Temporalities of Waiting in Contemporary African American Literature

By

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Introduction

On February 1, 1960, four African American students—Ezell A. Blair, Jr. (now Jibreel Khazan), Franklin E. McCain, Joseph A. McNeil, and David L. Richmond—sat down at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and requested service. When they didn't receive it and were asked to leave, they defied these instructions and instead decided to wait in their seats. They were practicing nonviolent action by choosing the quotidian space of the lunch counter to express their dissent for the racist Jim Crow laws that did not allow Black people to eat in these spaces or be employed by them. The nonviolent aspect of their protest is readily clear in their choice to sit at a counter and ask for service because this is not a violent act—except metaphorically perhaps in its violent epistemological rupture of the status quo. But, the "action" element of their campaign is perhaps more of a misnomer. Although the protest was instigated by the action sitting down, the force of the demonstration was fueled by *in*action—by refusing to move from the seats that they were in.

The Greensboro Four weaponized nonviolence and passivity for the cause of civil rights. Although we might think of protest as the result of extreme action undertaken by charismatic leaders, if we look closely at moments of resistance, we notice that dissent which incites significant societal change often occurs more quietly, happens in everyday moments, and features the temporal schema of delay and endurance, in other words, of waiting. My dissertation argues that this kind of waiting—that is paradoxically both stultifying and engenders change—is woven and ever-present in the fiber of Black life because waiting for the realization of equality is a fundamental tenant of the Black experience.

When Khazan, McCain, McNeil, and Richmond waited at Woolworth's, they were "cast out of straight time's rhythm."[1] Their protest of racist norms required them to cease participation in capitalistic exchange of straight time (they literally were prevented from buying the coffee and donuts they initially requested) and desist with the normal progression of their lives (their demonstration required them to stay at the counter until the store closed). As demonstrated in by their (in)action, waiting is inherently anti-progressive. While one waits, it is often impossible to accomplish daily tasks or continue along conventional paths. Waiting, in the word of capitalism, is defined as time when no exchanges are being made. And so, this downtime is, essentially, counter to capitalism's goals. To wait, in another sense, is to wait outside of the progression from one heteropatriarchal life goal—like marriage and child rearing—to the next. To wait is to do nothing, and this nothingness runs against the flow of life that asks us to constantly be producing and moving from one moment in capitalism and heteropatriarchy to another.

This project's preoccupation with waiting had its genesis in the questions provoked by José Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. In particular, I was captivated by Muñoz's provocative linkage between waiting and to the experience of queer time:

> There is something black about waiting…Those who wait are those of us who are out of time in at least two ways. We have been cast out of straight time's rhythm, and we have made worlds in our temporal and spatial configurations.[2]

This meditation on the nature of race and waiting comes almost at the end of José Muñoz's final chapter in *Cruising Utopia*, which considers utopia and queer imaginings of it that lead to real resistance and world making in defiance of oppressive societal norms. Here, connecting the time

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1. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 182.

2. Ibid.

of waiting to failure and the performance art of Jack Smith, Muñoz takes CPT seriously to posit waiting as a temporality uniquely experienced by all those who are not in alignment with straight time. Although this formulation is exciting—and not in obvious alignment with Muñoz's version of utopia—Muñoz's chapter ends only paragraphs after he first describes waiting. He does not detail exactly how people of color or LGBTQ people experience waiting, describe its tempo, fully unpack its transformative potential, or explain how waiting might intervene in current temporalty theories or debates within overlapping discourses such as Afro-American studies. My dissertation starts here, where Muñoz has left off. I ask, what happens if we interrogate Muñoz's words? What does it mean that there is something Black about waiting? How might this waiting contribute to queer world making? Furthermore, how can waiting disabuse us of notions about active charismatic Black leadership and resistance?

In order to answer these questions, I define waiting first in terms of the way that it is experienced and second in terms of its social implications. As it is experienced as a temporality, waiting is a period in which the past overlaps with the future in the present day. When we wait, we may be outside of reproductive futurism[3]—Lee Edelman's term, chrononormativity[4]—Elizabeth Freeman's term, and straight time in general. This is true in at least two ways. First, this is because of the circular nature of waiting. As the past overlaps with the future in the present while we wait, the forward march of straight time desists and time becomes less linear and instead folds in on itself. In moments of delay, we become unmoored to the present moment, and instead we are able to daydream about the past or imagine the future. In the minutes that

3. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004), 21.

4. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 3.

comprise these moments, nothing is happening to pin us down to a linear experience of time. Second, in terms of its social implications, waiting involves stepping outside of straight time insofar as it necessitates the cessation of all goal achievement. As clarified simply by Claudia Rankine's narrator in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, "waiting can be futile."[5] In some cases, this means that those who wait for more extended durations are thrown out of straight time. They may be unable to participate in marriage, childbearing, or any of the other trappings of chrononormativity or the productivity of capitalism. Waiting is non-teleological and limits our ability to move forward with our lives. Importantly, waiting is experienced unevenly across race, class, gender-identity, ability, sexual-orientation, and other identity categories. And so, Muñoz's description of "those who wait" is particularly apt. While we do not always choose waiting, and while it can be painful and unfairly distributed, it forces us into an antagonistic position towards normativity.

Part of this antagonistic position towards normativity is waiting's critique of capitalism. As described above, waiting is an inherently non-productive state. Capitalism operates at its peak when all participants are able to create products, provide services, make purchases, or contribute meaningfully to society. Jack Halberstam, adding to the work of Edelman and Leo Bersani, defines queer time as "the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing."[6] Implicit in Halberstam's conclusions is the idea that queer life has the potential to uproot the normative flow of capital, both in terms of the undoing of linear forms of inheritance, production of new fruitful citizens through reproduction, and

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5. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf, 2015), third printing, 119.

6. Jack Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), Google Play Book Edition, 2.

respectability generated by norms of the capitalist work force. Thinking about queer time through the lens of anti-capitalism, then, this temporal schema can be thought of—at least in part—as a mode of undoing or rethinking normative assumptions about the way that citizens should be sublimated into conventional life schemas that center goal achievement, climbing the institutional ladder, and accumulating wealth. When we wait, whether we are in line at a store or at work, we are necessarily less than optimally efficient and participate—at least in some small way—in denying capitalism its overwhelming force. Furthermore, building on queer temporalities scholars' contention that the experience of non-linear temporalities often provides us with the ability to create new—and better—worlds, I, too, argue that queer temporalities, and waiting in particular, allows us to leave behind the norms of compulsory reproduction and bourgeois family-making.

Of course, queer time in its fullest sense cannot be thought of only as a kind of time that subverts capitalism. This kind of thinking would divest queer time of its inherent connection to desire. While desire runs through the texts I discuss in this dissertation, not all of the texts can be categorized as queer if we are to define "queer" in alignment with desire that exceeds the normative or is based in attraction outside of opposite-sex connection. For this reason, this dissertation I uses the word "queer" in a broad sense that pulls from the conventional notions of queer time but does not exactly reproduce them. In doing so, I draw from eclectic definitions of the term queer exemplified by many scholars,[7] but particularly in the work of Eve Sedgwick. She thinks about queerness as an "open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning" not necessarily tied to a monolithic gay or lesbian

7. See Halberstam, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Freeman, and José Esteban Muñoz.

identity.[8] At times, my chapters work through queer methodologies, draw from Queer Theory, engage with queer cultural texts. At all times, they focus on ways of being in time that are outside of chrononormativity.

With this perspective in mind, my project heeds Tom Boestroff's call for a queer temporal schema that lies outside of "slowing down, stopping, or reversing…linear trajectory"[9] by positing a temporal framework that exceeds the future and past-based models that have been proposed so far. I do not privilege the past-centric model of those like Heather Love, Dana Luciano, and Elizabeth Freeman, the anti-futurism of Lee Edelman, or the recoveries of the queer future advanced by Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Nicole Seymour. Waiting is a kind of queer time that is based on the long extension of the present mired in delay and the elongation of time. Waiting, in this way, explains the way that time does not progress according to a linear progression towards the future. And so, waiting focuses our attention on a temporality that has not been considered at length by queer theory—one that emphases the quotidian moments that comprise protest and living out of time with normativity in the everyday and present delays of mundanity.

In focusing on waiting in the context of Black life, I argue that in addition to the distress that waiting can engender it also provides us with a model of resistance and resilience that is not in accordance with stereotypes associated with Black activism and leadership. Writing about a concept that similarly critiques these structures—the quiet—Kevin Quashie conflates waiting and praying, imploring us to connect the quiet to the Black body in order to counteract

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8. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer and Now," in *Tendencies*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993), 8.

