [Video]” and “Ho Sit Down: Kirk’s Alleged Jacuzzi Jumpoff Claps Back After Being Put On Blast For Creepin’ With A Married Man- ‘Just Hide Your Husbands’” both titles predicated on the assumed deviant sexuality of Sisqo and controlling the infidelity of Kirk Frost from *Hip Hop Atlanta*, both Black men. Importantly, the amount of news under each category (children, women, and men) decreased as adulthood and maleness increased, with seventy-eight pages of news tagged under “hide ya kids,” twenty-one pages of news tagged under “hide ya wife,” and none tagged under “hide ya husbands” as of June 3, 2014.

The limited amount of news that Bossip chose to feature, or could evidence, speaks to the ways in which there remains an egregious stigma around violence that men

experience, particularly sexual and physical violence, that lessens their likelihood of admitting to being survivors.⁴²² The dearth of news under a “hide ya husbands” category signals that accounts around sexual violence involving mature male adults is not popularly reported enough to index. This likely comes from an unwillingness to disclose sexual and physical trauma due to the types of ways that it mars popular conceptions of masculinity as invulnerable to, and primary catalyst of, those types of traumas.

In a haunting way, the tags, in combination with the titles of the stories mentioned above, point back to notions held around Antoine Dodson as the rapist of his own sister—the idea that while Antoine was instructing his community to protect their entire families, he, because he was gay and embodied a deviant sexuality, is the one that they needed protection from.⁴²³ Indeed, the subtext of each of the news stories under the tag “hide ya kids” and “hide ya wife” follows the latter sickening logic. Certainly, the types of news that were tagged under Antoine’s “hide ya” phrase are telling reminders about how deviant desires, sexualities, and races are used as scapegoats, or proxies, for the world’s ills and how new media technologies make those proxies readily available in simplified ways. While the phrase was a verbal and embodied tool used by Antoine Dodson as a form of covert denigration toward Kelly Dodson’s perpetrator and naysayers, Bossip shows how that covert denigration can be produced as a tool to disparage Antoine Dodson’s embodiment and street vernacular, turning stancetaking and styling on its head.

A serious story about an attempted rape, which summoned discourses around sexual violence in Black communities, (d)evolved into viral performances concerning the sexuality of Antoine Dodson, the threat and fear of homosexuality, queer acts of Black masculinity as comic relief and entertainment, and racial memeification. Once circulated

through viral performance, the phrase “Hide Ya Kids, Hide Ya Wife,” and one could argue the entirety of Antoine’s warning/defense, became reworked and deployed as a category for serial rapists, child molesters, LGBTQI drama, and infidelity (all things that are misguidedly associated with Black gay men in particular), remixes to imitate and/or deride his performance, a sex offender tracker application, an iTunes song, T-shirts, Halloween costumes, and a cameo in Tyler Perry’s *A Madea Christmas* (where he played the same Ghetto Witness). This song, and indeed this scenario, never dies and the number of (re)presentations that I have just named would have been worth a thorough examination that I, unfortunately, cannot address in this project.

These (re)presentations, in many ways, would never signal the attempted rape of a Black woman in public housing, and thus, begin to show us the way in which viral performance acts to erase and brand Black men and Black women in stereotypical and generative ways. We also see the ways in which viral performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life keep acts in perpetuity. Every time someone commented, shared, or used a performance out of context, they ensured that Antoine Dodson’s performance would never die, in many ways keeping him, and one would hope the traumas that Kelly and Antoine Dodson faced and overcame, at the forefront of popular imaginations.

The visibility of this viral performance also amplified things that affirmed Black life by challenging norms and expectations around Black womanhood, Black masculinity, and Blackness generally. For instance, in Part one I demonstrated the ways in which Kelly Dodson’s honor was affirmed through Antoine Dodson’s testimony and warning, issues around sexual violence in the Lincoln Park community were exposed, and

normalized conceptions of gender roles were challenged. Part two expounds on the many ways in which interactors' affective labor drives them to respond through anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-classist discourse to other interactors' denigrations of Blackness, sexuality, and class; the spaces where these interactions are made, as a result, function as locales where cross-viewing can take place and perspectives can be altered. Part Three explores how the very mechanisms that increase the rapid ubiquity of viral bodies, such as memeing, sampling, and citation also allow an indexing of them whereby new ways of critically understanding Black bodies as parts of larger phenomena, such as the trope of the Ghetto Witness, emerge. Indeed, turning Black bodies into things, like the Ghetto Witness, has been integral to processes of commodification as well as the production of Blackness, affecting how Black bodies (dis)identify.⁴²⁴

Through creating mobile applications, making celebrity appearances, and generating enough capital from his viral performance to move his family out of public housing and into a house and beyond, Antoine Dodson makes a career out of the rage inspired by his sister's sexual assault. Another Black male Ghetto Witness, Walter Bankston, from the Netflix original series *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* explains the flip side to the resulting notoriety and flows of capital, "After my viral video, I got a taste of fame...but there's a darker side to fame... The other shoe is gonna drop."⁴²⁵ Indeed, by capitalizing on the currency of the Ghetto Witness, Antoine Dodson also becomes a minstrel of himself, what Amber Johnson calls the Homo Coon—a sexualized form of the zip coon that frames Black homosexual masculinity negatively, and memeifies a stereotype that denies it authenticity by reducing it to coonery—forever recalling his own sincere performance as this queer character that he can never escape.⁴²⁶ His minstrelsy,

however, also cues us in on his awareness and recycling of “the nervous joke making, a laughing to keep from talking—or to hide otherwise awkward silences” that so many interactors revealed through their lols, lmaos, and silence.⁴²⁷

Importantly, with each instance of the (re)presentation of Antoine Dodson’s performance, his sister’s voice gets lost in the narrative and the audience risks losing sight of the seriousness and importance of the event. Nonetheless, as much as the news and social media coverage of Antoine Dodson does work to reify notions of a Black people as a monolith, create comedy out of poverty and Black queer sexuality, and reinforce sexual and patriarchal normalcy, Antoine “...still remembers what’s important...and [keeps his notoriety and coverage] grounded in the reality of what started it in the first place.”⁴²⁸

Chapter 5 Coda, Viral Bodies: #NoCureforStigma

In the introduction of *Viral Bodies* I thought through what the viral constitutes as a phenomenon in relationship to Black bodies. Surveying various scholarship, theories, and methods to approaching visual and Black performances, the chapter introduced readers to the subjects, terminology, and lenses that are centered throughout the dissertation, outlined the central research questions, and conveyed my use of the tools that scholars of Black Performance Studies and African American Studies have used to approach similar work. Beginning with a racially intense image from an Intel advertisement, I explored the ways that viral mechanisms continued to be used to propagate and critique pre-existing stereotypes of Blackness in the contemporary imaginary. I also examined the dialogical and dialectical ways that the viral, erasure, and branding are related to each other when we consider performances of Blackness in popular culture and everyday life.

“People See What They Hear: Rumor and Branding in (Re)presentations of Black Men” (Chapter 1) analyzed the use of the Black male body in advertising in select photographs from the *B@anded* series by Hank Willis Thomas, revealing historic representations of Black men and women in visual culture that haunt the present. I examined photographs from the series that deal with issues surrounding literal and figurative branding, viral rumor, and stereotypes of Blackness, all of which are used in fashion both historically and today. By bringing the reader’s attention to the viral at play in these photographs, I conveyed how rumor sustains and critiques the violence toward Black bodies.

Similar to how viral rumor functions as a broadcasting system whose messages become a part of how we understand institutional forces mounted against Black bodies, the radio, as an extension of a Black man's body, also functions as a viral act and a device that allows such a viral performance as rumor to be spread. In (Chapter 2) "I Can't Live Without My Radio: Performances of Viral Black Masculinity in Film and Everyday Life" I used a material culture analysis of Radio Raheem's boom box from *Do The Right Thing* to examine its uses and comment on the larger cultural and material implications of them, such as the association of boom boxes with Blackness and masculinity, the creation of an imaginary and tangible Black public sphere, and production of a counter space through such a device. Finally, I demonstrated the viral ways in which the folklore of the African Diaspora is still used and being re-created to spread the myth of Radio Raheem within Black popular culture, which consequently pervades and influences commonsense ideologies around Blackness and masculinity.

While the previous chapter ended on the possibilities that the Internet held for myriad expressions of Blackness and masculinity, (Chapter 3) "This Song Will Never Die: The Appropriation and Amplification of Race, Sexuality, and Class through Viral Media" dealt with both the possibilities and limitations of the World Wide Web for those expressions. Examining a newscast of a 2010 sexual assault on Kelly Dodson, I considered, through a Black feminist lens, how the focus on the presence of her brother, Antoine Dodson, functioned to erase her from the narrative. Using netnography, I surveyed provocative comments, images, and videos from YouTube, WSHH, and Reddit that were created in response to, or in conversation with, the remix video of the newscast (which became the most viral video of 2010), *BED INTRUDER SONG!!!* (*now on*

iTunes). This survey gauged how spectators, through their online dialogue and production in relationship to the remix video, engaged with and developed the sociocultural discourses around it. I argued that as much the remix made songs, made performances, and elicited responses that reinscribed stereotypical notions of Black femininity and masculinity, it also developed variants, which contradicted the normalized stereotypes and provided desirable possibilities for expectations, and products, of performances of Blackness. I ended the chapter with an exploration of how elements and people from the remix video have uncontrollably traveled in popular culture since its creation.

Now I would like to shift the discussion around viral performance toward a meditation on it as leverage for social justice. Indeed, this possibility ruminates throughout the earlier chapters: calling onlookers to question historical images and rumors of Black bodies, using mass-distributed fiction to critique police brutality and racial inequality, and increasing the visibility of sexual violence. Yet, now I will think through the possibilities of viral performance and social justice more broadly in the current moment and what else “viral bodies” could mean.

It is not only Black Performance Studies, which provides me with a theoretical framework to deal explicitly with performance in Black life that does not disavow Black women, lesbians, gays, and transgendered people, and the Black middle class from Blackness, but the movement largely known by the hashtag, “#BlackLivesMatter.” While BlackLivesMatter has been likened to spawning a new civil rights movement, it differentiates itself by explicitly upholding the lives within the full spectrum of Blackness inclusive of marginalized sexualities, sexes, genders, and classes, which also reflects in its decentralized leadership.⁴²⁹ This is the precise danger in its name: that “Black” has

historically excluded other(ed) voices and been used and understood as male, a dangerous homogenization of Blackness. Nonetheless, the mass-produced images and broadcasts of the civil rights movements (past and present) not only capture the dynamics of contagion regarding Black viral performances, but also how viral performances create leverage for social justice. While the photos and videos display how Blacks are contained and, in a sense, quarantined in the U.S., they also appeal to people's ethics who empathize with the plight of Blacks on a global scale.

Even though BlackLivesMatter is quite young in comparison to the Civil Rights Movement, emerging after George Zimmerman's verdict of innocence on July 13, 2013, their hashtag has been used to index countless violent crimes against a spectrum of Black bodies. The countlessness of these crimes against Black bodies is chaotic in its frequency. Hashtags, however, bring an order to the chaos of so many stories by publicly indexing them, increasing public access and searchability. I can find out about recent phenomenon by following hashtags or create my own archive of phenomenon through hashtags. The hashtag targets political agendas and awareness that everyday, and extraordinary, people have categorized. Through these public indices, national patterns begin to emerge, and the ways in which anti-Black violence is viral in the United States becomes glaringly apparent.

Hashtags used on Twitter and Facebook (i.e. #Icantbreathe, #IfIDieInPoliceCustody, and #BlackLivesMatter) and video aggregation/sharing sites (i.e. YouTube, WorldStarHipHop, and Facebook) have been used to index, crowdsource, and document stories that center Black bodies, bringing an unprecedented visibility to the egregious material affects of popular immaterial perceptions about Black bodies.

Principally, these (un)conscious biases have hinged on assumptions about the criminality of Black bodies based on things like the music they play (Jordan Davis), clothes they wear (Trayvon Martin), or their inability to be subjects in crisis as perpetrators of it (Renisha McBride) and have led to their material deaths. So for anyone that says racism does not exist in this so called “post-racial” present or that what someone thinks in their minds has nothing to do with how they affect others in everyday life she or he should follow the discourse being widely shared within these virtual archives.

Indeed, the visibility that hashtags bring to particular stories is due to their viral performance and the incessant ways in which they are used by interactors, almost as periods, to punctuate posts about issues the greater public may or may not be concerned with. For instance, in reaction to Sandra Bland’s death where a routine traffic stop ended in her death under police custody (claimed to be suicide by hanging)—which echoes, with signal difference, the deaths of many other Black bodies in police custody (Michael Stewart, Latandra Ellington, Kimberlee King, Dejuan Brison)—Black interactors on Twitter, or at least interactors with their avatar featuring a Black body, created the hashtag “#IfIDieInPoliceCustody.” The hashtag calls for participation in it and reveals individuals’ skepticism and fear of police arrests concerning Black bodies.

April Reign, a popular Twitter interactor and managing editor of *Broadway Black* had one of the most retweets, tweeting, “#IfIDieInPoliceCustody know that they killed me. I would do everything in my power to get home to my family. So never stop questioning.”⁴³⁰ This and many other tweets reveal a deep distrust of police and correctional officers, “know that they killed me,” and a premeditated willingness to live in spite of confinement, “I would do everything in my power to get home to my family.”

It is also a call to action and investigation, “never stop questioning,” around the circumstances of Sandra Bland’s arrest and July 13, 2015 death. Beyond individual skepticisms, the collection of these stories in one ongoing virtual archive creates a irrefutable consensus around the types of obstacles that Black bodies face as a group.

The consensus produced in aggregating visual material and indexing stories creates a material pressure whereby viral performances can be used leverage for social justice. The viral performance of Derrion Albert’s death, suggested by Eric Holder as a wake-up call for the country, is a significant example of this. Near Christian Fenger Academy High School on the far South Side of Chicago a huge fight happens between two neighborhoods, Altgeld Gardens and The Ville, of which Derrion Albert is innocently caught between.⁴³¹ Derrion Albert is a sixteen year-old sophomore on the honor-roll who was killed by several of his peers on September 24, 2009.

A video titled, “Tragic: Teens Give A Chicago Student From A Rival High School A Deadly Beating With Huge Wooden Boards! *Warning* (Very Graphic) (R.I.P Derrion Albert) (This Has To Stop)” surfaces on WSHH September 27th, 2009. I happen across it as I browse WSHH. It begins with a notice, “WARNING: The following footage is graphic and violent. If you can identify allegedly involved in the death of Derrion Albert, please call the Chicago Police Dept. at 312-747-8272.” Following the notice, the video begins inside of a car where a young woman documenting the fight exits to gain a closer view.

A brawl materializes involving a collection of twenty plus high schoolers in brown khakis and black golf shirts walking or jogging around and brutally punching each other in the street. As a vehicle honks its horn, people holler and scream indecipherably.

A young man equips himself with wooden planks larger than he is as he pummels another young man with them. A woman yells, “zoom in.” At this point another young man grabs a different wooden plank, a second young man (who was being assaulted in front of a car by a small group) speedily runs away. Derrion Albert is walking amid the chaos and the young man, who is still running away, brushes his body and destabilizes him, turning him around. While his head is turned, the other young man, still holding the wooden plank, swings it down on his head. Someone yells, “DAMN!” All audio drops for a couple of seconds as Derrion Albert tries to stand. The audio returns as a young man punches him to the ground. Then another young man kicks Derrion Albert. As the camera turns and focuses on other fights happening in the street, someone screams, “Yeah, put that nigga to sleep!” In the corner of the camera’s view, Derrion Albert is seen trying to sit up. Someone blurts out, “Oh my God, get closer.” Anticipating the impact of another blow from a wooden plank, Derrion Albert puts his hand out as another young man stands above him holding a long wooden plank. Mercifully, he does not follow through and walks away. Young men begin surrounding and punching Derrion Albert while another young man runs to him with a wooden plank and swings it twice at his body. After this, there are gut-wrenching screams. The entire scene is frantic with young men running away while a woman runs toward Derrion Albert’s body and nervously utters, “they killing him look.” As a small group carries his body into a building entrance, a girl pleads, “get up Derrion, please!” The camera turns away and a man says, “We got a kid down in here, we got a kid down. They beat him to death.” Meanwhile the guy holding the camera mentions, “Damn, look they still down there goin’ at it.”⁴³²

Something that haunts me about viral performance, which is evoked by this video, is how the currency of the act trumps the lives featured in it. It was not until Derrion Albert appeared lifeless that anyone reacted gravely to his situation, nervously uttering, “they killing him look.” It is possible that the people recording may not have felt safe, yet, it is equally possible that their investment in the moment of violence was for the resulting views, likes, or retweets that it might receive. There is a high value placed on raw emotion, liveness, and spontaneity that eclipses the concern for another’s, or one’s own, life in archives that possess viral performances like WSHH, YouTube, and the News. From recorded brawls to police chases and severe weather, there is a supply and demand for danger that is rewarded with ratings, raises, and retweets that fattens the pockets and increases the visibility of the photographer, recorder, or reporter. This phenomenon provokes me to rhetorically ask, would you risk another’s life or health, including your own, to be seen, to increase your visibility.