9. Tom Boellstorff, "When Marriage Falls: Queer Coincidences in Straight Time," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2-3 (2007): 229.

discourses that regulate Blackness to exteriority and active resistance.[10] In a similar vein, Erica Edward's *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* argues that the Black charismatic leadership is a farce—one that is dispelled by African American literature and cultural production in the contemporary period.[11] Charismatic leaders, unlike more quiet ones, are active and gregarious. In other words, they do not wait; they act and mobilize others to take direct action. This is apparent in Edwards's description of the way that uplift ideologies and progressivism undergird the narrative of the charismatic leader. This dissertation argues, in conjunction with Erica Edwards and Kevin Quashie, that foregrounding more passive forms of resistance can counter stereotypes about African American leadership and protest that often characterize it as charismatic or violent. By highlighting waiting, then, I work to counteract misperceptions about African American protest and resistance.

Since the almost the inception of the American experiment, Black Americans have been waiting for democracy to fulfil its promise of equality and justice. As defined by Fred Moten, democracy is "the name that has been assigned to a dream as well as to certain already existing realities that are lived, by many people, as a nightmare."[12] In Moten's characterization, democracy is freed from its denotative meaning as "government by the people" and instead becomes a specter of the imagination that is both lived and purely imaginary.[13] In its most

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10. Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of the Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 3.

11. Erica Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 4.

12. Fred Moten, "Democracy," in Keywords for American Cultural Studies, edited by Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, vol. 2 (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 75.

13. Ibid., 75.

optimistic and imaginary iteration, democracy stands for equal treatment and equal voice. In practice, U.S. democracy, however, is asymmetrical and exclusive. From the repressive voter ID laws to the violent police shootings of unarmed Black men, one does not have to think very long to come up with a litany of examples across history that prove democracy's consistent failure—and especially—its consistent failure to serve those that are most in need of it. Along with repressive sexual politics and capitalism, this failure of democracy works to promote the status quo and curb equal opportunity. I argue here that while waiting for the promise of democracy is painful, it simultaneously forces us to live in schedules that are outside of reproductive futurity and the productivity of capitalism. Ultimately, this waiting also creates a potent critique of the "nightmare" of democracy.

In thinking Black and queer together, my dissertation engages in interdisciplinary work that is intersectional insofar as it considers theory and literature through an enmeshed lens derived from Critical Race Theory and Queer Theory. Intersectionality, as it was initially conceived by Kimberlé Crenshaw, was always rooted in the idea that multiple categories of identity not just intersect but work together to produce a reality that is greater than the sum of its parts.[14] Later theorists working at the intersection have more recently turned to an assemblage model. As defined by Jasbir Puar, assemblage theory proscribes an enmeshment of identities that fully destroys the predetermined pathways of gender, race, or sexuality.[15] Indeed, tending toward the Deleuzian assemblage model, much of the queer of color critique field since 2000 has turned away from intersectional analyses. This is true of work written by such diverse authors as

14. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1244.

15. Jasbir K. Puar, "Queer Times, Queer Assemblages," *Social Text* 84-85, no. 3-4 (2005): 127-128.

Darieck Scott, Juana María Rodríguez, Vincent Woodward, Alexander Weheliye, Nadia Ellis and, as discussed above, Jasbir Puar. These authors' monographs converge around a particular topic such as abjection, cannibalism, terrorism, or diaspora and use various strains of queer theory and the literature or history of people of color to arrive at unique perspectives on these topics.

Although viewing identity from an assemblage perspective deemphasizes boundaries and feels innately post-modern and queer, I worry that a project based in a purely deconstructive space that removes disciplinarity from conversations around queer theory and Black studies might leave us bereft of the context for the historical debates that exist within these spaces. I also am concerned that a purely queered identity or politics might dissolve the opportunities for group formation and solidarity that exist within definition and identification. And so, my dissertation moves away from the assemblage model proposed within recent queer of color scholarship and instead tends toward a more interdisciplinary and intersectional model. This interdisciplinarity, I argue, is necessary in order to tease out the strains of thought that collide in the confluences between various disciplines. At the same time, leveraging some of the thought of the assemblage model, I seek to determine how notions given to us by Queer Theory can be used within the current debates in Afro-American studies to produce new insights. In so doing, my analysis is derived from the theories in both fields—ultimately privileging neither—hoping to expand conversations that engage meaningfully with the conversations in queer theory and Afro-American studies by moving towards a queer of color critique that is truly interdisciplinary.

By engaging in this interdisciplinary model, I stand on the shoulders of critics including Audre Lorde, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, and Jennifer Nash who use the frameworks of queer theory in order to intervene in debates that exist within African American studies. Although my

approach is similar to those who work within this wide field insofar as I also attempt to engage with theoretical approaches from both Queer Theory and Afro-American studies, my particular focus is different from previous work because my intervention sits at an intersection previously not considered—queer temporalities and temporal debates within Afro-American studies.

Although Valerie Rohy, Daylanne English, and Margo Crawford may be considered my project's closest interlocutors, because these texts explicitly foreground both race and time, my dissertation forges significantly different ground. Writing back to these texts, I reject Rohy's contention in *Anachronism and its Others* that anachronism has no inherent political valence. Rohy argues that since anachronism is a part of white patrilineage, it is inherently implicated in straight time and cannot be claimed as an exclusively queer temporality.[16] Alternatively, my dissertation posits that anachronism and other non-linear temporalities inherently refute normative ideologies for a variety of reasons, but most simply, because they provide opportunities to live outside of chrononormativity.

In *Each Hour Redeem: Time and Justice in African American Literature*, English argues that the justice system prescribes a temporality for African Americans that is different than the temporality that is set for white people.[17] English's text shows how African Americans consistently challenge prevalent philosophical conclusions about time and justice, showing how both are contingent and not as stable as philosophers might believe. Building on English's work, I too think through how people of color may experience time in a way that is outside of normative trajectories. While I value her account of strange temporalities in African American

16. Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* (Albany, New York: New York State University Press, 2009), xv.

17. Daylanne K. English, *Each Hour Redeem: Time and Justice in African American Literature* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 29 and 41.

literature in *Each Hour Redeem*, my project will with engage much more directly with contemporary queer scholarship and will home in on a particular experience of time, waiting—a temporality that English does not consider.

In her chapter, "The Aesthetics of *Anticipation*: The Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement," Margo Crawford explicitly discusses waiting. Crawford's essay argues that writers of the Harlem Renaissance including Jean Toomer anticipated themes of the Black Arts Movement. In making this argument, Crawford posits that these Harlem Renaissance texts exhibit an aesthetic of anticipation that is different from waiting.[18] Differing from Crawford, I argue that waiting, like anticipation can be future oriented and gives those who experience it a "different sense of time."[19] As I say above, waiting often creates the mental coexistence of the past, present, and future. Those who wait can scheme and plan for new futures. However, Crawford is right to comment that anticipation is more active than waiting. With Crawford's conjectures in mind, my dissertation extends Crawford's work. If anticipation is a key aesthetic of Harlem Renaissance literature, I argue that waiting is a key component of more contemporary African American fiction as well as cultural productions.

Although each one of these texts discusses abnormal experiences of time—directly or indirectly—none engage substantially with the discourses of queer temporalities. Because of this, they are not able to fully theorize connections between the life trajectory of queer people and people of color (or people of color who are queer). And so, my dissertation maps out a unique framework for addressing fields and theories that these texts do not.

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18. Margo Crawford, "The Aesthetics of *Anticipation*: The Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement," in *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, edited by Cherene Sherrard-Johnson (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 398.

19. Ibid, 398.

In the chapters that will follow this introduction, I will consider the way that the queer time of waiting inheres to stories of African American life by thinking about waiting in four different contexts: enslavement, protest, imprisonment, and rewind. The first three contexts are drawn from the way that African American life is told by historians—ongoing experiences that are simultaneously an element of the past and the present. For example, slavery—which is the subject of the first chapter—both refers to a historical period when chattel enslavement of Black Americans was codified by the American legal system and an ongoing reality that informs Black life today. The same is true for protest, especially in the way that American protest is so synonymous with periods like the Civil Rights Movement and the more recent #BlackLivesMatter protests. Although imprisonment has reached its apotheosis in the contemporary period, its importance to the retelling of American history has been cemented by recent books like Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*. Rewind is perhaps the most slippery context that I will describe. This final chapter focuses on the way that contemporary media creates linkages with the past that cannot be disentangled from the present.