What I hope does not happen with videos like these is that they are used to justify excessive force against Black bodies. I also do not want my use of performance to conflate Derrion Albert’s behaviors in the video to something “staged.” My use of viral performance here deals with the ways in which the video was incessantly shared, re-watched, commented on, and through that circulation, Derrion Albert’s memory becomes meaningful to countless lives.

While violence and racist sentiments circulated online through diverse means including news articles, the video footage, and comments, the life of this young Black man was made valuable through the same circulation. As a result of the cell phone footage being shared, public evidence of Derrion Albert’s murder existed, and pressure

increased around finding his killer(s), disallowing the moment of violence to be overlooked. By framing the video through a notice, WSHH functioned as a kind of 21st century wanted poster, soliciting information about the perpetrators of murder it portrayed. Witnesses were able to identify those who murdered Derriion Albert from the video, those young men would later be convicted for first degree murder, and President Barack Obama sent members of his cabinet to Chicago to speak with the Mayor about violence there.

Even in these highly visible moments of excessive violence toward Black bodies by Black bodies, there is a swelling of people who through their memeing, retweeting, and sharing of the moment, refuse to have the incidents forgotten. Contrary to opinions that uncritically use Black on Black violence to detract attention from movements against police brutality, a site that traffics in Blackness is actively uncovering this instance of Black on Black crime without the need to counter any momentum against police brutality. There is, indeed, a refusal to be silenced and to have experiences where civil rights are violated, even by other Black people, go unpunished and the processes by which the violations occur go unaddressed. Online social media has become the great broadcaster that the radio once was, providing a spectrum of perspectives on many situations concerning the greater public and leaving it to the audience to decide what knowledge to take away and act upon.

While there is a catchiness and undeniable coolness to Black bodies that I seek to emphasize in the idea of viral bodies, what alarmingly catches on and becomes cool about Black bodies often resembles the projection of disease (things compromising wellness and wholeness) upon them. There are viral thoughts, such as stigmas around

Black bodies, that if considered as diseases would be worthy of intervention from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The social nature of the disease would require the CDC to socially, economically, and racially intervene with lawmakers, employers, and everyday citizens of the U.S. Indeed, it would not merely be about addressing those who are currently infected by anti-Black racism, but training people in how to protect themselves from contracting it. This multi-pronged intervention would have to address other aspects of identity that are stigmatized and intersect with race too, such as, sexuality, gender, class, and ability. However, the precedent for epidemics and disasters have not been social problems, particularly those faced by Black people in the U.S.

There are people that might consider themselves stigma negative, carrying anti-Black racism without knowing it. This unconscious bias has been theorized quite successfully as color-blind racism, which Eduardo Bonilla-Silva describes as otherizing softly, a covert kind of racism without the racists or racial epithets.⁴³³ Nonetheless, “after race—or class or gender—is created, it produces real effects on the actors racialized as ‘black’ or ‘white.’”⁴³⁴ Indeed, perceptions of anti-Blackness still work their way into social policies (institutionally) and everyday micro/macro-aggressions (interpersonally) that materially affect Black lives. As the saying goes, you are either infected or affected [or both].

It is never that these viral bodies are producing what we already know—Black people are being violated or caricatured in disproportional ways—it is that they centralize this knowledge in ways that evidences it as a pattern. The Ghetto Witness, for example, has long been a viral performance. However, now we can decipher it as a viral presence

for the ways in which it is indexed online. Processes, such as video-sharing, memeing online, and hashtags expose a pattern: a tradition whereby media gathers information from people within ghetto communities who perform subjectivity in ways that trouble expectations—to the point where the expectation is trouble. So viral performances of Blackness are very much a CNN, broadcasting information that is both informative and misleading about Blackness, the world, and the challenges and pleasures that intersect with them. Yet, differently from CNN, viral performances of Blackness are now indexed in ways that can be used as empirical evidence to leverage justice on behalf of viral bodies, for which there seems to be no cure for what pathologizes them.

Notes

- ¹ Gabriel Peoples, “We Are Not Expendable,” Twitter Post, *Twitter*, (July 13, 2013), <https://twitter.com/Gofthepeoples/status/356242125328891904>.
- ² Gene Demby, “Combing Through 41 Million Tweets To Show How #BlackLivesMatter Exploded,” *NPR.org*, March 2, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/03/02/468704888/combing-through-41-million-tweets-to-show-how-blacklivesmatter-explodednews.bbc.co.uk>.
- ³ Trymaine Lee, “Eyewitness to Michael Brown shooting recounts his friend’s death,” *MSNBC*, August 12, 2014, <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/eyewitness-michael-brown-fatal-shooting-missouri>.
- ⁴ Michelle Ye Hee Lee, “‘Hands Up, Don’t Shoot’ Did Not Happen in Ferguson,” *The Washington Post*, March 19, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/wp/2015/03/19/hands-up-dont-shoot-did-not-happen-in-ferguson/>.
- ⁵ Gary Alan Fine and Patricia Turner, *Whispers on the Color Line: Rumor and Race in America*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 18.
- ⁶ Francesca Chambers, “Dem representatives make 'hands up, don't shoot' motion on House floor as they discuss what it's like to be ‘black in America,’” *Daily Mail Online*, December 2, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2857549/Dem-Congressman-makes-hands-don-t-shoot-motion-House-floor-African-American-lawmakers-discuss-s-like-black-America.html>.
- ⁷ Jeremy Gordon, “The St. Louis Rams’ ‘Hands Up, Don’t Shoot’ Protest,” December 1, 2014, <http://blogs.wsj.com/dailyfix/2014/12/01/rams-protest/>.
- ⁸ Populo Iratus, “#CecilTheLion,” Twitter Post, *Twitter*, (July 30, 2015), <https://twitter.com/cmahar3/status/626753864612638720?lang=en>.
- ⁹ “Mike is coming over for a meeting. Doesn’t know Russ and Manny are waiting in bushes with airsoft guns. #TheDetroitCast #handsupdontshoot.” Jay Detroitcast, “Mike Is Coming over for a Meeting,” Twitter Post, *Twitter*, (July 30, 2015), <https://twitter.com/JayDetroitcast/status/626762336888471552?lang=en>.

¹⁰ “A narrative crumbles...#PantsUpDontLoot #IStandWithDarrenWilson #NoBill.” Conservative Pelican, “A Narrative Crumbles....,” Twitter Post, *Twitter*, (November 15, 2014), <https://twitter.com/TheHappyPelican/status/533747484745797634>; “@kendricklamar puts #Ferguson protesters on the cover of his new cd. NICE! #pantsUpDontLoot @mikerotondo86.” [Previously known as Paper or Plastic] Trader for Trump, “@kendricklamar Puts #Ferguson Protesters on the Cover of His New Cd,” Twitter Post, *Twitter*, (March 15, 2015), <https://twitter.com/eshropshire1/status/577272106062389248>; Jeff, “#pantsupdontloot,” Twitter Post, *Twitter*, (June 17, 2015), <https://twitter.com/12voltman60/status/611306079503425536>.

¹¹ Velotron, “#cosby Would Say #pantsupdontloot,” Twitter Post, *Twitter*, (December 30, 2014), <https://twitter.com/308husker/status/549804263774240768>.

¹² “White cops coerced Stinney’s confession. He was executed at 14. He was exonerated 70 years later #PantsUpDontLoot.” Rugged Amethyst, “White Cops Coerced Stinney’s Confession,” Twitter Post, *Twitter*, (December 17, 2014), <https://twitter.com/GrooveSDC/status/545301898798981120?lang=en>.

¹³ Chuck, “#PantsUpDontLoot IS NOT RIGHT,” Twitter Post, *Twitter*, (December 13, 2014), <https://twitter.com/ChuckSleep/status/543872099371061248?lang=en>.

¹⁴ Gene Demby, “Combing Through 41 Million Tweets To Show How #BlackLivesMatter Exploded,” <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/03/02/468704888/combining-through-41-million-tweets-to-show-how-blacklivesmatter-explodednews.bbc.co.uk>.

¹⁵ Complex personhood is a term coined by Avery F. Gordon. See *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 4-5.

¹⁶ The viral performances of Black masculinity in popular culture that I am analyzing are constructed and made knowable through visual technologies and, as such, there will always be something unknowable about their acts, something outside of the frame allowed. This unknowability reveals that, “we—whether in our various disciplines, or languages, or geographic locations throughout the Americas—do not simply or unproblematically understand each other [or ourselves].” Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the RePuertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 15.

¹⁷ In *Going Viral* by Karine Nahon and Jeff Hemsley, the concept of going viral is explained as a particularly new possibility made feasible by the sharing of particular information across digital social networks with an alarming speed and reach not before attainable, which stands out in a “sea of content.” While this suffices as a definition of “going viral,” it does not tell us how (a modicum of) this virality is sustained over longer periods of time—which can explain how past viral performances continue to resurface, albeit at smaller slower levels of virality. (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 35. e-book, Introduction.

¹⁸ Duriel E. Harris, *Thingification: A One-Woman Show*, *Thingification.org*, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://www.thingification.org/>.

¹⁹ Netnography is “the textual output of Internet related fieldwork...a written account of online cyberculture, informed by methods of cultural anthropology.” Cyberculture refers to the culture mediated by computer networks for multiple purposes, such as entertainment, communication, and business. Robert V. Kozinets, “I Want To Believe”: A Netnography of The X-Philes’ Subculture of Consumption” *Advances in Consumer Research* 27, (1997): 470 (emphasis original).

²⁰ Aisha Harris also picked up on this viral trend I call the Ghetto Witness, referring to it as the Hilarious Black neighbor, as she discusses how “derisive memeification” and desire to see Black people perform trumps the heroism and courage of Charles Ramsey, Antoine Dodson, Kimberly Wilkins, and Michelle Clark. See Aisha Harris, “The Troubling Viral Trend of the ‘Hilarious’ Black Neighbor,” *Slate*, May 7, 2013, accessed October 8, 2013, http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2013/05/07/charles_ramsey_amanda_berry_rescuer_becomes_internet_meme_video.html

²¹ Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xxiv.

²² See Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982); Richard Shecner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” (*Theatre Journal* 40(4), 1988); Elin Diamond, “Introduction,” in *Performance & Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Joni Jones, “Sista Docta: Performance as Critique of the Academy” *The Drama Review* 41, no. 2 (1997): 51-67; José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications*; Dwight Conquergood, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research” *The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 145-156; E. Patrick Johnson, “Strange Fruit: A Performance about Identity Politics” *The Drama Review* 47, no. 2 (June 1, 2003): 88-116; D. Soyini Madison, “Staging Fieldwork/Performing Human Rights” *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies*, Ed. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2006); Jeffrey Q. McCune Jr., “‘Out’ in the Club: The Down Low, Hip-Hop, and the Architexture of Black Masculinity” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 28 (July 2008): 298-314; Marlon M. Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps: Gender Performance and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013).

²³ Performativity is the process by which we invest a body with meaning. It is how a body is brought into being. Performance is what the body does once it is constituted. See E. Patrick Johnson, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 10.

²⁴ Through a theatre lens, Felton-Dansky examines conceptual artists, Eva and Franco Mattase (photographing fake death scenes, creating computer viruses, and erecting fake Nike monuments), and the multimedia performance collective, Critical Art Ensemble (recreating germ warfare experiments and fake radioactive bombs), to explore the viral possibilities of media and performance. Miriam Felton-Dansky, “Viral Performance: Contagious Hoaxes in the Digital Public Sphere” *Theater* 42, no. 2 (2012): 120.

²⁵ Dareick Scott’s articulation of Blackness is useful for how I am thinking about it here. He writes, “Like all language, then, blackness is a code. And as with all language this encoding can by its proliferating processes of abstraction and association virally replicate itself; it generates more encoded language—and thus more knowledge, more of a *something* which it codes—otherwise unavailable. See *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 95.

²⁶ A great articulation of this was made by Lil Wayne on his song “A Milli” where he boastfully announces, “Mothafucka I’m ill!” See *Tha Carter III*, Audio CD (New Orleans: Cash Money, 2008). For other examples see Nas, *Illmatic*, Audio CD (Columbia: New York, 1994); Foxy Brown, *Ill Nana*, Audio CD (New York: Def Jam, 1996); Red Cafe, “I’m Ill,” *Red October*, Audio MP3 (New York: Howie McDuffie Music Group, 2010).

²⁷ Niko Koppel, “Are Your Jeans Sagging? Go Directly to Jail,” *New York Times*, August 30, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/30/fashion/30baggy.html?_r=0.

²⁸ Using case studies in Asian and Asian American fashion, Dorinne Kondo analyzes Asian and Asian American identity. Importantly, she discusses the amnesia of the fashion industry in relationship to consumption, which is insightful when thinking through the ways in which visible signs of poverty, such as sagging jeans, could be nationally transformed into something fashionable, hiding its classed origins. She writes, “The fashion industry has a tendency to reduce historical and political difference to consumable elements of style.” See *About Face: Performing Race and Fashion in Theater* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 169.

²⁹ The small words in the bottom portion of the Intel ad say the following: Multiply computing performance and maximize the power of your employees. Intel® Core™ 2 Duo Processor. 40% more performance for business. Boasting 40% more performance with improved energy efficiency,* 64-bit capable Intel Core 2 Duo desktop processor delivers unparalleled multi-tasking capability. Now you can boost productivity and efficiency by running multiple computing-intensive applications at once. Learn more about why great business computing starts with Intel Inside. Visit intel.com/dulacore
*Performance measured Intel® Core™ 2 Duo desktop processors compared to Intel® Pentium® D Processor 805 on SPEC_intbase2000 and SPEC_int_rate_base2000 (2 copies). Actual performance may vary. Visit intel.com/performance ©2007 Intel Corporation. Intel, the Intel logo, Intel. Leap ahead, Intel. Leap ahead. Logo, Intel Core and Core Inside are trademarks of Intel Corporation in the United States and other countries.

³⁰ Wily Ferret, “Intel under Fire for ‘Racist’ Ad: White Men Can’t Run,” *The Inquirer*, August 10, 2011, <http://www.theinquirer.net/inquirer/news/1004060/intel-racist>.

³¹ For a list about stereotypes of Black people in film and stage performance see Edward Mapp, *Blacks in American Films: Today and Yesterday* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1972), 30-31.

³² Through a discourse analysis of Geek Squad’s website and nerdcore music, Lori Kendall conveys the “difficulty in expanding the nerd identity to include people who are not white or not male” when attempts at challenging the normalized nerd role require access to science and tech still “guarded by the unmarked signifiers of whiteness and male gender.” See “‘White and Nerdy’: Computers, Race, and the Nerd Stereotype,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 44, no. 3 (June 1, 2011): 505 & 510.

³³ See M. Eugene Sirmans, “The Legal Status of the Slave in South Carolina, 1670-1740” *The Journal of Southern History* 28, no. 4 (November 1962): 465.

³⁴ As Dwight Conquergood writes, “It is no longer easy to sort out the local from the global: transnational circulations of images get reworked on the ground and redeployed for local tactical struggles [and purposes].” “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research” *The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 145.

³⁵ Herman Gray, “Black Masculinity and Visual Culture” *Callaloo* 18, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 401-405.

³⁶ Kara Keeling, “Passing for Human: Bamboozled and Digital Humanism” (*Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist History* 15, no. 1 (2005): 248; I use disidentification here to touch on how we can disagree with stereotypes yet simultaneously use them in our critique and nuance of them. See José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 12.

³⁷ I am trying to use the essence of original to suggest a starting point, a performance that spawned many others or recalls those types of acts. This is complicated, however, by the notion that as much performances create something new, they are always embedded with acts that preceded them, which nullifies the notion of an original.

³⁸ What are those? is a question that was originated by comedian Young Busco used to call attention to ugly shoes. He became known for the phrase as he was documenting a Bay Area police arrest on his cell phone. Young Busco says to the police officer, “Officer I got one question for you,” then his cell phone aims at the sky and pummels down to the officer’s shoes as he screams, “What are those?!!” Everyday people as well as artists like Soulja Boy Tell ‘Em and Ludacris have made reference to his act. After being posted for 5 weeks, it has 4,473 likes on Instagram as of July 21, 2015. See youngbusco, Instagram post, *Instagram*, 2015, https://instagram.com/p/36y_adBPK3/.

³⁹ Phonte, a rapper from the groups Little Brother and Foreign Exchange, defines the sample succinctly saying, “[Samples]...are a way to re-contextualize something and put it in a way that is more palatable to an audience that may not have gotten the first thing.” See Phonte Coleman, interview by Shawn Setaro, *The Cipher*, podcast audio, March 14, 2016 “146: Phonte,” on *The Cipher* (podcast).

⁴⁰ Robert V. Kozinets, *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Ltd., 2010), 34.

⁴¹ D. Soyini Madison, “Performance Ethnography,” in *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005), 151.

⁴² See Haki R. Madhubuti, *Black Men, Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?: The Afrikan American Family in Transition*, 1st ed. (Chicago: Third World Press, 1991); Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, *Cool pose: the dilemmas of black manhood in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993); Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine L. Jenkins, *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men’s History and Masculinity, Vol. 2: The 19th Century: From Emancipation to Jim Crow (Blacks in the Diaspora)* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001); Maurice O. Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men’s Literature and Culture 1775-1995* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002); R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Mark Anthony Neal, *New Black Man*, New edition (New York: Routledge, 2006); Ronald L. Jackson II, *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity Culture and Racial Politics in Popular Media* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006); Mark Anthony Neal, *Looking for Leroy: Illegible Black Masculinities* (New York: NYU Press, 2013).