All of these contexts coalesce around themes that are unmoored from a particular time. For example, my first chapter will examine texts that span over 155 years. This is intentional and works to underscore my argument that time does not always grant us the progression we wish for. History is still alive in the present day. This suggests a different mode of historical analysis but also a different relationship to these temporal realities. Here, I advocate not complete anachronism, but instead, a thorough kind of egalitarian enmeshment that allows us to consider the way that the past and future overlap. We are mired in an anti-progressive waiting where the past, present, and future cannot be fully differentiated from each other. To wait is to be in opposition to the chrononormative tempos of life in a way that is at a quiet and sometimes

imperceptive scale. But this smallness does not prevent waiting from being a tactic of protest and anti-normativity.

My project recognizes moments of waiting—both chosen and unchosen—but does not advocate for waiting as a solution. Instead, my dissertation works to illuminate moments of resistance that occur within the broken promise of the American dream of equality and justice. In noticing resistance that occurs within waiting, I focus on the way that Black people have mobilized the time of waiting and have embraced anti-teleological modes of being in order to protest the capitalistic heteropatriarchal structures that have forced them into the temporality of delay. But, this focus should not be interpreted as an endorsement of these structures.

In my first chapter, I explore the way that waiting is experienced in enslavement through the lens of pregnancy. In the context of slavery, I show how pregnancy can be thought of as a queer state of being that does not necessarily conform to a linear understanding of time or heteronormative scripts. This chapter first turns its attention to *Beloved*—perhaps the most iconic example of pregnancy within the contemporary neo-slave narrative—to show the result of Sethe's pregnancy: a story, but not one that valorizes a nuclear family or one that allows Sethe to move on from the past. Next, I consider *Kindred*. I explain how Dana is hindered by genealogical time and engrossed by the pursuit of self-production. Like Sethe, Dana also creates a story by the end of her narrative that enables self-authorship while reifying tethers to the past that mire her in waiting. In the final section of the chapter, I read *The Underground Railroad* and its many figurations of the cis female body and reproduction to show how Cora enables her own (possibly tenuous) freedom through means created by her own body. Sethe, Dana, and Cora produce new futures through their symbolic pregnancies—futures cannot be fully disentangled from the past and are backwards looking. Through these stories we see how the waiting time of pregnancy is

reconfigured by enslavement as a state that does not operate according to norms of white respectability or reproductive futurism. In the midst of this waiting, we can see how these women carving out resistance through self-authorship and production of the self.

Moving from enslavement to opposition, my second chapter analyzes how waiting is implicated and experienced during protest. This chapter considers the way that protest in imbricated in everyday life in the 1990 film *Paris is Burning* directed by Jennie Livingston and in Toni Morrison's 1973 novel, *Sula*. Because of my interest in the everyday, this chapter is centered on the way that living and being "extra" is a form of protest—and particularly one that has been created by Black and queer communities. I define "extra" as an intentional act that protests temporal norms through the extension of time and interruption of normativity in the visual sphere. I read *Paris is Burning*—a film that documents a possible birthplace of the extra as it is used in the twenty-first century—to argue that the queens depicted in the documentary are living in extra time by radically dreaming of futures that will be foreclosed by the realities of the AIDS epidemic. Moving backwards in time, this chapter looks at *Sula* to examine the opposite of living in extra time: Sula, and eventually many in the local community, melancholically die in extra time by embracing the queer potentiality of death. This chapter will end with a meditation on the protest movement of the summer of 2020. By considering these contexts, this chapter posits the idea that the everyday and extra time of protest has the potential to undo structures so endemic as racism that also live in the protracted actions of everyday life.

In my third chapter, I think about imprisonment and the prison industrial complex in the modern era. In this chapter I show how the time of prison—in particular epistolary time and the time of concurrent sentences—can work to undermine the forces of the carceral system. In Kalisha Buckhanon's *Upstate,* the central couple in the novel are forced to communicate with

each other through letters in a way that produces queer failure. This failure which removes characters from their progression towards normative goals and enables exit from chronormativity. I also show how Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* plays with the idea of concurrent sentences—a mechanism that allows for the simultaneous fulfillment of multiple prison terms—by literalizing this expression so that the concurrent sentence of prison becomes a concurrency in the time of the novel. In both *Upstate* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, the characters use these queer temporal schemas to exert agency and push back on the carceral state and its forces that extend beyond the walls of prison.

In my final chapter, I argue that Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* and *Citizen: An American Lyric* show that the temporality of media landscapes can positively contribute to our individual and collective processing of racial trauma and Black death. By featuring temporalities that are not in alignment with progressive movement toward teleology, these texts show how individuals use technology to rewind, re-encounter, and linger in states of abjection that allow for the radical contemplation of new futures out of step with police brutality. In order to make this argument, I draw on Darieck Scott's understanding of abjection as evincing vertigo and transcendence of linear time that allows individuals to encounter new ways of experiencing the world. This abjection enables a psychic hurtling between the past, present, and future that causes the viewer to go beyond the immediacy of the present-day moment in a way facilitates empathy and—ultimately—resistance.

If we look back along the long arc of the way that Black stories have been chronicled by history, we'll find that waiting is at every turn and in each monumental instance. There is something about waiting itself that rebels against the bigness of seminal events of African American history—like enslavement and the Civil Rights protests—because waiting is quiet,

individual, colloquial, and anti-productive. And it this very rebellion that gives waiting its power and ensures that it will be a core temporal experience of the seminal touchstones of Black American history. Because of the consistency of waiting and its reliability, by tracing waiting throughout these moments, this work contributes to an understanding of American history as static and anti-progressive. This dissertation shows not only how waiting is apparent in at the micro-scale of individual action and experience, but also how the story of American Abolition, Civil Rights, Black Power, and our own modern era of #BlackLivesMatter may slowly whittle away at American racism but can never irradiate it. To understand American racism is to know waiting because we have never fully moved on from slavery. And yet, to understand waiting is also to understand rebellion and dissent and living outside of the norms proscribed by racist heteropatriarchy.

In fact, when surveying the possibilities that are generated by waiting in the chapters of this dissertation, we find that individuals have been able to produce their own stories, question media narratives, demonstrate against injustice, and subvert the disciplinary structures of imprisonment. At times, these possibilities represent subtle shifts in perspective or small deviations from the norm. But in their collectivity, we see the mapping of a community of resistance that moves in a way that is outside of the constraints imagined by chrononormativity and racist heteropatriarchy. Although this may seem like only incremental and insignificant change, even these small aberrations represent a fruitful struggle against overwhelming and entrenched forms of oppression.

Chapter One—Pregnancy in the Neo-Slave Novel: Queer Productions in Non-Linear Gestations

Introduction: Queer Pregnancy in the Context of Black Enslavement

In thinking about seminal moments within the African American experience, it is impossible to ignore the long period of enslavement that created American capitalistic dominance, fueled manifest destiny, and defined American racism. But, within African American Studies, there has been much debate about the salience of slavery to a contemporary Black experience. While those like Kenneth Warren argue that slavery is far removed from the contemporary Black experience, those like Christina Sharpe, Ian Baucom, Paul Gilroy, and Maria Rice Bellamy point to slavery as a traumatic event that is embedded within the psyche of African Americans. Ultimately, this dissertation is not interested in adjudicating how or if slavery has influenced the contemporary Black experience—especially because it is a misnomer to talk about *the* contemporary Black experience as if there is just one universal way that Black Americans relate to history and the past. Because it is indisputable that slavery has inspired a variety and abundance of media that centers Black identity and subject formation—from television, to film, to music, to novels—a dissertation that considers how Black life has been represented in media must consider enslavement. Since Margaret Walker's 1966 novel *Jubilee*, the neo-slave narrative has been an important staple of Black literature. A quick review of the genre will easily produce important examples from every decade since *Jubilee*, which include *Kindred* (1979), *Beloved* (1987), *Middle Passage* (1990), *The Known World* (2003), and—most recently—*Pym* (2011), *The Sellout* (2015),[20] and *The Underground Railroad* (2016). For this

20. Although *Pym* and *The Sellout* are not usually read as members of this genre, Yogita Goyal makes a convincing case that these novels are modern-day satirist neo-slave narratives. See Yogita Goyal, *Runaway Genres: The Global Afterlives of Slavery* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).

reason, it is impossible to think about seminal moments in contemporary African American experiences as they are represented in Black literature without first turning to the topic of slavery and the neo-slave novel.

Before turning to the neo-slave narrative, this chapter will first consider the genesis of this genre—the slave narrative, and in particular Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. This early text is especially relevant because of the way that it emphasizes many of the themes that animate the neo-slave narratives I will review later, in particular insofar as Jacobs's autobiographical narrative features (and simultaneously elides) her own pregnancy. I analyze Jacobs's pregnancy in order to establish a model for thinking about the way that pregnancy can be figured in a text without direct discussion of the pregnant body and to show how a non-linear kind of waiting goes hand-in-hand with a "productive" pregnancy that produces something other than a child.

The experience of Jacobs—as depicted through her pseudonymous character Linda Brent—here, embodies much of what I see occurring in the neo-slave novels I will discuss later: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, and finally Colson Whitehead's *Th*e *Underground Railroad*. Thus, the body of this chapter will consider the inheritors of the legacy of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*—contemporary neo-slave novels whose protagonists also grapple with motherhood and pregnancy. By reading *Beloved, Kindred*, and *The Underground Railroad*, we can see how enslaved women (or formerly enslaved women) in these texts become literally or figuratively pregnant—the ultimate state of waiting in which one is fully consumed by anticipating for impending birth that is often conceived of through the lens of heteronormativity and linear time. Although pregnancy could mean a death sentence for enslaved women, like Linda, the characters in these books become pregnant and use pregnancy to exert

agency in their own lives. Importantly, this agency does not propel these characters toward a redemptive end or to circumstances that outweigh the traumas inflicted upon them by those who have enslaved them or the racist structures that undergird their lives. But, in paying attention to this theme of pregnancy—and the way that the time of waiting is implicated in this state—we can see moments where the characters in these novels make space for new orientations and individual empowerment. These texts show the ways in which pregnancy can be generative—not necessarily in terms of the production of new life—but in the production of new potentials outside of chrononormativity.

In what follows, I will first discuss *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to think through my suppositions about the queer potentiality of pregnancy in the lives of enslaved women and Linda in particular. I will trace the way that pregnancy and queer theory have, and have not, intersected and will argue that pregnancy in the context of slavery is a queer state of being that does not necessarily conform to a linear understanding of time or heteronormative scripts. I will then apply this reading to Linda Brent's experience in *Incidents* to show how—by persistently pursuing the identity of mother in a society that precludes this identification—she can be placed with a queer constellation that pushes against normativity and racist figurations of family structures. From here, I discuss the non-linearity of pregnancy and the way that it functions to disturb notions of heteronormative propriety. Moving out of the introduction, I will consider *Beloved*, which is perhaps the most iconic example of pregnancy within the contemporary neo-slave narrative genre because it figures and features so many different kinds of pregnancy. I will argue that by the end of the novel, Sethe gains a story, but not one that valorizes a nuclear family or one that affords her the opportunity to move on from the past. From there, I will turn to *Kindred*—a novel preoccupied with genealogical time and self-production. Like Sethe, Dana also

creates a story by the end of her narrative, one that promises a new relationship to the past, but ultimately never fulfils this promise. Finally, I will read *The Underground Railroad* and its many figurations of the cis female body and reproduction to think about the way that Cora creates the means for her—perhaps only temporary—freedom through the production of self. In all of these texts, women encounter the waiting time of pregnancy. They exist in indeterminate modes that are often painful to them, and, at the surface, strip them of agency. And, in these worlds, they carve out spaces where they can create and re-birth themselves. They produce new futures, even if these futures cannot be fully disentangled from the past.

Returning to *Incidents*, Linda Brent's garret has become an iconic space and has inspired much discussion. Linda, Jacobs's pseudonymous protagonist, is forced into this "loophole of retreat" in order to escape her master and watch over her children. Located in the attic of her grandmother's shed, Linda lives in this cramped space, which is only nine feet by seven feet wide and three feet high. She endures this incredible subjugation for seven years in order to protect her children. She can barely move in the "loophole of retreat" and suffers lifelong injuries because of its constriction on her motion. Despite these obstacles, however, Linda believes that her sequester is beneficial to her children. The first-person narrator describes the dire circumstances of her constriction, explaining that she "was so weary of [her] long imprisonment that, had it not been for the hope of serving [her] children, [she] should have been thankful to die; but, for their sakes, [she] was willing to bear on."[21] It is almost beyond comprehension that a human could live in such a restricted space for seven years, and yet, Linda persists. She waits for her circumstances to improve. She does not contribute to her master's productivity or her own.

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21. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 162.

She does not actively participate in any of the trappings of chrononormative life stages. As defined by Elizabeth Freeman, chrononormativity is the idea that human bodies are generally organized by the state or social strictures in a way that maximizes their productivity and reproduction.[22] Linda cannot work towards achieving freedom or journey northward. She does not linearly progress—instead, she is trapped in full stasis.

The imagery of motherhood and pregnancy permeates the scene of the garret. Linda originally enters the attic in order to keep her children safe from Dr. Flint's jealous impulses. When Dr. Flint learned about her relationship with Mr. Sands—the white father of her children—he sent Linda to work in the fields. Given this decision, Linda is concerned that her children will also be subjected to similar treatment and determines that it is too risky to attempt to escape north with her children. Instead, she enters into the attic in order to keep her children safe and contrives to have Dr. Flint sell her children to a slave trader, acting on behalf of Mr. Sands. After this, Linda's grandmother has custody over Benny and Ellen and Linda is able to watch her children from afar.

Thus, by entering into the garret and staying there, Linda is acting selflessly and acting in her children's best interests. In this way, then, the garret represents a deeply maternal space within Jacobs's narrative because her purpose for entering and staying in the garret is the safety of her children. Figuratively, too, we can associate the space with emblems of cis female reproduction. It is almost as though Linda has entered this loophole in order to re-gestate her children—to put them back into the womb. This image is evinced because the primary purpose of Linda's time in the loophole is to protect her children just as a womb is a place where a fetus is protected from the outside world. In a way, the garret itself is womb-like. The loophole is dark

22. Freeman, *Time Binds,* 3.

and cramped like a womb would be. Although she eventually is able to bore a hole that is "about an inch long and an inch broad" in the wall of the attic so that she can see her children and get a bit of fresh air, this is an unlit and shadowy space.[23] Like a fetus, Linda is fully reliant on others in order to meet her basic needs. Her food is "passed up to [her] through the trap-door [her] uncle had contrived" by different members of her family.[24] The only way that she can communicate with the outside world is predicated on others' decision to come and talk to her.

The metaphor of the attic as a womb is intensified because of the temporality of pregnancy. Pregnancy is a period of time that is defined by the waiting. This is clear even in the way that pregnancy is described colloquially as being "expecting."[25] And indeed, the temporality of female life as defined by heteropatriarchy is rooted in waiting—an argument that Adrienne Rich makes explicitly. As she explains,

> Women have always been seen as waiting: waiting to be asked, waiting for our menses, in fear least they do or do not come, waiting for men to come home from wars, or from work, waiting for children to grow up, or for the birth for a new child, or for menopause.[26]

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23. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* 148.

24. Ibid., 147.

25. Crawford, "The Aesthetics of Anticipation," 387-401.

Expecting might be thought about as different from waiting because expecting is usually temporally bound and is based on the expectation that an event will occur. Margo Crawford discusses anticipation—which is much like expectation—in her chapter "The Aesthetics of Anticipation: The Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement." In it, she discusses how the Harlem Renaissance anticipated the Black Arts Movement, arguing that the two periods have overlapping ideologies (391). Ultimately, we might think of expecting as a type of waiting that involves looking forward to an outcome. As I will show later in this chapter, although the time of pregnancy is tied to looking forward to a certain event. I will complicate these expectations. In this way, although the term "expecting" has linear connotations, in the context of enslaved women's pregnancy, the time of pregnancy becomes less predicated on a simple linear progression toward an expected outcome.

26. Rich, *Of Woman Born,* 39.

Reflecting on her own experience of marriage and motherhood, Rich posits that the patriarchy organizes women's lives around waiting and passivity. In this formulation, women wait for their lives to transform—they are expected to react and respond to others' needs instead of having their own agency to orient their lives around their own desires. Their lives are linear, in accordance with chrononormative life stages, and are predicated on forces outside their lives allowing them to progress. Because Linda can take up very few pursuits while she is in the garret, she is consumed by the experience of waiting in a way that is similar to Rich's understanding of the temporality of female life. Linda's every day is consumed by waiting to leave the loophole.

Indeed, pregnancy itself is often thought about as a deeply linear experience, one in which a clear sequence of events occurs, which ends in an obvious result. After nine months, a baby is produced. Additionally, women[27] who are pregnant are expected to align their lives in accordance with this eventual production. They are supposed to nest, to take prenatal vitamins, and count down each day of their three trimesters in order to prepare for a baby which will arrive after the span of the pregnancy. Heteronormative culture aligned in support of reproductive futurism requires that pregnant women change almost every aspect of their life in service of waiting for the birth of their child—from their food intake to their social activities to their home environment and even core identity. We see this complete life-realignment in Jacobs's narrative, too. Linda hopes that she and her children will gain their freedom—and while she is in the garret, she can only wait for this eventuality. Her life becomes oriented by watching over her children

27. This dissertation acknowledges that people with a wide variety of gender identities can become pregnant but refers exclusively to women here to evoke straight hegemonic culture's expectations for women in particular.