⁴³ Shannon Jackson, *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 8.

⁴⁴ Itibari M. Zulu & Karanja Keita Carroll. “Transdisciplinary African American Studies Approaches and Implications: A Collective Interview with James Stewart” (*The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, no. 2 (March 2008): 85-95.

⁴⁵ E. Patrick Johnson, “Black Performance Studies: Genealogies, Politics, Futures” (D. Soyini Madison & Judith Hamera 446-464), 447.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 446-447.

⁴⁷ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003), 8.

⁴⁸ Darieck Scott, *Extravagant Abjection*, 95.

⁴⁹ E. Patrick Johnson, “Black Performance Studies,” 446.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 460.

⁵¹ Peggy Phelan, "Performance, Live Culture, and Things of the Heart" *Journal of Visual Culture* 2, no. 3 (2003): 292.

⁵² Dwight McBride, "Straight Black Studies: On African American Studies, James Baldwin, and Black Queer Studies" in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham: Duke UP, 2005), 72.

⁵³ Frantz Fanon and Charles Lam Markmann, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 113.

⁵⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112.

⁵⁵ Fanon's use of epidermalization is also limiting due to its sole reference to Black men when the act occurs across the spectrum of Blackness.

⁵⁶ Ronald L. Jackson II, *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, 74.

⁵⁷ Here complicity bears resemblance to Antonio Gramsci's notion of "spontaneous" consent in that it is rooted in symbolic and physical violence, which establishes the boundaries that anyone can safely resist within and gives the illusion of consent or complicity while masking coercion that creates the collusion. See TJ. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities" (*American Historical Review*, 90, June 1985), 568.

⁵⁸ Ronald L. Jackson II, *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, 98.

⁵⁹ Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 209.

⁶⁰ Ronald L. Jackson II, *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, 74.

⁶¹ I am emphasizing post-production here to bring attention to the fragility of labeling anything as such when all of what I examine throughout this dissertation is already after the fact of production.

⁶² Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies," 146.

⁶³ Discussing the drift that happens between presence and absence in performances, Elin Diamond writes, "Performance is always a doing and a thing done...while a performance embeds traces of other performances, it also produces experiences whose interpretation only partially depends on previous experience." Elin Diamond, "Introduction," 2.

⁶⁴ Maurice O. Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine*, 8.

⁶⁵ For more on the parergon see Robin Marriner, "Derrida and the Parergon" in *A Companion to Art Theory*, eds. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 349-359.

⁶⁶ Maurice O. Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine*, 177.

⁶⁷ Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), 14.

⁶⁸ Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., as qtd. in 7.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 8.

⁷³ Ibid., 30-31.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 19.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁷ Robin Bernstein, "Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race," *Social Text* 101 27, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 70.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 69.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ O. Diekmann, J. A. Heesterbeek, and J. A. Metz, "On the Definition and the Computation of the Basic Reproduction Ratio R_0 in Models for Infectious Diseases in Heterogeneous Populations," *Journal of Mathematical Biology* 28, no. 4 (1990): 365-366.

⁸² YouTube is an online social network centered on video-sharing.

⁸³ WorldStarHipHop is a content aggregating video blog. It is considered to be one of the best aggregate sites for Hip-Hop content online.

⁸⁴ Aisha Harris also picked up on this viral trend I call the Ghetto Witness, referring to it as the Hilarious Black neighbor, as she discusses how "derisive memeification" and desire to see Black people perform trumps the heroism and courage of Charles Ramsey, Antoine Dodson, Kimberly Wilkins, and Michelle Clark. See Aisha Harris, "The Troubling Viral Trend of the 'Hilarious' Black Neighbor," *Slate*, May 7, 2013, accessed October 8, 2013, http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2013/05/07/charles_ramsey_amanda_berry_rescuer_becomes_internet_meme_video.html

⁸⁵ Robin D. G. Kelley, "Burning Symbols," 103.

⁸⁶ Mark Anthony Neal, *Looking for Leroy*, 7.

⁸⁷ The #BlackLivesMatter movement was begun by three Black women activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi seeking to use “Black” to affirm the many (queer, disabled, undocumented...) lives within the Black spectrum of existence.

⁸⁸ Here, I use re-member to connote the process of piecing together disconnected parts and stories, a striving to both achieve and challenge wholeness.

⁸⁹ Gary Alan Fine and Patricia A. Turner, *Whispers on the Color Line*, 21-23.

⁹⁰ My use of “synesthetic” here derives from the idea that the stimulus in one sense can be experienced in a different sense, such as smelling sounds, hearing a mute image, or tasting a color. See Steven Connor, “Edison’s Teeth: Touching Hearing,” in *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2004), 172.

⁹¹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 2.

⁹² Scripts assign bodies with roles, and these roles also instruct bodies in how to exist; Ronald L. Jackson II uses the notion of racial and gendered “scripting” for understanding the process of assigning meaning onto Black masculine bodies. *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity Culture and Racial Politics in Popular Media* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006), 98; Bernstein uses script as a verb, which instructs the way in which bodies operate socially. Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things,” 70.

⁹³ Michael Issacharoff, *Discourse as Performance* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 3.

⁹⁴ “30 Americans,” *Corcoran Gallery of Art and College of Art + Design*, accessed August 10, 2013, <http://www2.corcoran.org/30americans/explore>.

⁹⁵ The act of labeling one’s self with or being labeled by a specific logo, which is used by individuals to symbolize ownership/belonging to organizations or used by organizations to symbolize the ownership of a product.

⁹⁶ Maurice O. Wallace, *Constructing*, 8.

⁹⁷ See Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey*, xxiv.

⁹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill And Wang, 1982), 32.

⁹⁹ Fred Moten, *In The Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 172. Here Moten uses the salient sensual elements from an essay by Lee Edelman, titled, “The Part for the (W)hole,” to explore how the aural emerges in its fullest possibility by the visual, hearing a character most clearly by seeing a character, and how the visual emerges in its fullest possibility by the aural, seeing a character most clearly by hearing a character.

¹⁰⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 32.

- ¹⁰¹ Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 2.
- ¹⁰² Bristol Record Office Online Catalogue: Record View, 17562/1, accessed November 8, 2012, <http://archives.bristol.gov.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=17562%2f1&pos=1>.
- ¹⁰³ Fleetwood observes that considering the outline or shadow of bodies that occupy the field of vision or affective framework can help in gathering information about the absent referent more than the visible bodies themselves. See Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 19.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Meet Hank Willis Thomas* (NowThis News), accessed July 16, 2013, <http://www.nowthisnews.com/news/meet-hank-willis-thomas/?autoplay=true>
- ¹⁰⁵ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University of Press, 1998), 1.
- ¹⁰⁶ Cheryl Finley, "Committed To Memory: The Slave-Ship Icon in the Black-Atlantic Imagination," *Chicago Art Journal* 9 (Spring 1999): 12.
- ¹⁰⁷ For plethora examples see "Singles," 2009, http://www.absolutad.com/absolut_gallery/singles/.
- ¹⁰⁸ Kendrick Lamar, *Swimming Pools*, MP3 (Aftermath/Interscope Records, 2013).
- ¹⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 265.
- ¹¹⁰ "...Black men, especially those under the age of 30, are more likely to be victims of alcohol-related homicides than were either white men or women or Black women in that age group." Lawrence E. Gray, "Drinking, Homicide, and the Black Male," *Journal of Black Studies* 17, no. 1 (Sept. 1986): 15-31.
- ¹¹¹ Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass* (New York: Penguin 1986), 116.
- ¹¹² Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 10.
- ¹¹³ Chris Evans and Göran Rydén, *Baltic Iron in the Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 172.
- ¹¹⁴ W.T. Lhamon, Jr., "Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit," in *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*, eds. Harry J. Elam & Kennell Jackson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 112.
- ¹¹⁵ Eradication of the slavery of non-criminals is a point that must be emphasized as slavery is permitted if one is convicted of a crime. See section 1 of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.
- ¹¹⁶ Steve Estes, *I Am A Man: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 2.

¹¹⁷ Steve Estes, *I Am A Man*, 2.

¹¹⁸ The full reference is from the title of the 1982 book by Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*.

¹¹⁹ Leslie Primo, "Visual Arts 1: Representations of Blacks," in *The Oxford Companion to Black British History* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹²⁰ It should be noted that as early as the 1830s a campaign banner was used with a strong supplicating enslaved African female, her wrists in chains and her fingers intertwined with a pleading expression across her face and a slogan beneath her reading, "Am I Not A Woman And A Sister." This image would be used interchangeably with the image the supplicating enslaved African male, yet, the same issues with essentialization remain. See "Am I Not a Woman and a Sister," *nationalarchives.gov.uk*, accessed August 1, 2013, "Am I Not a Woman and a Sister," August 1836, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/rights/docs/am_woman.htm.

¹²¹ References were made by Hugh McCall, a past major of the US infantry, concerning the unique physiology of Africans, which "seemed" to make them uniquely fit to endure the labors of slavery. He writes, "Agriculture was the prime object, and the culture of rice, which held up the most promising source of wealth, could not be carried on successfully without the assistance of Africans, whose constitutions seem formed by nature to bear the heat and exposure of a climate, most favorable for its production." See Hugh McCall, *The History of Georgia: Containing Brief Sketches of the Most Remarkable Events, Up to the Present Day* (Seymour & Williams, 1811), 5; Also, Blacks were treated so cruelly by Whites that they eventually [almost as a way to cope] "accepted their master's claims about the rightness, the power and the sanctity of Whiteness and the degradation, the powerlessness, and the shame of Blackness." See John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 303.

¹²² Eugene D. Genovese, "Rebelliousness and Docility in the Negro Slave: A Critique of the Elkins Thesis" *Civil War History* 13, no. 4 (December 1967): 312.

¹²³ Jasmine Nichole Cobb, *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York: NYU Press, 2015).

¹²⁴ Part of the idea that enslaved Africans were happy in confinement has to do with what Saidiya V. Hartman calls "an interested misreading of the interdependence of labor and song common among the enslaved." *Scenes of Subjection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 22.

¹²⁵ The American Anti-Slavery Society, *The Anti-Slavery Record Vol. III, for 1837* (New York: The American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), 73.

¹²⁶ Cheryl Janifer LaRoche calls these types of images biased and suggests that they are not representative of the collective involved in assisting escapees from North American slavery inclusive of free Black communities, Black churches and fraternal societies like Freemasonry. See the Introduction to *The Geography of Resistance: Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 1.

¹²⁷ William L. Van Deburg, *Slavery & Race in American Popular Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 17.

¹²⁸ Carol McGinnis, *Michigan Genealogy: Sources & Resources* (Baltimore: Genealogical Pub Co, 2005), 200-201.

¹²⁹ Strategic essentialism uses the group as the foundation for struggle while “debating the issues related to group identity within the group.” See Kristina Wolff, “Strategic Essentialism,” in *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer, (2007).

¹³⁰ Robin D. G. Kelley, “Burning Symbols: The Work of Art in the Age of Tyrannical (Re)production” in *Hank Willis Thomas: Pitch Blackness* (New York: Aperture, 2008), 103.

¹³¹ Sage Francis, *Narcissist*, Audio CD, The Known UnSoldier “Sick of Waging War” (Providence, Rhode Island: Strange Famous Records, 2001). The mixtape is the fourth in his “Sick of” mixtape series.

¹³² Allan Brettman, “Creator of Nike’s Famed Swoosh Remembers Its Conception 40 Years Later,” June 15, 2011, http://www.oregonlive.com/business/index.ssf/2011/06/nikes_swoosh_brand_logo_hits_4.html.

¹³³ In *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* branding is recalled as one of many punishments for enslaved Africans’ attempt to escape slavery. It was a way to cause them pain as punishment for running away and to label them so that others knew who they belonged to in case they tried to run away again. In one instance, similar to others of the same caliber, a slaveholder named J.P. Ashford of the Adams County Mill made an advertisement in the “Natchez Courier” on August 24, 1838, it read: “Ranaway a negro girl called Mary, has a small scar over her eye, a good many teeth missing, the letter A. is branded on her cheek and forehead.” This woman likely ran away multiple times, indicative of her missing teeth and multiple brands. See Theodore Dwight Weld, *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses.*, 1st ed. (New York: The American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839), 78, quoted in *Documenting the American South* (University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2000), <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/weld/weld.html#p108>.

¹³⁴ Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 6.

¹³⁵ Matthew Pratt Guterl, *Seeing Race in Modern America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 69.

¹³⁶ This article describes keloids generally occurring on the “chest, shoulders, earlobes (following ear piercing), upper arms and cheeks.” “African Americans 7 Times More Likely to Have Keloid Scarring of the Head, Neck,” *Henry Ford Health System*, March 6, 2012, <http://www.henryford.com/body.cfm?id=46335&action=detail&ref=1554>.

¹³⁷ The article only discusses keloids forming on the head and neck following a traumatic event, specifically surgery. Ibid.

¹³⁸ Kate Linker, “Went Looking for Africa: Carrie Mae Weems,” *Artforum International* 31, no. 6 (February 1993): 81.

¹³⁹ Harvey Young, “The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching,” *Theater Journal* 57, no. 4 (2005): 657.

¹⁴⁰ Naomi Pabst, “Blackness/Mixedness: Contestations over Crossing Signs,” *Cultural Critique* 54 (Spring, 2003): 180.

¹⁴¹ This is not to suggest that there is no consensus among Black bodies or that power structures do not exert power on Black people in ways that affect them as a group, just that Blackness is always impure, mixed.

¹⁴² Social interactions between members of the same sex.

¹⁴³ Sarah Mizumoto Posey, “The Body Art of Brotherhood,” In *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision*, eds. Tamara L. Brown, Gregory S. Parks and Clarendia M. Phillips, (The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 274.

¹⁴⁴ “African Americans 7 Times More Likely to Have Keloid of the Head, Neck,” <http://www.henryford.com/body.cfm?id=46335&action=detail&ref=1554>.

¹⁴⁵ Sarah Mizumoto Posey, “The Body Art,” 273-274.

¹⁴⁶ Jay-Z, *Ignorant Sh*t*, Audio MP3 (New York: Roc-A-Fella Records, LLC, 2011).

¹⁴⁷ The Roots, *The Next Movement*, Audio CD, Things Fall Apart (MCA, 1999).

¹⁴⁸ Sarah Mizumoto Posey, “The Body Art,” 275.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., as qtd. in 275.

¹⁵⁰ Sarah Boxer, “IN SHORT: NONFICTION; Consenting Adults,” *The New York Times*, March 7, 1993, sec. Books, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/07/books/in-short-nonfiction-consenting-adults.html>.

¹⁵¹ In alignment with Cheryl Janifer Laroche’s assertion that the term “runaway” dehumanizes and criminalizes the body involved in a way that frames it from the “enslavers’ legal vantage point,” I will only refer to the term as such. See the Preface to *The Geography of Resistance*, xiii.

- ¹⁵² Nicki Minaj, *Truffle Butter (feat. Drake and Lil Wayne)*, Audio MP3 (Cash Money Records/Motown Records, 2015).
- ¹⁵³ Kendrick Lamar, *Money Trees (feat. Jay Rock)*, Audio MP3, Good Kid, m.A.A.d City (Aftermath/Interscope Records, 2013).
- ¹⁵⁴ J. Cole, *Nobody (feat. Missy Elliott)*, Audio MP3, Cole World: The Sideline Story (New York: RocNation, 2011).
- ¹⁵⁵ Elzhi, *Detroit State Of Mind*, Audio MP3, Elmatic (XXL, 2011).
- ¹⁵⁶ Kanye West, *All Falls Down*, Audio CD, College Dropout (New York: Roc-A-Fella Records, 2004).
- ¹⁵⁷ Nas, *Nothing Lasts Forever*, Audio MP3, The Lost Tapes (New York: Columbia, 2002).
- ¹⁵⁸ Master P, *Bout It, Bout It II*, Audio MP3, Ice Cream Man (Priority Records, 1996).
- ¹⁵⁹ Heather Newman, "Web Postings Turn Writers into Anonymous," *Detroit Free Press*, July 3, 2001.
- ¹⁶⁰ "Poet Maya Angelou Highlights Corporate Racism-Fiction!" *Truthorfiction*, December 16, 2011, http://www.truthorfiction.com/rumors/m/mayaangelou.htm#.VM7SLmTF_JI.
- ¹⁶¹ The oak tree is known for its density, as a symbol strength, and they only appear in the Northern Hemisphere—where North America contains the most oak species in the world.
- ¹⁶² Anne P. Rice, *Witnessing Lynching: American Writers Respond* (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 89.
- ¹⁶³ Michael Fedo, *Lynchings In Duluth* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000), xxii.
- ¹⁶⁴ Koritha Mitchell, *Living With Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 24.
- ¹⁶⁵ Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (New York: Verso, 1998), 6.
- ¹⁶⁶ See Eric Wilson, "Fashion's Blind Spot" *Nytimes*, August 7, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/08/fashion/fashions-blind-spot.html>
- ¹⁶⁷ Patricia A. Turner, *I Heard It Through The Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), xv-xvi.
- ¹⁶⁸ Koritha Mitchell, *Living With Lynching*, 3.
- ¹⁶⁹ Matthew Pratt Guterl, *Seeing Race*, 64.

¹⁷⁰ Matthew Pratt Guterl, *Seeing Race*, 47-49.

¹⁷¹ The Rosewood massacre took place during the first week of January 1923 in rural Levy County, FL. It began when a group of White men from towns nearby lynched a Rosewood resident, Sam Carter, over unsupported accusations from a White woman in Sumner, FL that a Black man robbed and raped her. When other Rosewood residents defended their lives against a White mob, they began to act without restraint, hunting Black people and burning every structure in Rosewood. Even though they were aware of the violence, State and local authorities made no arrests. See Maxine Jones, *A Documented History of the Incident which Occurred at Rosewood, Florida, in January 1923*, Florida Board of Regents, December 22, 1993, accessed April 20, 2014, <http://www.displaysforschools.com/rosewoodrp.html>.

¹⁷² Koritha Mitchell, *Living With Lynching*, 4.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁷⁵ Myles Brown, "The 25 Best Air Jordan Commercials of All Time" *Complex*, accessed March, 21 2012, <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/the-25-best-air-jordan-commercials-of-all-time/5-banned>.

¹⁷⁶ Todd Boyd, "The Holy Grail of Basketball Shoes," *ESPN.com*, January 25, 2008, <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=boyd/080125>.

¹⁷⁷ See Nike annual reports from 1987-2012.

¹⁷⁸ This us (White suburban Americans) and them (Black Americans) trend in news stories around sneaker violence also occurred within and alongside news stories that disproportionately featured images of the Black drug criminal, which led to an inseparability between sneaker murderers, drug criminals, and Black bodies. See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 360-365. e-book, ch. 3.

¹⁷⁹ Rick Telander, "Senseless" *Sports Illustrated Vault*, May 14, 1990, p. 1, accessed December 15, 2011, <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1136895/1/index.htm>.

¹⁸⁰ Catherine A. Coleman, "Classic Campaigns - 'It's Gotta Be the Shoes': Nike, Mike and Mars and the 'Sneaker Killings'" *Advertising & Society Review* 14, no. 2 (2013), under "The Development of 'Sneaker Killing' Reports in the 1990s."

¹⁸¹ We can see that the individual-as-brand notion has a strong presence in earlier propaganda such as the seal for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

¹⁸² Leigh Raiford, “Restaging Revolution: Black Power, *Vibe* Magazine, and Photographic Memory” in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, eds. Renée Christine Romano & Leigh Raiford (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 220-222.

¹⁸³ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 33.

¹⁸⁴ “Things” are analyzed by Robin Bernstein, such as a racist coloring book, that limit them to pejorative connotations of Blackness, which are important to analyze, yet, can miss the aspects of the “things” that may be generative of meanings that are critical of the pejorative. Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things,” 67-94.

¹⁸⁵ Avery Gordon conveys that acknowledging the ghost is the way to move beyond the ghost, the way to no longer be haunted by it, even if for only that moment of recognition/reconciliation. Her analysis of the ghost in the motion picture *Beloved* (1998) as a haunting is useful in many ways, especially thinking of the way in which fiction can fill in the blanks of slave narratives—thinking here how Hank Willis Thomas’ concepts fill in voids in the history of enslaved Africans both here and abroad. See Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 23.

¹⁸⁶ Lyle Owerko, *The Boombox Project: The Machines, The Music, and the Urban Underground* (New York: Abrams Image, 2010), 89.

¹⁸⁷ LL Cool J, *I Can’t Live Without My Radio*, Audio CD, Radio (New York: Def Jam, 1995).

¹⁸⁸ Mayor Ed. Koch, for example, created “radio free zones” in certain beaches and city parks in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island. See “N.Y. beaches ban boomboxes,” *Star News*, July 26, 1985, accessed May 20, 2013, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1454&dat=19850726&id=KuBOAAAIBAJ&sjid=zBMEAAAIBAJ&pg=4605,7604220>. Another article discusses how the signs designed to limit noise levels in Jersey City convey that boomboxes, instead, are illegal and subject to fines of up to \$1000 and/or imprisonment. It also reveals how the laws targeted youths who sold crack and used the radio at early hours in the morning to announce that crack was for sale. See Albert J. Parisi, “4,2>Noise Ban Angers Ice Cream Vendors,” *The New York Times*, September 4, 1988, sec. N.Y. / Region, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/09/04/nyregion/42-noise-ban-angers-ice-cream-vendors.html>.

¹⁸⁹ Lyle Owerko, *The Boombox Project*, 90.

¹⁹⁰ Patrick S. Ryan, “The ITU and the Internet’s Titanic Moment,” *Stanford Technology Law Review* 8 (2012), 3, <http://stlr.stanford.edu/pdf/ryan-theituandtheinternetstitanicmoment.pdf>.

¹⁹¹ See HOOVER, Secretary of Commerce, v. INTERCITY RADIO CO., Inc. (Court of Appeals of District of Columbia 1923).

¹⁹² Jessica H. Foy, "The Home Set to Music," in *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930*, Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Marling, eds. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 58.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 59.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 77.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 66.

¹⁹⁷ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 13.

¹⁹⁸ Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 119.

¹⁹⁹ Lizabeth Cohen, "Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s," in *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence B. Glickman, 1 edition (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1999), 155-158.

²⁰⁰ Lizabeth Cohen, "Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots," 155.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., 155-156.

²⁰³ Andrew Graham, "Broadcasting Policy in the Digital Age," *The Aspen Institute*, accessed June 20, 2014, <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/communications-society/programs-topic/digital-broadcasting-public-interest/broadcasting->.

²⁰⁴ Charles Fairchild, "Deterritorializing radio: deregulation and the continuing triumph of the corporatist perspective in the USA" (*Media, Culture, and Society*, 21: 549-561), 553.

²⁰⁵ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, 442.

²⁰⁶ Lyle Owerko, *The Boombox Project*, 153.

²⁰⁷ I'm using e as a gender-neutral pronoun. This allows me to not limit the gender possibilities of the person I am using to describe the given subject.

²⁰⁸ Lyle Owerko, *The Boombox Project*, 47.

²⁰⁹ Ray B. Browne and Pat Browne, *The Guide to United States Popular Culture* (Madison, WI: The Popular Press, 2001), 110.

- ²¹⁰ Lyle Owerko, *The Boombox Project*, 24.
- ²¹¹ Ray B. Browne and Pat Browne, *The Guide*, 110.
- ²¹² Lyle Owerko, *The Boombox Project*, 24.
- ²¹³ Ibid. 153.
- ²¹⁴ Ibid.
- ²¹⁵ Ibid., 96.
- ²¹⁶ Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, Introduction to *Black Performance Theory*, eds. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 8.
- ²¹⁷ Paul R. Mullins, *Race & Affluence: An Archaeology of African America and Consumer Culture* (New York: Springer, 1999), 29.
- ²¹⁸ Lyle Owerko, *The Boombox Project*, 5.
- ²¹⁹ Chuck D, “Eddie Murphy,” Twitter Post, *Twitter*, (September 22, 2011), <https://twitter.com/MrChuckD/status/116749836535074816?lang=en>.
- ²²⁰ “Weekend Update,” Videocassette (VHS), *Saturday Night Live* (New York: Time Life Video, 1980).
- ²²¹ Tara Rodgers, ““What, for me, constitutes life in a sound?: Electronic Sounds as Lively and Differentiated Individuals,” *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 2011): 510.
- ²²² Richard Rothstein discusses a similar definition of ghetto. See Historian Says Don’t “Sanitize” How Our Government Created Ghettos, interview by Terry Gross, accessed May 14, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/05/14/406699264/historian-says-dont-sanitize-how-our-government-created-the-ghettos>.
- ²²³ “Bringing music as well as other programs into the home, the radio also diminished the individuality of the music heard. People were bound by the programming available at a given time.” This is precisely why the radio’s evolution into the boom box is so important, because with the boom box the owner can control what she listens or desires other people to listen to, without dependence on a pre-scheduled program. Jessica H. Foy, “The Home Set to Music,” *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930*. Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Marling, eds. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 76.
- ²²⁴ My working definition of an aural sphere is a space that is created or evoked through music, sound, or speech.
- ²²⁵ For a brief history of radio deregulation in the U.S. see Charles Fairchild, “Deterritorializing Radio,” 553.

²²⁶ An interesting note here is that in Spike Lee's journal of *Do The Right Thing*, on the actual set there was a meeting between homeowners on the block and the location manager—Brent Owens. They discussed plans for improvements on several homes, but what pleased homeowners the most was shutting down a crack house described as being littered with vials, used condoms, dead animals, and feces. The actual block had to be cleaned up to be shot as the pristine place that it was on film. See Spike Lee and Lisa Jones, *Do The Right Thing: A Spike Lee Joint* (New York: Fireside, 1989), 83.

²²⁷ Richard Rothstein discusses how “ghettos” were created through governmentally segregated housing. See Historian Says Don't “Sanitize” How Our Government Created Ghettos, interview by Terry Gross, accessed May 14, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/05/14/406699264/historian-says-dont-sanitize-how-our-government-created-the-ghettos>

²²⁸ “Historically, non-African American merchants have dominated the economy of African American communities” Kwang Chung Kim, *Koreans In The Hood: Conflict With African Americans* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 1999), 44.

²²⁹ “Because the majority of Korean immigrants held professional or managerial positions in Korea, operating a small business in the United States represents underemployment and a loss of status.” Ibid., as qtd. in 43.

²³⁰ “...many African American economic developments and business ventures have failed due to lack of capital or skills, redlining, institutional discrimination, and racism.” Kwang Chung Kim., *Koreans In The Hood*, 44.

²³¹ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, 14.

²³² Indeed, Black and Brown people in the U.S. have a long history of existing through the very lens that understands that they are always outside. This lens is made possible due to their disproportionate surveillance and, thus, increased chances of being harassed/ infiltrated by the state. As a result, Black and Brown people experience a legacy of limited control over the safety of their bodies/families.

²³³ For more on this see Jürgen Habermas. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

²³⁴ The Black Public Sphere Collective, ed., *The Black Public Sphere*, 1st ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 2.

²³⁵ Ibid., 3.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *The Phantom Public Sphere (Studies in Classical Philology)*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 8.

²³⁸ Public Enemy, *Fight the Power*, CD, Do the Right Thing (Def Jam, 1989).

²³⁹ Tara Rodgers, “What, for me,” 517.

²⁴⁰ Thomas Tracy, “Cops Involved in Fatal Confrontation with Eric Garner Were Asked to Crack down on Illegal Cigarette Sales: Bill Bratton,” *NY Daily News*, August 13, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-crime/cops-involved-eric-garner-confrontation-asked-target-illegal-cigarette-sales-bratton-article-1.1901612>.

²⁴¹ Folk heroes are defined as the figures who, at critical moments in time, have certain qualities or behaviors that would enhance culture-building (or the ability to protect group identity and values in the face of a threat to them), and are therefore embraced as heroes by that group. John W. Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 5-6.

²⁴² Calvin Lee, “The Block Is Hot,” DVD, *The Boondocks* (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2006).

²⁴³ The Cool Kids, *Pump Up The Volume*, MP3, Totally Flossed Out EP (C.A.K.E., 2007).

²⁴⁴ Kanye West, *Good Morning*, MP3 Graduation (Roc-A-Fella Records, 2007).

²⁴⁵ J Dilla, *E=MC² (feat. Common)*, MP3, The Shinning (London, England: BBE Records, 2007).

²⁴⁶ Hassan Mackey & Apollo Brown, “Tell Me,” *Daily Bread*, Mello Music Group, 2011.

²⁴⁷ Spike Lee, *NYPD Puts Deadly Chokehold On Staten Island Man*, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CS_rm3ai9Og&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

²⁴⁸ “Precrime” comes from Philip K. Dick’s 1956 science fiction short story *Minority Report*. In it, Precrime is a criminal justice agency that uses precog mutants who are able to see up to two weeks into the future. These mutants produce cards that are interpreted by Precrime to stop future criminals before they ever commit a crime.

²⁴⁹ Philip K. Dick, *Minority Report*, e-book (New York: Pantheon Books, 2009), Chapter 9, page 98 or 196.

²⁵⁰ For example, Mother Sister was the old Black lady that watches everything on the block, The Mayor was the wino, the White guy (self-proclaimed Brooklynite) was the Yuppie who moved in to escape the high rent in Manhattan.

²⁵¹ Adisa Banjoko, in *The Boombox Project: The Machines, The Music, and the Urban Underground*, 61.

²⁵² Michael Stewart was a 25-year-old Black graffiti artist and from Brooklyn who was arrested on September 15, 1983, at which point he was in transit to police custody, for spray-painting graffiti in a Manhattan subway. He was bruised, hogtied, and comatose when he was admitted to Bellevue Hospital and died thirteen days later. All six White male transit officers involved with his arrest, and accused of permitting Michael to be beaten while he was in their custody, were acquitted. Besides the sentencing of these police officers, this incident echoes the murder of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, MD. See Isabel Wilkerson, "JURY ACQUITS ALL TRANSIT OFFICERS IN 1983 DEATH OF MICHAEL STEWART," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1985, sec. N.Y. / Region, <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/11/25/nyregion/jury-acquits-all-transit-officers-in-1983-death-of-michael-stewart.html>.

²⁵³ Kimberly Kindy and Kimbriell Kelly, "Thousands Dead, Few Prosecuted," *Washington Post*, April 11, 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/investigative/2015/04/11/thousands-dead-few-prosecuted/>.

²⁵⁴ Eleanor Bumpurs was a 66-year-old African American woman living in the Sedgewick Houses of the Bronx who was shot twice with a shotgun by New York City Police who enforced a city ordered eviction. Eleanor was waving a knife at the officers and one of them shot her hand, shattering the knife and her hand in the process, yet, she was shot in her chest as the officer claimed to continue to be threatened. The judge dismissed the indictment of manslaughter. See Selwyn Raab, "STATE JUDGE DISMISSES INDICTMENT OF OFFICER IN THE BUMPURS KILLING," *The New York Times*, April 13, 1985, sec. N.Y. / Region, <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/04/13/nyregion/state-judge-dismisses-indictment-of-officer-in-the-bumpurs-killing.html>.

²⁵⁵ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, e-book (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), Chapter 2, page 221 or 242.

²⁵⁶ CNN Newsroom, "'Loud Music' Shooter Testifying," *CNN*, February 11, 2014, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1402/11/cnr.04.html>.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ A South Side, Chicago style of music that emerged in early 2010 during what was called a "homicide crisis" whose content celebrates camaraderie, money, love and lust, reflects on and premeditates violence, and discusses selling drugs to survive as well as thrive. The sound of Drill has been described by Lucy Stehlik of *The Guardian* as the sonic cousin to footwork, southern Hip-Hop, and the 808 drum style of trap music. See Lucy Stehlik, "Chief Keef Takes Chicago's Drill Sound Overground" *The Guardian*, November 16, 2012, sec. Music, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/nov/16/chief-keef-chicago-drill-rap#start-of-comments>.

²⁵⁹ Paul Meara, "It's A Drill!: The Sound That Has Music Labels Flocking To The Windy City," *AllHipHop*, August 23, 2012, <http://allhiphop.com/2012/08/23/its-a-drill-the-sound-that-has-music-labels-flocking-to-the-windy-city/>.

²⁶⁰ Shepard Fairey, “MANIFESTO” *Obey Giant*, April 18, 1990, <http://www.obeygiant.com/articles/manifesto>.

²⁶¹ Ta-Nehesi Coates, ““I Am Still Called by the God I Serve to Walk This Out”” *The Atlantic*, February 25, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/02/i-am-still-called-by-the-god-i-serve-to-walk-this-out/284064/>.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ In the scenario where Michael Dunn asks Davis and his friends to turn down their music and they do so only to turn it up again “Beef (feat. Fredo Santana & Lil Durk)” must be read differently. For example, “Ain’t playin’ fair so we keep them things” alludes to the way in which odds have been stacked up against Davis and his friends as Black men, requiring them to metaphorically even up the odds with figurative weapons. “Fuck nigga you don’t want no Beef” is suggestive of how White men who tout their White entitlement are immediately demoted to someone that is unlikeable and warned that they do not want to conflict with Davis and his friends. ““Run up on ‘em you better think again” builds on the previous idea that White men had better think twice before conflicting with Davis and his friends and flashing their entitlement in their face. “Free all of my niggas” points to a sense that not only are there Black men locked up for crimes that they did not commit, but that there are Black men suffering from the same White entitlement and privilege that is smothering Davis and his friends in their confrontation with Michael Dunn. See Lil’ Reese, *Beef (feat. Fredo Santana & Lil Durk)*, Don’t Like: A Gangsta Grillz Exclusive, 2012.

²⁶⁴ SwhiteAKA3, “I will be playing my radio very loudly,” Twitter Post, *Twitter*, (February 3, 2014), <http://www.twitter.com/swhiteAKA3>.

²⁶⁵ Vershawn Ashanti Young discusses how Black men are feared and the way in which our knowledge of this level of legibility inspires varying performances of quieting down or “testing out just how equal our society is by speaking out freely instead of shape shifting.” See *Your Average Nigga: Peforming Race Literacy and Masculinity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 144.