(often literally) and pursing their best interests. In this way, then, while in the garret, Linda re-experiences the time of pregnancy defined by waiting (although an extended one) and figuratively

Although pregnancy is thought of as the ultimate embodiment of heterosexual time, pregnancy—and in particular, pregnancy in the context of slavery—needs to be recognized as a queer act of resistance that is not in accordance with reproductive futurism or chrononormativity.[28] In part, this is because enslaved people were considered property during this time period. Although they may have counted as three-fifths of a person in 1787 for the sake of legislative representation, in the eyes of the law, enslaved people were objects that plantation masters could sell, trade, berate, and use without much restriction. Furthermore, as has been established by C. Riley Snorton and Frank B. Wilderson, Black labor was and is fungible[29]—unspecific and mutable. Because of their object status, enslaved people did not have rights to either marriage or to their own children. Plantation owners could, and often did, sell enslaved women's male partners and children to other plantations across the country. Given the object

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28. All pregnancy transforms bodies in a way that is outside of the most restrictive and conservative norms beauty and femininity and explodes even the concept of bodily autonomy. This chapter will focus in particular on how black and enslaved women's experience of pregnancy is contiguous with queer ways of being.

29. See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1915); Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987) 65-81; and Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, tr. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

This is in accordance with the way that Marx understands commodities as "directly interchangeable with other commodities" (64). In the eyes of the law, enslaved people were considered to be economic goods. In the same way that a bushel of grain can be substituted for another bushel of grain without issue, enslaved people could be exchanged. In a similar vein, Hortense Spillers describes this strange relationship between chattel and personhood as "property *plus*" (65). Black bodies were transformed into "instruments of production" (42).

status of enslaved people, the categories of woman, wife, and mother were not legally available to enslaved people who had given birth to children and partnered with others. In the eyes of the legal system, then, when two enslaved people had sex and produced a child, this act produced only more property—and was not necessarily or legally indicative of any personal attachment, relationship, desire, or love. Thinking about the intersection of slavery and sexuality, Hortense Spillers argues that it is not possible to apply the rubrics of sexuality or desire to enslaved people: "we could go so far as to entertain the very real possibility that 'sexuality,' as a term of implied relationship and desire is dubiously appropriate, manageable, or accurate to any of the familial arrangements under a system of enslavement."[30] For this reason, it is impossible to apply modern-day understandings of relationships, gender-identity, or sexual-identity to enslaved people.[31] Moreover, because of an enslaved mother's legal object status and dehumanization, personal and self-determined identity formation along these lines would be all-but impossible. And so, pregnancy in the context of enslavement is necessarily outside of heterosexual and chrononormative logics.

Despite these social factors and the realities of chattel slavery, however, we can read queer relationships to the norm within Jacobs's historical experiences and—even more distinctly—in the neo-slave narratives that Jacobs's story inspired. Although it would be a mistake to think of Jacobs or even Linda Brent as experiencing same-sex desire because there is no clear evidence for this in her narrative or other archival materials, her narrative has often been

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30. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," 76.

31. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 43

According to Michel Foucault, homosexuality became a "species" in 1870, so even in a context outside of slavery, gay identity would not be available to people during this era.

read through a lens that is sensitive to her anti-normativity. In particular, Linda's actions are read as a critique of the Cult of True Womanhood insofar as the morals prescribed to nineteenth-century middle-class white women are shown to be impossible for enslaved women during this period to follow.[32] For example, although the Cult of True Womanhood would not sanction pregnancy outside of marriage, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* shows that marriage was an untenable state in the context of legal enslavement, since it provided no protection against spouses being sold to plantations far away from their partners.[33]

A few scholars have paid particular attention to resonances between Linda's gender identity and contemporary queer expression. In particular, there is much to say about how Linda's cross-dressing as a method to evade recognition and capture relates to Linda's gender identity and the way that gender can operate within the system of chattel slavery. As C. Riley Snorton notes, this scene is most often read through the lens of passing.[34] When Linda leaves her friend Betty's house in order to move into the loophole of retreat, Betty brings her "a suit of sailor's clothes,—jacket, trousers, and tarpaulin hat" in order to hide her identity.[35] When she walks on the street, she recalls "pass[ing] several people whom [she] knew, but they did not recognize [her] in [her] disguise."[36] By successfully passing for a man, Linda troubles the

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32. Jennifer Larson, "Converting Passive Womanhood to Active Sisterhood: Agency, Power, and Subversion in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *Women's Studies* 35.8 (2006): 740.

33. Ibid., 741.

34. C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 70.

35. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 124.

36. Ibid., 125.

boundaries of this category, but also, in some way inhabits the cultural role of maleness in a way that allows her to extract the power associated with it—in this case, freedom and mobility. According to Snorton, this foray into masculine gender-expression is indicative of "ungendered blackness."[37] In other words, Snorton finds that Linda's cross-dressing in this moment is not only a strategy to avoid detection, but is indicative of a broader theme within the experience of enslavement in the particular context of the antebellum era. Thus, we see that the logics of slavery that have led Linda to her precarious position of needing to flee and hide have created the conditions for her to transcend static gender presentation or identity. Snorton argues that Jacobs's narrative "exposes…the impossibility of normative gender and sexual reciprocity under captivity,"[38] and we can see time and time again that these norms become unavailable within the logics of chattel slavery.

For this reason, then, the pursuit of motherhood as an identity category by enslaved women in the nineteenth century is a radical act in alignment with broad definitions of what it means to be queer and must be thought of as such. By finding a way to become and then stay a mother—one that cares and watches over her children—in the face of extreme violence and deadly circumstances, Linda rebels against the norms for Black womanhood at the time. By remaining in the garret, despite the pain that it causes her, Linda performs and inhabits motherhood—but not one (especially because she is unmarried) that fits in with the norms of the Cult of True Womanhood. In this inhabitation and embodiment, we see the way that anti-normativity and the Black experience go hand-in-hand. Because of her race, Linda must creatively inhabit motherhood in a way that is always slant of the norm.

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37. Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, 67.

38. Ibid., 69.

This idea that Black and queer identities are fundamentally tied together is discussed at length by Matt Richardson. He argues that, "the Black has been inextricably tied to the queer—the lesbian in particular" because both identity categories are outside of "normative heterosexuality."[39] This is supported by Sharon Holland's observation in *Raising the Dead* that "that the words *lesbian* and *black* are forged in blood, in physiognomy, and ultimately in racist science."[40] This formulation is also operational in Muñoz's identification of "those who of us who wait" who he describes in turn as "black" and "outside of straight time's rhythm,"[41] which I have already cited in the introduction to this dissertation. Given these confluences, we can see how Linda's race places her in a position where normative inhabitations of motherhood are not available to her. For this reason, we can place Linda in a queer constellation, as a character who figures rebellion against the norm through her commitment to protecting her children and inventive imaginings of this relationship through the figuration of anti-normative pregnancy.

Queer pregnancy is not a new topic, and in fact, much has been written about the way that families can come together in ways that do not neatly fall under a nuclear-traditional-heteronormative family structure. Because of the critiques that are leveraged against families where one or more partners identify along the LGBTQ spectrum, theorists and activists alike have spent time providing evidence that these families are just as nurturing as heterosexual ones. For example, Abbie Goldberg and Katherine Allen's edited collection, *LGBT-Parent Families: Innovations in Research and Implications for Practice*, includes chapters that cover the spectrum

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39. Matt Richardson, *The Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2013), 7.

40. Sharon Patricia Holland, *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000), 145.

41. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia,* 182.

of queer parenting—and considers intersections of race and identity. Broadly, the studies included in the book show that queer parenting is not—as conservatives have claimed—detrimental to children's wellbeing.[42] This argument is supported, too, by earlier scholars writing on this topic including Judith Stacey and Timothy J. Biblarz;[43] Mike Allen and Nancy Burrell;[44] and Philip A. Belcastro, Theresa Gramlich, Thomas Nicholson, Jimmie Price, and Richard Wilson.[45]

Maybe predictably, much has also been written about the ways in which we can critique these visions of normalcy in order to broaden the meaning of a "nurturing" family rather than to conform queer identity to fit within a category that has been defined by homophobia. However, not much has been written about the way that pregnancy itself is imbued with potentiality outside of racist heteropatriarchy. Despite this, however, the constitutive elements of this argument have received significant attention. Pregnancy has been thought of as feminist, but not quite queer. Rich explores the transformational power of pregnancy and traces the history of pregnancy and its origins in inherently female bodies of knowledge that pre-date patriarchal formations.[46]

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42. Abbie E. Goldberg and Katherine R. Allen, *LGBT-Parent Families: Innovations in Research and Implications for Practice* (New York: Springer, 2013), 360.

43. Judith Stacey and Timothy J. Biblarz, "(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?" *American Sociological Review* 66, no. 2 (2001): 59-183.

44. Mike Allen and Nancy Burrell, "Comparing the Impact of Homosexual and Heterosexual Parents on Children: Meta-Analysis of Existing Research," *Journal of Homosexuality* 32, no. 2 (1997): 19-35.

45. Philip A. Belcastro, Theresa Gramlich, Thomas Nicholson, Jimmie Price, and Richard Wilson, "A Review of Data Based Studies Addressing the Affects of Homosexual Parenting on Children's Sexual and Social Functioning" *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage* 20, no. 1-2 (1994): 105-122.

46. Rich, *Of Woman Born,* 100.

Pregnancy has also been explored within the context of queer identity. Writing explicitly about the lesbian experience, Laura Mamo's *Queering Reproduction* discusses the medical interventions available to lesbians who wish to use fertility treatments in order to become mothers.[47] In texts such as this, the people who are giving birth and becoming pregnant are queer, but not much attention is paid to the potentiality of pregnancy itself as a site of antinormativity.

Other work of relevance includes Audre Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic," which discusses the power of female sexuality and defines this force in opposition to the "European-American male tradition."[48] But, Lorde does not specifically mention pregnancy as an erotic power of women, although her essay does important work to link the female body with strength and ability. Further, Joani Mortenson's "Queering the Politics of Maternal Eroticism" foregrounds the way that pregnancy can be erotic and narratively describes a mother and grown son creating poetry with each other. The essay includes poetry and beautiful memories, but it does not work to theoretically unpack why pregnancy may be a queer way of being.[49] Although all of these strains of thought—from fields as far flung as poetry, literary studies, psychology, sociology, and queer theory—get close to fully decolonizing and queering pregnancy, they ultimately do not cohere to make this argument.

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47. Laura Mamo, *Queering Reproduction: Achieving Pregnancy in the Age of Technoscience* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007).

48. Audre Lore, "Uses of the Erotic," in *Sister Outsider* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 59.

49. Joani Mortenson and Luke Mortenson, "Borders, Bodies & Kindred Pleasures: Queering the Politics of Maternal Eroticism," in *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Margaret F. Gibson (Ontario, Canada: Demeter Press, 2014), 187.

To decolonize and queer pregnancy itself requires an understanding of the possibility of the pregnant body. Outside of this imagining, and especially outside of marriage, pregnancy is a sign not of a stable family, but instead is a sign of sexuality. It requires an understanding of pregnant people that is not reliant on a linear progression towards a stable end where "linear progression" implies journeying from marriage *to* pregnancy. It must center all those who are outside of a white heteropatriarchal imagining of the pregnant body, in Cathy Cohen's words, "punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens."[50]

Although pregnancy is attached to advancing the nation and producing new productive citizens, many pregnant women did not fall into the category of the "angel of the house" or the "'nobler half of humanity' whose duty was to elevate men's sentiments and inspire their higher impulses."[51] Moreover, for women of all races during the nineteenth century, pregnancy rarely meant a stable relationship with one's body or health. As bell hooks explains,

> Given the strains of endless pregnancies and the hardships of childbirth, it is understandable that 19th century white women felt no great attachment to their sexuality.[52]

And for Black women, pregnancy was even more dire:

> Breeding was [a] socially legitimated method of sexually exploiting black women…Undernourished, overworked women were rarely in a physical condition that would allow for safe easy childbirth. Repeated pregnancies without proper care resulted in numerous miscarriages and death.[53]

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50. Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 3, no. 4 (1997): 437–465.

51. bell hooks, *A'int I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 31.

52. Ibid., 31.

53. Ibid., 39 & 41.

Neither of these images of pregnant women are in alignment with an easy and linear pregnancy in accordance with a normative vision of femininity. Instead, women were forced into situations where they had to compromise their health and well-being, and this contributed to the high rates of infant mortality during this time. Jennifer Morgan cites Peter Wood's study of "sex ratios and birth rates among blacks and white in one South Carolina parish in 1726" to show the vast disparity between birth rates among black and white women.[54] She notes that "in St. George's Parish in 1726 the average white woman had more than two children (2.24) while the average Black woman had just over one child (1.17)."[55] Morgan argues that this difference in the number of children produced between Black and white women "highlights the trauma that accompanied the intense labor regime and dislocation of enslavement in the colony."[56] Sasha Turner argues that abolitionists believed that increasing the slave population "naturally" through reproduction would end the slave trade.[57] By making the enslaved woman's body a tool to advance political ideology, plantation owners dehumanized and then made use of enslaved women's reproductive abilities through a regime of sexual assault and rape that is fully outside the relative protections of marriage and virginity that were afforded to and required of white women during this time.

Moreover, the very biological realities of pregnancy are not very "angelic." From the parasitic relationship of the fetus to the parent, to the extraordinary bodily changes that occur,

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54. Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 131.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies*: *Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 4.

even to the "deeply sensuous and erotic"[58] feelings toward their unborn child that some mothers report, pregnancy is truly not in accordance with a normative understanding of individuals' bodily autonomy, conventional beauty standards, or even propriety. Furthermore, for enslaved women, when miscarriage and infant mortality rates were so high, thinking about pregnancy as a clear-cut nine-month period with an obvious outcome is a mistake. Without access to modern medical care, it may not have been clear to pregnant women when exactly their pregnancy started or even who the father of the child was. Given slave owners' proclivity for "mating" their property, the gestational period may not easily map onto a nine-month timeline. For this reason, although pregnancy is thought of as a completely linear experience, for enslaved women, this often was not the case.

To further an understanding of a decolonized concept of pregnancy that is not in accordance with straight time or white normativity, the remaining sections of this chapter will examine the way that women in contemporary neo-slave narratives variously figure and literally endure pregnancy. In telling these stories, the novels I will consider map a new relationship between women and their bodies that is not so bathed in normativity and tied to dominant narratives of what it means to be a mother or what it means to bear children. Especially given the history of Black women's sexuality—particularly thinking about the context of frequent rape and abuse by white slaveowners in the context of slavery—it is not fair to say that pregnancy has been an experience that has always provided women with more agency and control over their lives, since quite frequently it has meant the opposite. This chapter both recognizes the horror of

58. Mortenson and Mortenson, "Borders, Bodies & Kindred Pleasures: Queering the Politics of Maternal Eroticism," 187.

these experiences and moments when pregnancy has led to new meanings and new articulations of self.

In articulating both the horror of waiting and the new possibilities that are generated by it, this chapter advances the key arguments of this dissertation. By entering into a temporal reality that is outside of straight time and normativity, Black enslaved pregnant women are outside of chrononormative schemas of marriage and childrearing in the context of male protection. In alignment with ideas that will be traced in each subsequent chapter, this chapter will show how Black people have created agency within and despite the structural limitations of this temporality of delay and expectation. While later chapters will consider moments of waiting that transpire in protest, imprisonment, and rewind, this chapter starts at one of the beginnings of contemporary racial forms—in enslavement. By embarking from this beginning, I posit the contiguous nature of American Racism, Black resistance, and the temporal schemas that undergird both of these forms.

***Beloved*: Producing a Story Not to "Pass On"**

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* depicts one of the most iconic examples of anti-normative pregnancy within the antebellum period. Pregnancy is an important theme throughout the text, which features several pregnant women, and the specter of enslavement is always attached to these gestational periods. In *Beloved*, Morrison reimagines the life of Margaret Garner, a pregnant woman who fled enslavement in Kentucky and found refuge in Ohio. When she was captured, she decided to kill her children instead of allowing them to be brought back to Kentucky and to become re-enslaved. Garner intended to kill all four of her children, but managed only to kill her daughter before U.S. Marshalls subdued her. In Morrison's reimagining,

Sethe is a fictionalized embodiment of Garner. Like Garner, Sethe has escaped from slavery and killed her young daughter. When the novel starts, Sethe and the result of her pregnancy—Denver—live at a home they call "124." They are soon joined by two other characters—Paul D., an old friend of Sethe's from the plantation she escaped from, and Beloved, who we learn is a version of Sethe's dead child come back to life. Denver calls Beloved "the true-to-life-presence of the baby that had kept [Sethe] company most of her life."[59] Beloved is an otherworldly manifestation who begins to bend the inhabitants of the house to her will. At the end of the novel, the village expels Beloved from 124 and Sethe has to learn that she is her "own best thing."[60]

Beloved figures many of the themes that preoccupy this chapter insofar as it features a triad of women who all have some relationship to pregnancy. It is set during the antebellum era, but because it takes place—for the most part—in Ohio, enslavement is present in flashback. Despite the fact that enslavement is not a part of the present-day of the text, however, the time of slavery is essential to this text. Considering Beloved's attachment to and signification of the past, I will argue that her figurative re-gestation showcases her nonnormative relationship to time and sexuality. Although some scholars have read *Beloved* as a novel that is ultimately redemptive and ends with all of the central characters productively understanding their relationship to the past, I show how the text ends in indeterminacy—one where Beloved herself and the period of enslavement that she represents are always liable to resurface. Just like pregnancies in this text adhere to an abnormal temporal schedule, so does the trauma and rememory of slavery. By the end of this novel, Sethe is able to tell her story, but she is not able to move on from her past.