²⁶⁶ *Antoine Dodson NPR Interview*, YouTube Video, 8:19, from an interview by NPR staff, posted by “downtownphotographer,” September 4, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r2poH7oYPA>.

²⁶⁷ Elizabeth Gentle, “Woman wakes up to find intruder in her bed,” *WAFF 48 News*, July 28, 2010, <http://www.waff.com/Global/story.asp?S=12883477>.

²⁶⁸ *Antoine Dodson NPR Interview*, YouTube Video, 8:19, from an interview by NPR staff, posted by “downtownphotographer,” September 4, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r2poH7oYPA>.

²⁶⁹ Elizabeth Gentle, “Overnight Internet sensation reacts to new-found fame,” *WAFF 48 News*, July 30, 2010, <http://www.waff.com/Global/story.asp?S=12901080>.

²⁷⁰ I use “interactors” throughout this chapter to connote the ways in which people participate within their situated websites. People interact with each other, with discourses, and content such as videos, images, and texts. They execute these interactions by means of (re)producing, uploading, or posting said content and commenting on other people’s posts and comments.

²⁷¹ “This actually aired on my local news today. ‘Obviously we have a rapist here... so hide yo kids, hide yo wife, and hide yo husband ‘cause dey rapin’ e’rybody out here,’” Reddit submission, posted by “panhead,” July 29, 2010, http://www.reddit.com/r/funny/comments/cuvn3/this_actually_aired_on_my_local_news_today/.

²⁷² Chris Watson, “Antoine Dodson / Bed Intruder,” Part of a series on Viral Videos, *Know Your Meme*, (August 6, 2010), <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/antoine-dodson-bed-intruder>. The oldest video footage of the original newscast can be found here: “Woman wakes up to find intruder in her bed,” YouTube Video, 2:02, originally from an interview by WAFF-48 News, posted by “iKING,” July, 29, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzKtPezPsqE>.

²⁷³ “Woman wakes up to find intruder in her bed,” YouTube Video, 2:02, originally from an interview by WAFF-48 News, posted by “iKING,” July, 29, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzKtPezPsqE>.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Dave McDowell, “Hide Your Husbands!,” Photo, *Flickr*, (2010), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sacamoto2003/5531927565/>.

²⁷⁶ “They’re climbing your districts They’re snatchin your tributes up, tryna reap em so y’all need to hid your kids, hide your wife and hide your husband cuz they’re reapin errbody out there...,” in reply to Schmoyoho, *Auto-Tune The News: BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, YouTube video, 2:07, comment by “RobotKristen14,” February 18, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., comment by “AwesomeAostin,” April 28, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

²⁷⁸ A recurrent media motif often, but not always, of people of African descent that use the intimate street vernacular of their larger racial group, irrespective of their audience, to describe a sensational event or theory from their deeply personal perspective, clarifying, verifying, and producing a larger narrative.

²⁷⁹ Psyche A. Williams-Forsen, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006), 166.

²⁸⁰ Limor Shifman, “An Anatomy of a YouTube Meme,” *New Media & Society* 14, no. 2 (October 3, 2011): 190.

²⁸¹ Bossip is an online magazine specializing in entertainment and gossip largely concerned with Black people in the U.S.

²⁸² Videos, which are created by interactors on their respective websites that are made in response to an earlier video.

²⁸³ Comments are a public format through which interactors on the video-sharing and video-aggregating websites and news blogs I investigate communicate with one another. Often, comments take the form of chronological posts that are submitted independently, in response to (audio)visual media, or in response to another interactor.

²⁸⁴ Images refer to the visual representations of people or things obtained by cameras and displayed through interfaces.

²⁸⁵ Web content categories are how certain subjects, discussions, or areas of a website are digitally indexed, tagged, or catalogued so that interactors on said websites can find and trace them in an organized way.

²⁸⁶ Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), 57.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 57-58.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁸⁹ The TV shows that he examines are *Medicine Now*, *Today*, *High Resolution*, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

²⁹⁰ Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, 125-149.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

²⁹² The term “Netnography” was an anonymous reviewer’s suggestion for this qualitative method informed by consumer research, the conventions and approaches of cultural anthropology, and cultural studies. “I Want To Believe”: A Netnography of The X-Files’ Subculture of Consumption,” 470.

²⁹³ The World Wide Web is a system of interlinked hypertext documents accessed through the Internet, not to be confused with the Internet, which is an infrastructure of interconnected networks.

²⁹⁴ For more details on netnography, see Robert V. Kozinets, “I Want To Believe”: A Netnography of The X-Files’ Subculture of Consumption;” “On Netnography: Initial Reflections on Consumer Research Investigations of Cyberculture” *Advances in Consumer Research* 25, no. 1 (1998); and *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Ltd., 2010).

²⁹⁵ A newbie is a new member attempting to learn about an online community and reach out to establish social relationships; a maker is involved in constructing the online spaces that communities are situated in; an interactor is defined more narrowly than my use of the term, however, it encompasses hybrid involvement by someone who is between online and in-person whereby their interactions online are in relationship to their consumption and involvement in an in-person space; a networker gets involved in communities for the explicit purpose of creating social ties and interactions with online community members. Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 35

²⁹⁷ Here I borrow language from Jonathan H. Shannon's description of Tarab—the process of reaching that special state of emotional rapture or enchantment, sadness or joy experienced while listening to and performing good Arab music; “that feeling you get when you listen to music, and it just makes you want to say aah!” to describe the affectual labor that is a necessary aspect of a performance going viral. See “Emotion, Performance, and Temporality in Arab Music: Reflections on Tarab,” *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 1 (February 2003): 72 & 74.

²⁹⁸ Elin Diamond, “Introduction,” 3.

²⁹⁹ Elsa Barkley-Brown, “Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom” *Public Culture* 7 (1994): 119.

³⁰⁰ On January 13, 2003, Lynell Griffin, aka Bubb Rubb, and his associate, “Lil Sis,” explained a modification to exhaust pipes that were the latest craze in Oakland. Bubb Rubb replied to the KRON-TV Channel 4 news reporter who asked, “can you tell me about the whistles?” He responded, “The whistles go WOO...You wanna go WOO WOO!” The reporter replied, “some neighbors are saying it’s too loud.” Bubb Rubb remarked, “That’s only in the morning. He’s supposed to be up cooking breakfast or something, ...so it’s like an alarm clock. WOO WOO!” See Steve Lambert, “Bubb Rubb,” *Know Your Meme*, 2010, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/bubb-rubb>. Also see LILOUTLAW209, *The Whistles Go.... Whoo Whoo!*, YouTube Video, 2006, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nnzw_i4YmKk&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

³⁰¹ There is an entire neighborhood of people performing the Ghetto Witness in the Crichton area of Mobile, Alabama. They are featured in the newscast-turned-YouTube-video that seeks to uncover the mystery of a Leprechaun in a neighborhood teaming with Black experts on the phenomenon. After an amateur sketch of the Leprechaun is shown, residents are interviewed and present a spectrum of theories ranging from the Leprechaun being a crackhead in a tree to simply being a Leprechaun. One man performs a call and response, “Who all see the Leprechaun say yeah!” The crowd replies, “Yeaah!” For the full story see “Leprechaun in Mobile, Alabama,” YouTube Video, 2:03, from an interview by NBC affiliated news station WPML, posted by botmib, March 17, 2006, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nda_OSWeyn8.

³⁰² *Antoine Dodson NPR Interview*, YouTube Video, 8:19, from an interview by NPR staff, posted by “downtownphotographer,” September 4, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r2poH7oYPA>.

³⁰³ *Antoine Dodson on Judge Alex!*, WorldStarHipHop Video, 11:12, uploaded February 20, 2011, <http://www.worldstarhiphop.com/videos/video.php?v=wshhdhppJv6uZH1kfv17>.

³⁰⁴ Andy Carvin, “The YouTube ‘Bed Intruder’ Meme: A Perfect Storm of Race, Music, Comedy And Celebrity,” *NPR*, August 5, 2010, <http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2010/08/05/129005122/youtube-bed-intruder-meme>.

³⁰⁵ Stephanie Greco Larson, *Media & Minorities: The Politics of Race in News and Entertainment* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 82.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁰⁷ NPR Staff, “Antoine Dodson: Riding YouTube Out Of The ‘Hood,’” *NPR*, August 23, 2010, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129381037>.

³⁰⁸ See Mark Anthony Neal, *Looking for Leroy*, 8.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

³¹⁰ *Antoine Dodson NPR Interview*, YouTube Video, 8:19, from an interview by NPR staff, posted by “downtownphotographer,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r2poH7oYPA>.

³¹¹ Kimberlee Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1253.

³¹² MJTheKingOfDance4, *The Gregory Brothers (Creators Of Antoine Dodson Bed Intruder) Interview On Monique*, YouTube video, March 25, 2011, <http://thurdy.net/1652>.

³¹³ Responding to interviewer Shira Lazar about how to make a difference from a YouTube video, Antoine Dodson revealed that the majority of his fans were “victims of rape or molestation” that reached out to him that he would console and comfort. Shira Lazar, “*Bed Intruder Song*” *Exclusive Interview*, YouTube video, (CBS, 2010), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og5znBpNEh8&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

³¹⁴ Elizabeth Gentle, “Overnight Internet sensation reacts to new-found fame,” *WAFF 48 News*, July 30, 2010, <http://www.waff.com/story/12901080/overnight-Internet-sensation-reacts-to-new-found-fame>.

³¹⁵ Neoliberalists, for instance, assign inequalities to “private” life, label them as “natural,” and, as a result of the concept of private (civil society, family etc.) vs. the public (state, economy, etc.), those inequalities have nothing to do with the life of the state or economy and everything to do with personal responsibility. See Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 5.

³¹⁶ José Esteban Muñoz, introduction to *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), xi-xii.

³¹⁷ Antoine Dodson recently denounced his sexuality and claimed his identity as a heterosexual Black Hebrew Israelite.

³¹⁸ “Antoine Dodson NPR Interview,” YouTube Video, 8:19, from an interview by NPR staff, posted by “downtownphotographer,” September 4, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r2poH7oYPA>.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Shira Lazar, “*Bed Intruder Song*” *Exclusive Interview*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og5znBpNEh8&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

³²² “White men have said over and over—and we have believed it because it was repeated so often—that not only was there no such thing as a chaste Negro woman—but that a Negro woman could not be assaulted, that it was never against her will. —Jessie Daniel Ames (1936).” See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “‘The Mind That Burns In Each Body’: Women, Rape, and Racial Violence,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, Eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), as qtd. in 331.

³²³ Antoine Dodson’s act of protection fills a historical void that occupies a portion of the plea to *Colored Girls of the South* by American author, educator, and speaker foundational to feminist thought, Anna Julia Cooper, who wrote that these girls were “often without a stronger brother to espouse their cause and defend their honor with his life’s blood.” See Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice From the South* (The Aldine Printing House, 1892), Electronic Edition, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html>.

³²⁴ Communication Studies scholar Amber Johnson’s intersectional examination of this incident concerned with how Antoine Dodson began to use the unique defense of his sister for monetary gain and how social media users perceived that as “coonery” also discusses the ways in which his behavior challenged normative gender roles. See “Antoine Dodson and the (Mis)Appropriation of the Homo Coon: An Intersectional Approach to the Performative Possibilities of Social Media,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 161.

³²⁵ “When used positively, [fierce] is said of a characteristic that is exceptionally good or of behavior that is well done; when used ironically, it expresses a negative judgment.” I use the exceptional quality encompassed by “fierce” positively here. Marlon M. Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps*, 253.

³²⁶ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 77.

³²⁷ Stateside Staff, “Exploring ‘Ballroom Culture’ in Detroit,” *Michigan Radio*, online audio stream, 6:57, from an interview by Stateside Staff, December 19, 2013, <http://michiganradio.org/post/exploring-ballroom-culture-detroit>.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ *Web Redemption - Antoine Dodson - Uncensored*, Tosh.0 video, 5:10, from an interview with Daniel Tosh of Tosh.0, January 11, 2011, <http://tosh.cc.com/video-clips/dind4m/antoine-dodson>.

³³⁰ Resisting painting Black communities as overly-homophobic, in the same interview, Antoine revealed that being gay in Lincoln Park was quite accepted. Ibid.

³³¹ Steve Doyle, “Huntsville Housing Authority’s Lincoln Park Public Housing Site in Line for Facelift,” Blog, *AL.com*, January 23, 2012, http://blog.al.com/breaking/2012/01/huntsville_housing_authoritys_2.html.

³³² Steve Doyle, “Huntsville Housing Authority Pushes Redevelopment of Sparkman Homes, Lincoln Park Public Housing Sites to Back Burner,” Blog, *AL.com*, (July 1, 2013), http://blog.al.com/breaking/2013/07/huntsville_housing_authority_p.html.

³³³ A White “Country and Soul, Folk and Roll” band. The Gregory Brothers, “The Gregory Brothers” *Facebook*, January 7, 2010, <http://www.facebook.com/gregorybrothers?v=info>.

³³⁴ Annoying Orange is a North American comedy series on YouTube featuring an anthropomorphic orange—able to speak like a human with human teeth and eyes—that annoys other fruits and vegetables in varying scenarios.

³³⁵ Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in *The Judith Butler Reader*, eds. Sara Salih and Judith Butler (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 127.

³³⁶ John L. Jackson, Jr., *Thin Description: Ethnography and the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2013), 178.

³³⁷ Schmoyoho, *Auto-Tune The News: BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, YouTube video, 2:07, comment by “blezard2011,” November 3, 2010, accessed December 10, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

³³⁸ Annoying Orange, *Annoying Orange - Kitchen Intruder (Bed Intruder Spoof) with AutoTune remix!* YouTube video, 2:14, November 23, 2010, accessed on January 20, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pezdRcVe04c&feature=kp>.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ schmoyoho, *Auto-Tune The News: BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, YouTube video, 2:07, comment by “jackred5,” December 5, 2010, accessed December 10, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

³⁴¹ schmoyoho, *Auto-Tune The News*, comment by “zceed,” December 5, 2010, accessed December 10, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

³⁴² The title change from *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)* to *Antoine Dodson - They Rape'n Everybody Out Here [Auto Tune Edition]* shifts attention, once again, to Antoine, erasing the sexual assault attempted on Kelly and the home invasion that sparked the conflict in the first place.

³⁴³ See Jeffrey Q. McCune, Jr., “‘Out’ in the Club,” 311.

³⁴⁴ Peter V. Milo, “‘CNN Of The Ghetto’: WorldStarHipHop Becoming YouTube For Urban Violence,” *CBS Atlanta*, March 29, 2012, <http://atlanta.cbslocal.com/2012/03/29/worldstarhiphop-website-becoming-youtube-for-urban-violence/>.

³⁴⁵ *Q WorldStar Interview at The Breakfast Club Power 105.1*, YouTube video, 15:51, from an interview with the Breakfast Club, posted by “105.1BreakfastClub,” August 8, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuqTO6FHAfk>.

³⁴⁶ See Mark Jacobson, “WorldStar, Baby!,” *NYMag*, February 5, 2012, <http://nymag.com/news/features/worldstar-2012-2/>.

³⁴⁷ David Zurawick, “Worldstarhiphop.com makes a name for itself with violent viral videos,” *The Baltimore Sun*, March 23, 2012, http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2012-03-23/entertainment/bs-ae-zontv-worldstar-20120323_1_shock-video-ski-mask-third-video.

³⁴⁸ David Zurawick, “Worldstarhiphop.com makes a name for itself,” http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2012-03-23/entertainment/bs-ae-zontv-worldstar-20120323_1_shock-video-ski-mask-third-video.

³⁴⁹ Marc Kerschhagel, “Media Market: Media Consumption Trends among Black Men,” (New York: Opportunity Agenda, 2011), 109.

³⁵⁰ “Statistics” *YouTube*, accessed June 4, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>.

³⁵¹ Haley Tsukayama, “In online video, minorities find an audience,” *The Washington Post*, April 20, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/in-online-video-minorities-find-an-audience/2012/04/20/gIQAdhliWT_story.html.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ “Currency” refers to popularity as much as it nods toward fiscal capital—with users able to generate income based on channel subscriptions and views.

³⁵⁴ The series is now referred to as “Songify the News.”

³⁵⁵ Chris Watson, “Antoine Dodson / Bed Intruder,” <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/antoine-dodson-bed-intruder>.

- ³⁵⁶ Nigel D, “The Fruits of Antoine Dodson’s Labor,” December 12, 2010, <http://smokingsection.uproxx.com/TSS/2010/09/the-fruits-of-antoine-dodsons-labor>.
- ³⁵⁷ *Antoine and the Gregory Brothers meet the press*, YouTube video, posted by “antoinedodson24,” March, 24 2011, <http://thurly.net/1675>.
- ³⁵⁸ Antoine Dodson, “Antoine Dodson,” Facebook Page, *Facebook*, (August 14, 2010), <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Antoine-Dodson/102461723145137>.
- ³⁵⁹ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, as qtd. 44.
- ³⁶⁰ The sales of the songs are according to Antoine Dodson’s web redemption episode on Tosh.O. See Daniel Tosh, *Web Redemption - Antoine Dodson - Uncensored*, <http://tosh.cc.com/video-clips/dind4m/antoine-dodson>.
- ³⁶¹ “Antoine Dodson,” *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, January 3, 2011, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoine_Dodson.
- ³⁶² Daniel Tosh, *Web Redemption - Antoine Dodson - Uncensored*, <http://tosh.cc.com/video-clips/dind4m/antoine-dodson>.
- ³⁶³ Shira Lazar, “*Bed Intruder Song*” *Exclusive Interview*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og5znBpNEh8&feature=youtube_gdata_player.
- ³⁶⁴ Schmoyoho, *Auto-Tune The News: BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, YouTube video, 2:07, comment by “schmoyoho,” July 31, 2010, accessed August 5, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.
- ³⁶⁵ Marjorie Harness Goodwin and H. Samy Alim, “‘Whatever (Neck Roll, Eye Roll, Teeth Suck)’: The Situated Coproduction of Social Categories and Identities through Stancetaking and Transmodal Stylization,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (June 1, 2010): 190.
- ³⁶⁶ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 5.
- ³⁶⁷ Outkast, *SpottieOttieDopaliscious (featuring Sleepy Brown)*, CD, Aquemini (LaFace Records, 1998).
- ³⁶⁸ For more about Trap Music as well as its differentiation from Trap in Electronic Dance Music see Miles Raymer, “Who Owns Trap?: Does music born of Dirty South drug wars have any place in squeaky-clean dance clubs?” *Chicagoreader*, November 20, 2012, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/trap-rap-edm-flosstradamus-uz-jeffrees-lex-luger/Content?oid=7975249>.
- ³⁶⁹ This description also takes place within Fred Moten’s chapter titled “Visible Music.” *In The Break*, 200.
- ³⁷⁰ MJTheKingOfDance4, *The Gregory Brothers (Creators Of Antoine Dodson Bed Intruder) Interview On Monique*, <http://thurly.net/1652>.

³⁷¹ Schmoyoho, *Auto-Tune The News: BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, YouTube video, 2:07, comment by “MaNgAnImE,” January 26, 2011, accessed February 4, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

³⁷² Ibid., comment by “Airstrike141,” February 27, 2011, accessed March 2, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

³⁷³ Eliot Van Buskirk, “Gregory Brothers of ‘Bed Intruder’ Fame Discuss TV Pilot, Antoine Dodson” *WIRED*, August 13, 2010, accessed April 13, 2011 <http://www.wired.com/2010/08/gregory-brothers-bed-intruder-antoine-dodson-autotune/>.

³⁷⁴ I borrow “miscasting” from Joseph Roach who, in *Cities of the dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, studies the ways in which cultures of the past or the voices of the dead are (re)imagined, (re)presented, and embodied by the performance of their descendants in the present. These revisions put forth new identities and performances that evoke theatrical expressions “such as casting and miscasting, script and improvisation, memory and imagination.” See *Cities of the dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1

³⁷⁵ Louisdaprince, “Antoine Dodson - They Rape’n Everybody Out Here [Auto Tune Edition],” Video Post, *WorldStarHipHop*, (August 1, 2010), <http://www.worldstarhiphop.com/videos/video.php?v=wshhYib0xKG1Tu8tpG1>.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ I’m using e as a gender-neutral pronoun. This allows me to not limit the gender possibilities of the users whose online identities lack the visual signifiers of gender that people use (or bend) in everyday analog life, which are often just as illegible as online avatars or usernames.

³⁷⁸ Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 10.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., xvi.

³⁸⁰ Schmoyoho, *Auto-Tune The News: BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, YouTube video, 2:07, comment by “Laplap9370,” January 5, 2011, accessed January 8, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

³⁸¹ Ibid., comment by “Irockgame1,” January 23, 2011, accessed February 6, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

³⁸² Ibid., comment by baradona10, May 8, 2011, accessed June 3, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

³⁸³ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 147.

³⁸⁴ A case that reflects this criminalization of Black boys involved a facebook post of a baby Black boy that was being abusively cursed at by an adult and responding by cursing back at that adult. Omaha police found the video and reposted it on their union's website saying below the post, "the thug cycle continues," suggesting a direct correlation between an abusive social moment in this Black boy's childhood and thug behavior in his adulthood. See Tell Me More, "Toddler Removed From Home After Viral Swearing Video," *NPR*, January 14, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2014/01/14/262404302/toddler-removed-from-home-after-viral-swearing-video>.

³⁸⁵ Matthew W. Hughey and Jessie Daniels, "Racist Comments at Online News Sites: A Methodological Dilemma for Discourse Analysis," *Media, Culture, and Society* 35, no. 3 (April 2013): 336.

³⁸⁶ Schmoyoho, *Auto-Tune The News: BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, YouTube video, 2:07, comment by jcords40oz, November 3, 2010, accessed December 6, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

³⁸⁷ Dwight McBride, "Can the Queen Speak? Racial Essentialism, Sexuality and the Problem of Authority," *Callaloo* 21, no. 2 (1998): 371.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 390.

³⁸⁹ Louisdaprince, *Antoine Dodson - They Rape'n Everybody Out Here [Auto Tune Edition]*, <http://www.worldstarhiphop.com/videos/video.php?v=wshhYiib0xKG1Tu8tpG1>.

³⁹⁰ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness* 69.

³⁹¹ Shira Lazar of CBS News asked Antoine Dodson if he "realize[d] how people would react to [his] reaction and the way [he was] answering the questions." He told Shira Lazar of CBS News that he "really didn't care" because he was "so angry" and "didn't want [what happened] to get swept under the rug" so he just "put it out there like it was." Shira Lazar, "Bed Intruder Song" *Exclusive Interview*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og5znBpNEh8&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

³⁹² Robin Kelley uses the ways that "nigga" is employed on the West Coast to understand Ghetto centrality. See *Race Rebels* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 210-213.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 213.

³⁹⁴ Building from the craniometric studies of Samuel George Morton that were foundational to scientific racism, The Mobile, Alabama physician Josiah C. Nott and former U.S. consul in Cairo, George Gliddon, published a sweeping ethnological survey titled *Types of Mankind* (1854).

³⁹⁵ Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), as qtd. in 67.

- ³⁹⁶ Louisdaprince, *Antoine Dodson - They Rape'n Everybody Out Here [Auto Tune Edition]*, <http://www.worldstarhiphop.com/videos/video.php?v=wshhYiib0xKG1Tu8tpG1>.
- ³⁹⁷ Jonathan Green, "Jigaboo," Green's Dictionary of Slang, *New Oxford American Dictionary*, (2011), accessed January 17, 2015, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199829941.001.0001/acref-9780199829941-e-25614?rskey=TNunH3&result=2>.
- ³⁹⁸ Anna Everett, "The Revolution Will Be Digitized: Afrocentricity and the Digital Public Sphere" *Social Text* 71, vol. 20, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 133.
- ³⁹⁹ John L. Jackson, Jr., *Thin Description*, 177.
- ⁴⁰⁰ Karen A. Franck, "When I Enter Virtual Reality, What Body Will I Leave Behind?" In *Cyber_Reader: Critical Writings for the Digital Era*, ed. Neil Spiller (London: Phaidon, 2002) 238-245.
- ⁴⁰¹ See Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149-181; Alondra Nelson, "Introduction: Future Texts," *Social Text* 71, vol. 20, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 1-15, Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White, eds., "Introduction—Race and Digital Technology: Code, The Color Line, and the Information Society," in *Race After the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1-2.
- ⁴⁰² Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White, "Introduction," 17.
- ⁴⁰³ Topos Partnership, "Literature Review: Media Representations and Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys" (New York: Opportunity Agenda, 2011), 13-14.
- ⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.
- ⁴⁰⁵ United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, "Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department" (The United States Department of Justice, March 4, 2015), http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf.
- ⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.
- ⁴⁰⁷ Hank Willis Thomas, "Frames," *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003): 119-135.
- ⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.
- ⁴⁰⁹ See Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* (New York University Press, 2012), 90-91.
- ⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴¹¹ Portia K. Maultsby, “Africanisms in African-American Music,” in *Africanisms in American Culture*, ed. Joseph E. Holloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 201.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Photo stills taken from *Sweet Brown - Ain't Nobody Got Time for That (Autotune Remix)*, YouTube video, 1:56, posted by theparodyfactory1, April 13, 2012, accessed May 10, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFEoMO0pc7k>.

⁴¹⁴ Kara Keeling, “Passing for Human,” 248.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 242.

⁴¹⁶ *Sweet Brown - Ain't Nobody Got Time for That (Autotune Remix)*, YouTube video, 1:56, comment by MadXMaverick, May 24, 2012, accessed November 16 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFEoMO0pc7k>.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., comment by mynameissparkle1, August 4, 2012, accessed December 5, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFEoMO0pc7k>.

⁴¹⁸ superboysean, “The Justice League,” Reddit post, *Reddit*, (May 11, 2013), https://www.reddit.com/r/funny/comments/1e4zjf/the_justice_league/.

⁴¹⁹ Charles Ramsey is the Cleveland man responsible for the rescue of three kidnapped girls in 2013, Amanda Berry, Georgina “Gina” DeJesus, and Michelle Knight, who had gone missing more than a decade before. In a WEWS News Channel 5 interview, Ramsey was asked, “What was the reaction on the girls faces?” Dismissing the reaction on their faces and analyzing the fact that Amanda Berry ran into his arms, he remarked, “Bro, I knew som’n was wrong when a little pretty White girl ran into a Black man’s arms. Something is wroooooong here...[someone starts laughing in the background]...dead giveaway.” The newscaster, attempting to end the interview at that point says, “Charles.” Ramsey continues, “deead giveaway.” Trying again to end the interview, the newscaster replies, “Charles thank you very much.” Ramsey insists, “deeeeeeeeeaaaaad giveaway!” The newscaster continues, “Thank you very much for your time.” Ramsey concludes, “Either she homeless or she got problems, that’s the only reason why she run to a Black man.” Smiling, the newscaster replies, “Charles thank,” then he pats Ramsey once on the chest, “thank you for being there man.” Charles Ramsey would go on to be memeified and further popularized by The Gregory Brothers before appearing in “The Justice League.” He was also referenced on Antoine Dodson’s “BED INTRUDER SONG now on iTunes.” For example, YouTube interactor MoizAudio commented “CHARLES RAMSEY!!!” and received 56 likes. YouTube interactor billytan888 commented, “I was watching Charles Ramsey...now I am here.” See *WEWS NewsChannel5, Charles Ramsey Interview, Rescuer of Amanda Berry, Gina DeJesus and Michelle Knight in Cleveland*, YouTube Video, 2:54, May 6, 2013, accessed May 7, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axCn04iXkBg>; schmoyoho, *Dead Giveaway!*, YouTube Video, 1:51, May 7, 2013, accessed May 7 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZcRU0Op5P4>; Schmoyoho, *Auto-Tune The News: BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)* YouTube video, 2:07, comment by MoizAudio, May 7, 2013, accessed May 7, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>; Schmoyoho, *Auto-Tune The News: BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, YouTube video, 2:07, comment by billytan888, May 7, 2013, accessed May 7, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

⁴²⁰ RealCharlesRamsey, “I Am Charles Ramsey, the Scary-Looking Black Dude Who Helped Rescue Three Kidnapped Women from That Freak Ariel Castro in Cleveland One Year Ago . . . AMA,” Reddit post, *Reddit*, (May 14, 2014), https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/25ghyz/i_am_charles_ramsey_the_scarylooking_black_dude/.

⁴²¹ Gene Demby, “Who Gets To Be A Superhero? Race And Identity In Comics,” *NPR*, January 11, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2014/01/11/261449394/who-gets-to-be-a-superhero-race-and-identity-in-comics>.

⁴²² Kevin M. Ralston, “An Intersectional Approach to Understanding Stigma Associated with Male Sexual Assault Victimization,” *Sociology Compass* 6, no. 4 (April 2012): 285.

⁴²³ For example, interactor Ipwnatcardgamesinc commented, “THE RAPIST HAS BEEN FOUNDED! (sic) ITS (sic) THIS GUY!” Having received forty-one likes in the morning of December 24, 2010, Ipwnatcardgamesinc was not the only one who suspected this. Schmoyoho, *Auto-Tune The News: BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*, YouTube video, 2:07, comment by ipwnatcardgamesinc, December 24, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.

⁴²⁴ Kara Keeling, “Passing for Human,” 246-247.

⁴²⁵ It is important to note that the Gregory Brothers also auto-tuned this fictional Ghetto Witness, Walter Bankston, for the theme song of *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*. I quote from a later episode in the season where Walter is giving a protagonist, Titus Andromedon, advice on his seeking of the spotlight. I read this as a critique of the currency that Walter received from capitalizing on the trope of the Ghetto Witness. Tina Fey and Robert Carlock, “Kimmy Goes to Court!,” Netflix Video, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (Netflix, March 6, 2015), <http://www.netflix.com/watch/80028223?trackId=13752289&tctx=0,11,1205b148-9856-43bf-aecd-cc392b564865-43315763>.

⁴²⁶ Amber Johnson, “Antoine Dodson and the (Mis)Appropriation of the Homo Coon,” 158.

⁴²⁷ John L. Jackson Jr., “On Ethnographic Sincerity,” *Current Anthropology* 51, no. S2 (2010): S285.

⁴²⁸ Andy Carvin, “‘Bed Intruder’ Meme: A Perfect Storm of Race, Music, Comedy and Celebrity” *NPR*, August 5, 2010, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2010/08/05/129005122/YouTube-bed-intruder-meme?print=1>.

⁴²⁹ Elizabeth Day, “#BlackLivesMatter: The Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement,” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2015, sec. World news, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement>.

⁴³⁰ ReignofApril, Twitter Post, *Twitter*, (July 17, 2015), <https://twitter.com/ReignOfApril/status/621996332631355392?lang=en>.

⁴³¹ Karen Hawkins, “Holder, Duncan plan to fight Chicago teen violence,” *The Seattle Times*, October 7, 2009, <http://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/holder-duncan-plan-to-fight-chicago-teen-violence/>.

⁴³² WorldStarHipHop, *Tragic: Teens Give A Chicago Student From A Rival High School A Deadly Beating With Huge Wooden Boards! *Warning* (Very Graphic) (R.I.P Derrion Albert) (This Has To Stop) - World Star Uncut*, Digital Video, 2009, <http://www.worldstaruncut.com/uncut/18861>.

⁴³³ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 2, 29, & 54.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.* 9.

Bibliography

- “30 Americans.” *Corcoran Gallery of Art and College of Art + Design*.
<http://www2.corcoran.org/30americans/explore>.
- “African Americans 7 Times More Likely to Have Keloid Scarring of the Head, Neck.”
Henry Ford Health System, March 6, 2012.
<http://www.henryford.com/body.cfm?id=46335&action=detail&ref=1554>.
- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. E-book. New York: The New Press, 2010.
- Amethyst, Rugged. “White Cops Coerced Stinney’s Confession.” Twitter Post. *Twitter*, December 17, 2014.
<https://twitter.com/GrooveSDC/status/545301898798981120?lang=en>.
- “Am I Not a Woman and a Sister,” August 1836. http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/rights/docs/am_woman.htm.
- Annoying Orange. *Annoying Orange - Kitchen Intruder (Bed Intruder Spoof) with AutoTune Remix!* YouTube Video, 2010.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pezdRcVe04c&feature=kp>.
- “Antoine Dodson.” *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, December 9, 2015.
https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Antoine_Dodson&oldid=694536277.
- antoinedodson24. *Antoine and the Gregory Brothers Meet the Press*. YouTube Video, 2011. <http://thurdy.net/1675>.
- Antoine Dodson on Judge Alex!* WorldStarHipHop Video, 2011.
<http://www.worldstarhiphop.com/videos/video.php?v=wshhdhppJv6uZH1kfv17>.
- Bailey, Marlon M. *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013.
- Barkley Brown, Elsa. “Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom.” *Public Culture* 7, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 107–46.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.
- Bernstein, Robin. “Dances with Things Material Culture and the Performance of Race.” *Social Text* 27, no. 4 101 (December 21, 2009): 67–94.
- Blassingame, John W. *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. Revised & Enlarged Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Bogle, Donald. *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*. 4th ed. New York: Continuum, 2002.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

- botmib. *Leprechaun in Mobile, Alabama*. YouTube Video. WPML, 2006.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nda_OSWeyn8.
- Boxer, Sarah. "IN SHORT: NONFICTION; Consenting Adults." *The New York Times*, March 7, 1993, sec. Books. <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/07/books/in-short-nonfiction-consenting-adults.html>.
- Boyd, Todd. "The Holy Grail Of Basketball Shoes." *Espn.com*, January 25, 2008.
<http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=boyd/080125>.
- Brettman, Allan. "Creator of Nike's Famed Swoosh Remembers Its Conception 40 Years Later," June 15, 2011. http://www.oregonlive.com/business/index.ssf/2011/06/nikes_swoosh_brand_logo_hits_4.html.
- "Bristol Record Office Online Catalogue: Record View." <http://archives.bristol.gov.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=17562%2f1&pos=1>.
- Brothers, The Gregory. "The Gregory Brothers." *Facebook*, January 7, 2010.
<https://www.facebook.com/gregorybrothers?v=info>.
- Browne, Ray B., ed. *The Guide to United States Popular Culture*. 1 edition. Madison: Popular Press, 2001.
- Brown, Myles. "The 25 Best Air Jordan Commercials of All Time | Complex," March 21, 2012. <http://www.complex.com/sneakers/2012/03/the-25-best-air-jordan-commercials-of-all-time/5-banned>.
- Buskirk, Eliot Van. "Gregory Brothers of 'Bed Intruder' Fame Discuss TV Pilot, Antoine Dodson." *WIRED*, August 13, 2010. <http://www.wired.com/2010/08/gregory-brothers-bed-intruder-antoine-dodson-autotune/>.
- Butler, Judith. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." In *The Judith Butler Reader*, edited by Sara Salih and Judith Butler. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
- . "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1, 1988): 519–31.
- Carvin, Andy. "The YouTube 'Bed Intruder' Meme: A Perfect Storm of Race, Music, Comedy And Celebrity." *NPR*, August 5, 2010. <http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2010/08/05/129005122/youtube-bed-intruder-meme>.
- Chambers, Francesca. "Dem Representatives Make 'Hands up Don't Shoot' Motion on House Floor." *Mail Online*. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2857549/Dem-Congressman-makes-hands-don-t-shoot-motion-House-floor-African-American-lawmakers-discuss-s-like-black-America.html>.
- Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. London: Macmillan, 2005.
- Chuck. "#PantsUpDontLoot IS NOT RIGHT." Twitter Post. *Twitter*, December 13, 2014. <https://twitter.com/ChuckSleep/status/543872099371061248?lang=en>.