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59. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 141.

60. Ibid., 322.

Sethe's pregnancy that creates Beloved is the genesis of the anti-normative relation to time in the novel. Beloved was born before the central action of the text, so the reader is not given many details about Beloved's original birth. But, when Beloved re-enters the home of 124, the narrative is rife with images of pregnancy. Beloved's arrival causes Sethe's water to break—Sethe immediately feels her bladder fill and what flows out of her body is so extreme that it conjures visions of an amniotic sac breaking that typically occurs at the beginning of or during labor.[61] This connection is made explicitly in *Beloved* later in the novel when Sethe reflects on this experience. Sethe refers to her bladder opening as a moment in which she "broke water."[62] Moreover, Beloved is childlike. The chapter focalized through her perspective is a clear example of her disjointed and baby-like speech patterns.[63] Although she becomes pregnant herself[64] and

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61. Morrison, *Beloved*, 61.

62. Ibid., 156.

63. Ibid., 253.

64. See Kathryn Bond Stockton, "Prophylactics and Brains: *Beloved* in the Cybernetic Age of AIDS," *Studies in the Novel* 28, no. 3 (1996): 434-465; Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).; Martha Cutter, "The Fantastic, Narration, and Intertextuality in *Beloved* and *Jazz*," *African American Review* 34, no. 1 (2000), 61-75.

We could also think about Beloved's pregnancy as anti-normative. After an affair with Paul D, Beloved's belly begins to grow, although it is not certain if this is because of insemination or because Beloved has begun to demand and receive sweets. In Kathryn Bond Stockton's reading, Beloved has increased in size because she is eating her mother (454). Avery Gordon concludes that Beloved is "pregnant with unfulfilled possibility, with the something to be done that the wavering present is demanding…not a return to the past but a reckoning with its repression in the present" (183). If we do read this as a pregnancy, then it is also unclear what will be the result of this pregnancy since Beloved does not seem to adhere to the norms of biology or physics. Beloved never gives birth—instead she "disappear[s]" or "explode[s]" or otherwise leaves the immediate viscidity of 124 (310). Her pregnancy never comes to fruition in a way that almost mimics Denver's own refusal to leave Sethe's womb. This ongoing temporality of pregnancy, too, is underscored by the phenomenon of Beloved herself—who is, in a way, born twice. If we read Beloved not as Sethe's dead daughter come-to-life, but as a middle passage survivor as

seduces Paul D, Beloved never exerts the full agency of an adult, and seems to have no interest in leaving her mother's home. And so, Beloved is a perpetual fetus or child—fully dependent on her mother and unable to live in the world as an adult.

Eventually, Beloved's relationship with Sethe grows to the point where Denver cannot distinguish between her mother and her otherworldly sister.[65] In other words, their body has become one—just as is the case when an individual becomes pregnant. Reading Beloved's narration, Claudine Raynaud shows that the text "hints at a desire for fusion, for a world where mother and daughter can be together, reunited in an embrace that reproduces the oneness of pregnancy."[66] Thus, when Beloved reemerges at 124, she enters into a relationship that is almost like a reverse pregnancy. When she first arrives, Sethe's water breaks and figuratively gives birth. Later, the two are so fused—in mind and even body—that it is as though Beloved has entered the womb. Thus, it can be seen that pregnancies in *Beloved*—periods of waiting that sometimes result in the birth of a child—do not follow a linear temporal schema or a set nine-month gestational period. In these instances, it is clear that the time of pregnancy is ongoing—it often does not reach a clear conclusion and instead has no clear end—just "circles and circles of sorrow."[67] This alternate temporality signals the way that slavery itself intervenes on enslaved

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Martha Cutter suggests is a possibility, this logic still holds. Although Beloved would not be so literally "born" twice, we can think of the Middle Passage as a kind of birth unto itself. Another possibility that Cutter proposes for Beloved's presence in Morrison's novels is that the character Wild in *Jazz* is the reincarnation of Beloved. And so, it is possible that Beloved is reborn yet again in this more recent novel (63 & 67).

65. Morrison, *Beloved*, 283.

66. Claudine Raynaud, "The Poetics of Abjection in *Beloved*," *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage*, ed. Maria Diedrich, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Carl Pedersen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 76.

67. Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 174.

women's pregnancies. We can imagine these non-linear pregnancies are representative of all that can interfere with an enslaved mother's temporally regulated pregnancy, birth, and motherhood. And this is borne out by historical records that document reproduction and pregnancy in the antebellum era as discussed in the introduction.[68]

In many ways, Beloved represents the ultimate child of anti-futurity. Within queer theory, "the child"—and by association, the mother and production of this child—has been primarily associated with reproductive futurism and straightness. In Edelman's words, the child is the "fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity."[69] It is the embodiment of the future as created by heterosexual middle-class white marriage.[70] Edelman's critique of the child is grounded in a disdain for "the absolute privilege of heteronormativity."[71] Beloved is the anti-child, or the antithesis of Edelman's imagining of "the child," because she represents the return of the past—not a productive future. She is not accepted or supported by her community—in fact, by the end of the novel, women in Cincinnati have banded together to oust her. She has not been produced

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68. See Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book;" bell hooks, *A'int I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*; Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*); Sasha Turner, *Contested Bodies*: *Pregnancy, Childrearing, and Slavery in Jamaica*.

69. Edelman, *No Future,* 21.

70. Edelman's work has often been critiqued and strains of queer temporality theory have branched out from his anti-futurist stance. Some of this critique is centered on who "the child" includes and—more importantly—does not include. Edelman's "the child" is white and middle class. And so, brown and black children, or children produced outside of middle-class marriage, or children with gay parents, do not fit neatly within this category. (For a more detailed explanation of this critique, see my discussion of Juana María Rodríguez's analysis in chapter three of this dissertation.) Because, however, Edelman specifically defines this child as a "fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity" it is clear that this "child" is a vision of normative social forces—one that is imagined specifically in opposition to identity categories outside of white heterosexuality (21).

71. Ibid., 2.

by a heterosexual union, but instead has been spontaneously generated by forces in the novel outside of the characters' control. Rebecca Balon has argued that *Beloved* supports an anti-queer agenda because it attributes non-normativity, bestiality, and queer desire to Beloved. But, Balon's reading relies on the idea that the novel positions Beloved as a negative force. As Balon argues, "Morrison deploys bestiality to characterize Beloved's sexual sway over Paul D as a representation of the pervasions caused by slavery."[72]

My reading, however, thinks of Beloved—and the past she represents—as a figuration of a generative kind of waiting that leads to new possibilities, if not redemption. In this way, then, Beloved is not the anti-queer force that Balon notices, but instead is the site of queer non-normativity as the anti-child. Beloved is completely unfettered, uninhibited by the community's values, and happily destructs the nuclear family she finds at 124 by sleeping with Paul D. This act is particularly disturbing to the construct of the nuclear family because Paul D is her pseudo-father figure due to his relationship with Sethe. Furthermore, because she is a significant part of Sethe's past life, Beloved can never represent the future that Edelman imagines. She was killed in order to facilitate Sethe's escape from slavery and thus figures all of the traumas and pains of this institution's effect on Sethe's life. For this reason, she is freighted and suffused by the past.

When Beloved enters the family's life at 124, she inspires stasis and rumination. This is first true because soon after Beloved returns to her mother, the narrative tells the story of Sethe's escape from Kentucky to Ohio while she was pregnant with Denver.[73] This is the second time that readers have heard this story, so its repetition is indicative of Sethe's obsession with the past,

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72. Rebecca Balon, "Kinless or Queer: The Unthinkable Queer Slave in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Robert O'Hara's *Insurrection: Holding History*," *African American Review* 48, no. ½ (2015): 147.