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. E-book. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015.
- — —. “‘I Am Still Called by the God I Serve to Walk This Out.’” *The Atlantic*, February 25, 2014. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/02/i-am-still-called-by-the-god-i-serve-to-walk-this-out/284064/>.
- Cobb, Jasmine Nichole. *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century*. New York: NYU Press, 2015.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. “Encountering Mass Culture at the Grassroots: The Experience of Chicago Workers in the 1920s.” In *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, edited by Lawrence B. Glickman, 1 edition. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999.
- Cole, J. *Nobody (feat. Missy Elliott)*. Audio MP3. Cole World: The Sideline Story. New York: RocNation, 2011.
- Coleman, Catherine A. “Classic Campaigns - ‘It’s Gotta Be the Shoes’: Nike, Mike and Mars and the ‘Sneaker Killings.’” *Advertising & Society Review* 14, no. 2 (2013).
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2002.
- Connell, R.W. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- Connor, Steven. “Edison’s Teeth: Touching Hearing.” In *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*, edited by Veit Erlmann, English Ed edition. Oxford; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004.
- Conquergood, Dwight. “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research.” *TDR/The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 145–56.
- Cool J, LL. *I Can’t Live Without My Radio*. Audio CD. Radio. New York: Def Jam, 1985.
- Cooper, Anna Julia. *A Voice from the South*. Electronic. Aldine Printing House, 1892. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/cooper/cooper.html>.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99.
- Day, Elizabeth. “#BlackLivesMatter: The Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement.” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2015, sec. World news. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement>.
- D, Chuck. “Eddie Murphy.” Twitter Post. *Twitter*, September 22, 2011. <https://twitter.com/MrChuckD/status/116749836535074816?lang=en>.
- Deburg, William L. Van. *Slavery & Race in American Popular Culture*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.
- DeFrantz, Thomas F., and Anita Gonzalez. *Black Performance Theory*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

- Demby, Gene. "Combing Through 41 Million Tweets To Show How #BlackLivesMatter Exploded." *NPR.org*, March 2, 2016. <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/03/02/468704888/combing-through-41-million-tweets-to-show-how-blacklivesmatter-exploded>.
- — —. "Who Gets To Be A Superhero? Race And Identity In Comics." *NPR*, January 11, 2014. <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/01/11/261449394/who-gets-to-be-a-superhero-race-and-identity-in-comics>.
- Detroitcast, Jay. "Mike Is Coming over for a Meeting." Twitter Post. *Twitter*, July 30, 2015. <https://twitter.com/JayDetroitcast/status/626762336888471552?lang=en>.
- Diamond, Elin. "Introduction." In *Performance and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Dick, Philip K. *Minority Report*. E-book. New York: Pantheon Books, 2009.
- Diekmann, O., J. A. Heesterbeek, and J. A. Metz. "On the Definition and the Computation of the Basic Reproduction Ratio R_0 in Models for Infectious Diseases in Heterogeneous Populations." *Journal of Mathematical Biology* 28, no. 4 (1990): 365–82.
- Dilla, J. *E=MC² (feat. Common)*. MP3. The Shinning. London, England: BBE Records, 2007.
- D, Nigel. "The Fruits Of Antoine Dodson's Labor." *UPROXX*, September 21, 2010. <http://uproxx.com/smokingsection/the-fruits-of-antoine-dodsons-labor/>.
- Dodson, Antoine. "Antoine Dodson." Facebook Page. *Facebook*, August 14, 2010. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Antoine-Dodson/102461723145137>.
- Douglass, Fredrick. *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass*. New York: Penguin, 1986.
- downtownphotographer. *Antoine Dodson NPR Interview*. YouTube Video. NPR, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r2poH7oYPA>.
- Doyle, Steve. "Huntsville Housing Authority Pushes Redevelopment of Sparkman Homes, Lincoln Park Public Housing Sites to Back Burner." Blog. *AL.com*, July 1, 2013. http://blog.al.com/breaking/2013/07/huntsville_housing_authority_p.html.
- — —. "Huntsville Housing Authority's Lincoln Park Public Housing Site in Line for Facelift." Blog. *AL.com*, January 23, 2012. http://blog.al.com/breaking/2012/01/huntsville_housing_authoritys_2.html.
- Duggan, Lisa. *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003.
- Elam Jr., Harry Justin, and Kennell Jackson, eds. "Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit." In *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- Elzhi. *Detroit State Of Mind*. Audio MP3. Elmatic. XXL, 2011.

- Enemy, Public. *Fight the Power*. CD. Do the Right Thing. Def Jam, 1989.
- Estes, Steve. *I Am a Man!: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement*. 1 edition. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Evans, Chris, and Göran Rydén. *Baltic Iron in the Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century*. BRILL, 2007.
- Fairchild, Charles. "Deterritorializing Radio: Deregulation and the Continuing Triumph of the Corporatist Perspective in the USA." *Media, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4 (July 1, 1999): 549–61.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Media Discourse*. London: Edward Arnold, 1995.
- Fairey, Shepard. "MANIFESTO." *Obey Giant*, April 18, 1990. <https://obeygiant.com/articles/manifesto/>.
- Fanon, Frantz, and Charles Lam Markmann. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press, 1986.
- Fedo, Michael. *Lynchings In Duluth*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000.
- Felton-Dansky, Miriam. "Viral Performance Contagious Hoaxes in the Digital Public Sphere." *Theater* 42, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 119–37.
- Ferret, Wily. "Intel under Fire for 'Racist' Ad: White Men Can't Run." *The Inquirer*, August 10, 2011. <http://www.theinquirer.net/inquirer/news/1004060/intel-racist>.
- Fey, Tina, and Robert Carlock. "Kimmy Goes to Court!" Netflix Video. *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*. Netflix, March 6, 2015. <http://www.netflix.com/watch/80028223?trackId=13752289&tcx=0,11,1205b148-9856-43bf-aecd-cc392b564865-43315763>.
- Fine, Gary Alan, and Patricia A. Turner. *Whispers on the Color Line: Rumor and Race in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Finley, Cheryl. "Committed To Memory: The Slave-Ship Icon in the Black-Atlantic Imagination." *Chicago Art Journal* 9 (Spring 1999).
- Fleetwood, Nicole R. *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.
- Foxy Brown. *Ill Na Na*. Audio CD. New York: Def Jam, 1996.
- Foy, Jessica H., and Karal Ann Marling, eds. *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930*. 1st edition. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994.
- Francis, Sage. *Narcissist*. Audio CD. The Known UnSoldier "Sick of Waging War." Providence, Rhode Island: Strange Famous Records, 2001.
- Franck, Karen A. "When I Enter Virtual Reality, What Body Will I Leave Behind." In *Cyber_reader: Critical Writings for the Digital Era*, edited by Neil Spiller. London: Phaidon Press, 2002.

- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." In *The Phantom Public Sphere (Studies in Classical Philology)*, edited by Bruce Robbins. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Gary, Lawrence E. "Drinking, Homicide, and the Black Male." *Journal of Black Studies* 17, no. 1 (September 1, 1986): 15–31.
- Genovese, Eugene D. "Rebelliousness and Docility in the Negro Slave: A Critique of the Elkins Thesis." *Civil War History* 13, no. 4 (1967): 293–314.
- Gentle, Elizabeth. "Overnight Internet Sensation Reacts to New-Found Fame." *WAFF 48 News*, July 30, 2010. <http://www.waff.com/Global/story.asp?S=12901080>.
- . "Woman Wakes up to Find Intruder in Her Bed." *WAFF 48 News*, July 28, 2010. <http://www.waff.com/Global/story.asp?S=12883477>.
- Goodwin, Marjorie Harness, and H. Samy Alim. "'Whatever (Neck Roll, Eye Roll, Teeth Suck)': The Situated Coproduction of Social Categories and Identities through Stancetaking and Transmodal Stylization." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (June 1, 2010): 179–94.
- Gordon, Avery F. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Gordon, Jeremy. "The St. Louis Rams' 'Hands Up, Don't Shoot' Protest," December 1, 2014. <http://blogs.wsj.com/dailyfix/2014/12/01/rams-protest/>.
- Gould, Stephen Jay. *The Mismeasure of Man*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996.
- Graham, Andrew. "Broadcasting Policy in the Digital Age." *The Aspen Institute*. <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/communications-society/programs-topic/digital-broadcasting-public-interest/broadcasting->.
- Gray, Herman. "Black Masculinity and Visual Culture." *Callaloo* 18, no. 2 (1995): 401–5.
- Green, Jonathan. "Jigaboo." *Green's Dictionary of Slang*. *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2011. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199829941.001.0001/acref-9780199829941-e-25614>.
- Guterl, Matthew Pratt. *Seeing Race in Modern America*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2013.
- Guzman, Rene de, Robin Kelley, and Hank Willis Thomas. *Hank Willis Thomas: Pitch Blackness*. New York: Aperture, 2008.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989.

- Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. "'The Mind That Burns In Each Body': Women, Rape, and Racial Violence." In *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Ann Barr Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983. <http://www.worldcat.org/title/powers-of-desire-the-politics-of-sexuality/oclc/9759530>.
- Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Harris, Aisha. "The Troubling Viral Trend of the 'Hilarious' Black Neighbor." *Slate*, May 7, 2013. http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2013/05/07/charles_ramsey_amanda_berry_rescuer_becomes_internet_meme_video.html.
- Harris, Duriel E. "Thingification.org Performance Poetry in a One Woman Show." *Thingification.org Performance Poetry in a One Woman Show*. <http://www.thingification.org/>.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Hawkins, Karen. "Holder, Duncan Plan to Fight Chicago Teen Violence." *The Seattle Times*, October 7, 2009. <http://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/holder-duncan-plan-to-fight-chicago-teen-violence/>.
- Hine, Darlene Clark, and Earnestine L. Jenkins. *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men's History and Masculinity, Vol. 2: The 19th Century: From Emancipation to Jim Crow*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. 1st edition. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992.
- HOOVER, Secretary of Commerce, v. INTERCITY RADIO CO., Inc., (Court of Appeals of District of Columbia 1923).
- Hughey, Matthew W., and Jessie Daniels. "Racist Comments at Online News Sites: A Methodological Dilemma for Discourse Analysis." *Media, Culture & Society* 35, no. 3 (April 1, 2013): 332–47.
- Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith. *But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*. Feminist Press, 1982.
- iKING. *Woman Wakes up to Find Intruder in Her Bed*. YouTube Video. WAFF 48 News, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzKtPezPsqE>.
- Iratus, Populo. "#CecilTheLion." Twitter Post. *Twitter*, July 30, 2015. <https://twitter.com/cmahar3/status/626753864612638720?lang=en>.
- Issacharoff, Michael. *Discourse as Performance*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.
- Jackson II, Ronald L. *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity, Discourse, and Racial Politics in Popular Media*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006.

- Jackson Jr., John L. "On Ethnographic Sincerity." *Current Anthropology* 51, no. S2 (2010): S279–87.
- Jackson, Jr., John L. *Thin Description: Ethnography and the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Jackson, Shannon. *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Jacobson, Mark. "WorldStar, Baby!" *NYMag*, February 5, 2012. <http://nymag.com/news/features/worldstar-2012-2/>.
- Jay-Z. *Ignorant Sh*t*. Audio MP3. New York: Roc-A-Fella Records, LLC, 2011.
- Jeff. "#pantstupdontloot." Twitter Post. *Twitter*, June 17, 2015. <https://twitter.com/12voltman60/status/611306079503425536>.
- Johnson, Amber. "Antoine Dodson and the (Mis)Appropriation of the Homo Coon: An Intersectional Approach to the Performative Possibilities of Social Media." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30, no. 2 (June 1, 2013): 152–70.
- Johnson, E. Patrick. *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- . "'Quare' Studies, or (almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 1–25.
- . "Black Performance Studies: Genealogies, Politics, Futures." In *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies*, edited by D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera, 446–64. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2006.
- . "Strange Fruit: A Performance about Identity Politics." *The Drama Review* 47, no. 2 (June 1, 2003): 88–116.
- Jones, Joni L. "'Sista Docta': Performance as Critique of the Academy." *The Drama Review* 41, no. 2 (July 1, 1997): 51–67.
- Jones, Maxine. "A Documented History of the Incident Which Occurred at Rosewood, Florida, in January 1923," December 22, 1993. <http://www.displaysforschools.com/rosewoodrp.html>.
- Keeling, Kara. "Passing for Human: Bamboozled and Digital Humanism." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 15, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 237–50.
- . *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Kelley, Robin. "Burning Symbols: The Work of Art in the Age of Tyrannical (Re)production." In *Hank Willis Thomas: Pitch Blackness*, by Hank Willis Thomas. New York: Aperture, 2008.
- . *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, And The Black Working Class*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.
- . *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Vol. 1st electronic ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.

- Kendall, Lori. "'White and Nerdy': Computers, Race, and the Nerd Stereotype." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 44, no. 3 (June 1, 2011): 505–24.
- Kerschhagel, Marc. "Media Market: Media Consumption Trends among Black Men." New York: Opportunity Agenda, 2011.
- Kids, The Cool. *Pump Up The Volume*. MP3. Totally Flossed Out EP. C.A.K.E., 2007.
- Kim, Kwang Chung, ed. *Koreans in the Hood: Conflict with African Americans*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- Kindy, Kimberly, and Kimbriell Kelly. "Thousands Dead, Few Prosecuted." *Washington Post*, April 11, 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/investigative/2015/04/11/thousands-dead-few-prosecuted/>.
- Kondo, Dorinne. *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Koppel, Niko. "Are Your Jeans Sagging? Go Directly to Jail." *New York Times*, n.d. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/30/fashion/30baggy.html?_r=0.
- Kozinets, Robert. *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2009.
- — —. "I Want To Believe": A Netnography of The X-Files' Subculture of Consumption." *Advances in Consumer Research* 27 (1997).
- — —. "On Netnography: Initial Reflections on Consumer Research Investigations of Cyberculture." *Advances in Consumer Research* 25, no. 1 (1998).
- Lamar, Kendrick. *Money Trees (feat. Jay Rock)*. Audio MP3. Good Kid, m.A.A.d City. Aftermath/Interscope Records, 2013.
- — —. *Swimming Pools*. MP3. Aftermath/Interscope Records, 2013.
- Lambert, Steve. "Bubb Rubb." *Know Your Meme*, 2010. <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/bubb-rubb>.
- LaRoche, Cheryl Janifer. *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014.
- Larson, Stephanie Greco. *Media & Minorities: The Politics of Race in News and Entertainment*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
- Lazar, Shira. "Bed Intruder Song" *Exclusive Interview*. YouTube Video. CBS, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og5znBpNEh8&feature=youtube_gdata_player.
- Lears, T. J. Jackson. "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities." *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (June 1, 1985): 567–93.
- Lee, Calvin. "The Block Is Hot." DVD. *The Boondocks*. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2006.
- Lee, Michelle Ye Hee. "'Hands Up, Don't Shoot' Did Not Happen in Ferguson." *The Washington Post*, March 19, 2015. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/wp/2015/03/19/hands-up-dont-shoot-did-not-happen-in-ferguson/>.

- Lee, Spike, and Lisa Jones. *Do the Right Thing: A Spike Lee Joint*. New York: Fireside, 1989.
- — —. *Do the Right Thing*. 1989. Universal City: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2009. DVD, 114 min.
- — —. *NYPD Puts Deadly Chokehold On Staten Island Man*, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CS_rm3ai9Og&feature=youtube_gdata_player.
- Lee, Trymaine. "Eyewitness to Michael Brown Shooting Recounts His Friend's Death." *MSNBC*, August 12, 2014. <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/eyewitness-michael-brown-fatal-shooting-missouri>.
- LILOUTLAW209. *The Whistles Go.... Whoo Whoo!* YouTube Video. KRON 4, 2006. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nnzw_i4YmKk&feature=youtube_gdata_player.
- Linker, Kate. "Went Looking for Africa: Carrie Mae Weems." *Artforum International* 31, no. 6 (February 1993).
- Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment In Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.
- Louisdaprince. "Antoine Dodson - They Rape'n Everybody Out Here [Auto Tune Edition]." Video Post. *WorldStarHipHop*, August 1, 2010. <http://www.worldstarhiphop.com/videos/video.php?v=wshhYiib0xKG1Tu8tpG1>.
- Louis Gates Jr., Henry. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Mackey, Hassan, and Apollo Brown. *Tell Me*. MP3. Daily Bread. Tuscon, AZ: Mello Music Group, 2011.
- Madhubuti, Haki R. *Black Men, Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?: The Afrikan American Family in Transition*. 1st ed. Chicago: Third World Press, 1991.
- Madison, D. Soyini. "Performance Ethnography." In *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*, 304. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005.
- — —. "Staging Fieldwork/Performing Human Rights." edited by D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., n.d.
- Majors, Richard, and Janet Mancini Billson. *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*. Reprint edition. New York: Touchstone, 1993.
- Manning, Susan. *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.
- Mapp, Edward. *Blacks in American Films: Today and Yesterday*. Scarecrow Press, 1972.
- Marriner, Robin. "Derrida and the Parergon." In *A Companion to Art Theory*, edited by Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde, 349–59. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9780470998434.ch29/summary>.

- Maultsby, Portia K. "Africanisms in African-American Music." In *Africanisms in American Culture*, edited by Joseph E. Holloway. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- McBride, Dwight. "Straight Black Studies: On African American Studies, James Baldwin, and Black Queer Studies." In *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, edited by E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
- McBride, Dwight A. "Can the Queen Speak? Racial Essentialism, Sexuality and the Problem of Authority." *Callaloo* 21, no. 2 (1998): 363–79.
- McCall, Hugh. *The History of Georgia: Containing Brief Sketches of the Most Remarkable Events, Up to the Present Day*. Seymour & Williams, 1811.
- McCune, Jeffrey Q., Jr. "'Out' in the Club: The Down Low, Hip-Hop, and the Architecture of Black Masculinity." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (July 1, 2008): 298–314.
- McDowell, Dave. "Hide Your Husbands!" Photo. *Flickr*, 2010. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sacamoto2003/5531927565/>.
- McGinnis, Carol. *Michigan Genealogy: Sources & Resources*. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Com, 2005.
- Meara, Paul. "It's A Drill!: The Sound That Has Music Labels Flocking To The Windy City." *AllHipHop*, August 23, 2012. <http://allhiphop.com/2012/08/23/its-a-drill-the-sound-that-has-music-labels-flocking-to-the-windy-city/>.
- Meet Hank Willis Thomas*. NowThis News. Accessed July 16, 2013. <http://www.nowthisnews.com/news/meet-hank-willis-thomas/?autoplay=true>.
- Milo, Peter V. "'CNN Of The Ghetto': WorldStarHipHop Becoming YouTube For Urban Violence." *CBS Atlanta*, March 29, 2012. <http://atlanta.cbslocal.com/2012/03/29/worldstarhiphop-website-becoming-youtube-for-urban-violence/>.
- Mitchell, Koritha. *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011.
- MJTheKingOfDance4. *The Gregory Brothers (Creators Of Antoine Dodson Bed Intruder) Interview On Monique*. YouTube Video, 2011. <http://thurdy.net/1652>.
- More, Tell Me. "Toddler Removed From Home After Viral Swearing Video." *NPR*, January 14, 2014. <http://www.npr.org/2014/01/14/262404302/toddler-removed-from-home-after-viral-swearing-video>.
- Moten, Fred. *In The Break: The Aesthetics Of The Black Radical Tradition*. 1 edition. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Mullins, Paul R. *Race and Affluence: An Archaeology of African America and Consumer Culture*. New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2006.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. "Introduction." In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Nahon, Karine, and Jeff Hemsley. *Going Viral*. E-book. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013.

- Nakamura, Lisa. *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- Nakamura, Lisa, and Peter Chow-White, eds. "Introduction—Race and Digital Technology: Code, The Color Line, and the Information Society." In *Race After the Internet*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Nas. *Illmatic*. Audio CD. New York: Columbia, 1994.
- . *Nothing Lasts Forever*. Audio MP3. The Lost Tapes. New York: Columbia, 2002.
- Neal, Mark Anthony. *Looking for Leroy: Illegible Black Masculinities*. New York: NYU Press, 2013.
- . *New Black Man*. New Ed edition. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Nelson, Alondra. "Introduction: Future Texts." *Social Text* 71 20, no. 2 (2002): 1–15.
- Newman, Heather. "Web Postings Turn Writers into Anonymous." *Detroit Free Press*, July 3, 2001.
- Newsroom, CNN. "'Loud Music' Shooter Testifying." *CNN*, February 11, 2014. <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/140211/cnr.04.html>.
- Nicki Minaj. *Truffle Butter (feat. Drake and Lil Wayne)*. Audio MP3. Cash Money Records/Motown Records, 2015.
- "N.Y. Beaches Ban Boomboxes." *Star News*, July 26, 1985. <http://tinyurl.com/hpzbstd>.
- Outkast. *SpottieOttieDopaliscious (featuring Sleepy Brown)*. CD. Aquemini. LaFace Records, 1998.
- Owerko, Lyle, and Spike Lee. *The Boombox Project: The Machines, the Music, and the Urban Underground*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2010.
- Pabst, Naomi. "Blackness/Mixedness: Contestations over Crossing Signs." *Cultural Critique*, no. 54 (April 1, 2003): 178–212.
- panhead. "This Actually Aired on My Local News Today. 'Obviously We Have a Rapist Here... so Hide Yo Kids, Hide Yo Wife, and Hide Yo Husband 'Cause Dey Rapin' E'rybody out Here.'" *Reddit*, July 29, 2010. https://www.reddit.com/r/funny/comments/cuvn3/this_actually_aired_on_my_local_news_today/.
- Parisi, Albert J. "4,2>Noise Ban Angers Ice Cream Vendors." *The New York Times*, September 4, 1988, sec. N.Y. / Region. <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/09/04/nyregion/42-noise-ban-angers-ice-cream-vendors.html>.
- Partnership, Topos. "Literature Review: Media Representations and Impact on the Lives of Black Men and Boys." New York: Opportunity Agenda, 2011.
- Pelican, Conservative. "A Narrative Crumbles...." Twitter Post. *Twitter*, November 15, 2014. <https://twitter.com/TheHappyPelican/status/533747484745797634>.
- Peoples, Gabriel. "We Are Not Expendable." Twitter Post. *Twitter*, July 13, 2013. <https://twitter.com/Gofthepeoples/status/356242125328891904>.
- Phelan, Peggy. "Performance, Live Culture and Things of the Heart." *Journal of Visual Culture* 2, no. 3 (December 1, 2003): 291–302.

- — —. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. 1 edition. London; New York: Routledge, 1993.
- P, Master. *Bout It, Bout It II*. Audio MP3. Ice Cream Man. Priority Records, 1996.
- “Poet Maya Angelou Highlights Corporate Racism-Fiction!,” December 16, 2011. http://www.truthorfiction.com/mayaangelou/#.VM7SLmTF_JI.
- Posey, Sandra Mizumoto. “The Body Art of Brotherhood.” In *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision*, edited by Tamara Brown, Gregory Parks, and Clarenda Phillips. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010.
- Primo, Leslie. “Visual Arts 1: Representations of Blacks.” In *The Oxford Companion to Black British History*, edited by David Dabydeen and Cecily Jones. Oxford University Press, n.d.
- Raab, Selwyn. “STATE JUDGE DISMISSES INDICTMENT OF OFFICER IN THE BUMPURS KILLING.” *The New York Times*, April 13, 1985, sec. N.Y. / Region. <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/04/13/nyregion/state-judge-dismisses-indictment-of-officer-in-the-bumpurs-killing.html>.
- Ralston, Kevin M. “An Intersectional Approach to Understanding Stigma Associated with Male Sexual Assault Victimization.” *Sociology Compass* 6, no. 4 (April 1, 2012): 283–92.
- Raymer, Miles. “Who Owns Trap?: Does Music Born of Dirty South Drug Wars Have Any Place in Squeaky-Clean Dance Clubs?” *Chicago Reader*, November 20, 2012. <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/trap-rap-edm-flosstradamus-uz-jeffrees-lex-luger/Content?oid=7975249>.
- RealCharlesRamsey. “I Am Charles Ramsey, the Scary-Looking Black Dude Who Helped Rescue Three Kidnapped Women from That Freak Ariel Castro in Cleveland One Year Ago . . . AMA.” Reddit post. *Reddit*, May 14, 2014. https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/25ghyz/i_am_charles_ramsey_the_scarylooking_black_dude/.
- Red Café. *I’m Ill*. Audio MP3. New York: Howie McDuffie Music Group, 2010.
- Reese, Lil’. *Beef (feat. Fredo Santana & Lil Durk)*. Don’t Like: A Gangsta Grillz Exclusive, 2012.
- ReignofApril. “#IfIDieInPoliceCustody.” Twitter Post. *Twitter*, July 17, 2015. <https://twitter.com/ReignOfApril/status/621996332631355392?lang=en>.
- Rice, Anne P. *Witnessing Lynching: American Writers Respond*. Rutgers University Press, 2003.
- Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Roberts, John W. *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.

- Rodgers, Tara. "“What, for Me, Constitutes Life in a Sound?": Electronic Sounds as Lively and Differentiated Individuals." *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (2011): 509–30.
- Romano, Renee Christine, and Leigh Raiford, eds. *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006.
- Roots, The. *The Next Movement*. Audio CD. Things Fall Apart. MCA, 1999.
- Rothenberg, Paula S. *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*. 6th ed. New York: Worth Publishers, 2004.
- Rothstein, Richard. Historian Says Don't "Sanitize" How Our Government Created Ghettos. Interview by Terry Gross. Accessed May 14, 2015. <http://www.npr.org/2015/05/14/406699264/historian-says-dont-sanitize-how-our-government-created-the-ghettos>.
- Ryan, Patrick S. "The ITU and the Internet's Titanic Moment." *Stanford Technology Law Review* 8 (2012). <http://stlr.stanford.edu/pdf/ryan-theituandtheinternetstitanicmoment.pdf>.
- Schechner, Richard, and Victor Turner. *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.
- schmoyoho. *BED INTRUDER SONG!!! (now on iTunes)*. YouTube Video, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>.
- — —. *Dead Giveaway!* YouTube Video, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZcRU0Op5P4>.
- Scott, Darieck. *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination*. New York: NYU Press, 2010.
- Shannon, Jonathan H. "Emotion, Performance, and Temporality in Arab Music: Reflections on Tarab." *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 1 (February 2003). <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1525/can.2003.18.1.72/abstract>.
- Shifman, Limor. "An Anatomy of a YouTube Meme." *New Media & Society* 14, no. 2 (October 3, 2011). <http://nms.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/09/27/1461444811412160>.
- "Singles," 2009. http://www.absolutad.com/absolut_gallery/singles/.
- Sirmans, M. Eugene. "The Legal Status of the Slave in South Carolina, 1670-1740." *The Journal of Southern History* 28, no. 4 (November 1, 1962): 462–73.
- "Snapshot." Accessed November 7, 2015. http://www.truthorfiction.com/mayaangelou/#.VM7SLmTF_JI.
- Staff, NPR. "Antoine Dodson: Riding YouTube Out Of The 'Hood.'" *NPR.org*, August 23, 2010. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129381037>.
- Staff, Stateside. "Exploring 'Ballroom Culture' in Detroit." *Michigan Radio*, December 19, 2013. <http://michiganradio.org/post/exploring-ballroom-culture-detroit>.
- "Statistics." *YouTube*, June 4, 2014. <http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>.

- Stehlik, Lucy. "Chief Keef Takes Chicago's Drill Sound Overground." *The Guardian*, November 16, 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/nov/16/chief-keef-chicago-drill-rap#start-of-comments>.
- suparboysean. "The Justice League." Reddit post. *Reddit*, May 11, 2013. https://www.reddit.com/r/funny/comments/1e4zjf/the_justice_league/.
- SwhiteAKA3. "I Will Be Playing My Radio Very Loudly." Twitter Post. *Twitter*, February 3, 2014. <http://www.twitter.com/swhiteAKA3>.
- Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Telander, Rick. "Senseless." *Sports Illustrated*, May 14, 1990. <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1136895/1/index.htm>.
- The American Anti-Slavery Society. *The Anti-Slavery Record Vol. III, for 1837*. New York: The American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838.
- The Black Public Sphere Collective, ed. *The Black Public Sphere*. 1st ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- The Breakfast Club. *Q WorldStar Interview at The Breakfast Club Power 105.1*. YouTube Video, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuqTO6FHAfk>.
- The Parody Factory. *Sweet Brown - Ain't Nobody Got Time for That (Autotune Remix)*. YouTube Video, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFEoMO0pc7k>.
- Thomas, Hank Willis. "Frames." *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003): 119–35.
- Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.
- Tosh, Daniel. *Web Redemption - Antoine Dodson - Uncensored*. Tosh.0 Video, 2011. <http://tosh.cc.com/video-clips/dind4m/web-redemption---antoine-dodson---uncensored>.
- Tracy, Thomas. "Cops Involved in Fatal Confrontation with Eric Garner Were Asked to Crack down on Illegal Cigarette Sales: Bill Bratton." *NY Daily News*, August 13, 2014. <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-crime/cops-involved-eric-garner-confrontation-asked-target-illegal-cigarette-sales-bratton-article-1.1901612>.
- Trump, Trader for. "@kendricklamar Puts #Ferguson Protesters on the Cover of His New Cd." Twitter Post. *Twitter*, March 15, 2015. <https://twitter.com/eshropshire1/status/577272106062389248>.
- Tsukayama, Hayley. "In Online Video, Minorities Find an Audience." *Washington Post*, April 20, 2012. https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/in-online-video-minorities-find-an-audience/2012/04/20/gIQAdhliWT_story.html.
- Turner, Patricia A. *I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Turner, Victor Witter. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982.

- United States Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. "Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department." The United States Department of Justice, March 4, 2015. http://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/ferguson_police_department_report.pdf.
- Velotron. "#cosby Would Say #pantstupdontloot." Twitter Post. *Twitter*, December 30, 2014. <https://twitter.com/308husker/status/549804263774240768>.
- Wallace, Maurice O. *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men's Literature and Culture, 1775–1995*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Wallace, Michele. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. New York: Verso Books, 2015.
- Watson, Chris. "Antoine Dodson / Bed Intruder." Part of a series on Viral Videos. *Know Your Meme*, August 6, 2010. <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/antoine-dodson-bed-intruder>.
- Wayne, Lil. *Tha Carter III*. Audio CD. New Orleans: Cash Money Records, 2008.
- "Weekend Update." Videocassette (VHS). *Saturday Night Live*. New York: Time Life Video, 1980.
- Weld, Theodore Dwight. *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*. 1st ed. New York: The American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/weld/weld.html#p108>.
- West, Kanye. *All Falls Down*. Audio CD. College Dropout. New York: Roc-A-Fella Records, 2004.
- — —. *Good Morning*. Graduation. Roc-A-Fella Records, 2007.
- WEWS NewsChannel5. *Charles Ramsey Interview, Rescuer of Amanda Berry, Gina DeJesus and Michelle Knight in Cleveland*. YouTube Video, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axCn04iXkBg>.
- Wilkerson, Isabel. "JURY ACQUITS ALL TRANSIT OFFICERS IN 1983 DEATH OF MICHAEL STEWART." *The New York Times*, November 25, 1985, sec. N.Y. / Region. <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/11/25/nyregion/jury-acquits-all-transit-officers-in-1983-death-of-michael-stewart.html>.
- Williams-Forson, Psyche A. *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Wilson, Eric. "Fashion's Blind Spot." *The New York Times*, August 7, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/08/fashion/fashions-blind-spot.html>.
- Wolff, Kristina. "Strategic Essentialism." In *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, edited by George Ritzer, 2007.
- Woods, Clyde. *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*. New York: Verso, 1998.

- WorldStarHipHop. *Tragic: Teens Give A Chicago Student From A Rival High School A Deadly Beating With Huge Wooden Boards! *Warning* (Very Graphic) (R.I.P Derrion Albert) (This Has To Stop) - World Star Uncut*. Digital Video, 2009. <http://www.worldstaruncut.com/uncut/18861>.
- Young, Harvey. "The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching." *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 4 (2005): 639–57.
- Young, Vershawn Ashanti. *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007.
- youngbusco. Instagram post. *Instagram*, 2015. https://instagram.com/p/36y_adBPK3/.
- Zulu, Itibari M., and Karanja Keita Carroll. "Transdisciplinary African American Studies Approaches and Implications: A Collective Interview with James Stewart." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, no. 2 (2008): 85–95.
- Zurawik, David. "Worldstarhiphop.com Makes a Name for Itself with Violent Viral Videos." *The Baltimore Sun*, March 23, 2012. http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2012-03-23/entertainment/bs-ae-zontv-worldstar-20120323_1_ski-mask-east-baltimore-website.