73. Morrison, *Beloved*, 92.

which has been reignited by Beloved's return. Later, Sethe tells this story to Paul D, but she cannot pull together the threads of her past in a linear way. Sethe's meandering makes Paul D "dizzy" because she is "circling the subject."[74] And Sethe is aware of her ambulation:

> Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get it right off—she could never explain. Because the truth was simple, not a long-drawn-out record of flowered shifts, tree cages, selfishness, ankle ropes and wells. Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings…Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them.[75]

Although the truth is "simple," Sethe is so all-consumed by her past, that she cannot separate her own story from any other part of the world. As Paul D succinctly explains, "new Sethe didn't know where the world stopped and she began."[76] She becomes so "wide"—like a circle—and encompasses everything.[77] Since Sethe is caught up in circularity—even literally because she is walking around Paul D—she cannot move forward and instead is forced to wait in remembrances of her past actions.

These circles are emblematic of waiting, but also figure pregnancy and temporality associated with women. In her 1979 essay, "Women's Time," Julia Kristeva distinguishes two models of time: cyclical time and linear time. In her formulation, cyclical time is particularly associated with a female subjectivity. This understanding of time finds its meaning in "cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and

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74. Ibid., 189.

75. Ibid., 192.

76. Ibid., 193.

77. Ibid., 19.

imposes a temporality."[78] On the other hand, Kristeva aligns linear time with a kind of masculine hegemony characterized by accepted modes of history and politics. This reading of circularity maps onto Sethe's lack of linearity. She cannot make logical sense of her story and assimilate it to a masculinist understanding of the world that lauds objective truths and realities told logically. Instead, she embodies the kind of women's time Kristeva mentions—in her physical circling, the circular nature of her narrative, and also in the content of her story, which recalls the time when she was pregnant with Denver and killed Beloved. Sethe is haunted by this past pregnancy and the circularity that accompanies it—she cannot move on or forward.

Many scholars writing about *Beloved* conclude their essays noting that Sethe meets some kind of redemption. Angelyn Mitchell reads Beloved's ejection from the community as a "liberatory moment."[79] For Linda Krumholz, "the reader is led through a painful, emotional healing process."[80] And it is tempting to see the end of any narrative as the conclusion to a clear arc in the text that provides resolution and gives the characters a chance to move on from what besets them. By the end of the novel, Beloved has been run-off by the women of her Cincinnati community. Led by Ella, one of Sethe's old friends, they are possessed with a righteous anger directed at the past that Beloved represents: "Whatever Sethe had done, Ella didn't like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present…the past [was] something to leave behind."[81]

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78. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 191.

79. Angelyn Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember-Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 106.

80. Linda Krumholz, "The Ghosts of Slavery: Historical Recovery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," *African American Review* 26, no. 3 (1992): 407.

81. Morrison, *Beloved*, 302.

Indeed, after Beloved is run off and she has "disappeared [or] exploded,"[82] the town tries to forget her, but it is unclear where Beloved has departed to. Ella believes that she may not have permanently exited the neighborhood and supposes that she "'could be hiding in the trees waiting for another chance.'"[83] And so, while the town may have some initial peace, "it is not a story to *pass* on" (emphasis mine).[84] It is impossible to pass over and move on from Beloved or Sethe's past. As Smith explains, "The multiple meanings of the phrase 'to pass on,' suggesting that this is a story that cannot be told yet must be told, encapsulate the dilemma posed by this kind of reading."[85] Even though Beloved does not make another clear physical entrance to the community after she is removed, she lingers on despite the fact that the community has "forg[ot] her."[86]

The end of the novel focuses on how Beloved's presence has receded into the everyday life of the Bottom so that the past inheres to the present and the community is forced to wallow in waiting:

> By and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what it is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather.[87]

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82. Ibid., 310.

83. Ibid., 310.

84. Ibid., 323.

85. Valerie Smith, "'Circling the Subject': History and Narrative in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," in *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. Henry Louis Gates and K. A. Appiah (New York: Amistad Press, 1993), 353.

86. Morrison, *Beloved*, 323.

87. Ibid., 323.

Ultimately, although Beloved's footprints are gone, her presence has become like the natural forces of wind, rain, and sun—the environment in which the characters are living. Here, Christina Sharpe's concept of the weather is helpful. Sharpe conceives of "the weather" as the environment that perpetuates racism—it is pervasive, in the background, and creates the conditions for inequality.[88] When Sharpe's concept is applied to the end of the novel, Beloved becomes like the weather—her story dissipates and influences the environment of Cincinnati, but the community can never fully move on from her because she becomes a part of the natural conditions of their world. Instead of having a redemption where she is able to learn to overcome Beloved and all that she stands for, Sethe will never be able to fully forget Beloved who is "literally the story of the past embodied."[89] Sethe must wait and wallow in remembrances of the past and must move through the world experiencing the past's influence, which is embodied in the concept of rememory. As defined by Marianne Hirsh, "Rememory is neither memory nor forgetting, but memory combined with (the threat of) repetition"[90] It is "a way to re-member, and to do so *differently*, what an entire culture has been trying to repress."[91] In Smith's reading Beloved is "literally the story of the past embodied."[92] Figured by Beloved, rememory is a repetition of memory that occurs over and over again. Indeed, Maria Rice Bellamy refers to

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88. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016), 21.

89. Smith, "'Circling the Subject,'" 350.

90. Marianne Hirsch, "Maternity and Rememory: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," in *Representations of Motherhood*, ed. Anna Bassin, Margaret Honey, and Meryle Mahler Kaplan (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994), 96.

91. Ibid., 96.

92. Smith, "'Circling the Subject,'" 350.

rememory as "traumatic repetition."[93] Although there may be some hope that a full reconcilement with the past may disrupt these cycles, there is ultimately no evidence that Sethe has come to terms with either her experiences of enslavement or Beloved's death.[94] Therefore, Morrison's text shows the way that trauma inheres and does not allow those who have experienced it to easily move forward from the past.

Despite this lack of redemption, however, there is something that Sethe has gained by the end of *Beloved*. She has her story—the same story that the text intones is not appropriate to "pass on."[95] It is a story that Paul D is ready to "put next to" his own.[96] And it is a story that Sethe has ultimately given birth to. The narrative does not end in the creation of the "nuclear family"—an institution that some scholars have argued that the text valorizes[97]—but instead, Sethe and Denver find a resolution together that emphasizes both characters' interdependence and new self-sufficiency. Because Sethe is able to give birth to her story—which is embodied by the actual text of *Beloved*—the result of all of the pregnancies in this book transcend the normative result

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93. Maria Rice Bellamy, *Bridges to Memory: Postmemory in Contemporary Ethnic American Women's Fiction* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 11.

94. See Kristen Lillvis, "Becoming Self and Mother: Posthuman Liminality in Toni Morrison's Beloved," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 54, no. 4 (2013): 452-464.

Kristen Lillvis argues that Sethe is able to act against Bodwin, who represents Schoolteacher, in a way that productively allows her to move on from the past (461) and that Paul D is able to help Sethe understand her story (461). But, because we do not see Sethe's emotional state in detail after Beloved is ousted, there is no clear evidence that these acts have allowed Sethe to make any real progress.

95. Morrison, *Beloved*, 323.

96. Ibid., 322.

97. Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu, *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997), 75.

of pregnancy. We can see that Sethe's pregnancy and giving birth to Beloved twice has become the genesis of a story that is about Sethe's own individuality and desires even though it costs the life of Beloved—Sethe's child. In this way, Sethe's pregnancy is quite different from the heterosexual future that is so often embodied by pregnancy and this text maps a kind of relation between Black women and their bodies that is outside of the norms generated by racist heteropatriarchy. In this configuration, nothing "productive" in the sense that is given to us by capitalism is created. Instead, a relationship with the past is created, and this relationship is mired in waiting and not moving on. Although the heterosexual vision of "the child" is not produced, a story is generated that fully encompasses the lives of the women it touches and constructs self-efficacy.

***Kindred*: A Self-Generating Text**

Writing around the same time, Octavia Butler was preoccupied with many of the same themes as Morrison. *Kindred*, also one of the most iconic neo-slave narratives in contemporary African American literature, was published in 1979 about a decade after *Beloved*. The plot is centered on Dana, the at times gender-fluid protagonist who is shuttled without notice back-and-forth between the present-day California of 1976 and the Maryland plantation of her ancestors, Rufus and Alice, in the early nineteenth-century. She hurtles from one time period to another based on fear—both Rufus's and her own. When Rufus is scared he might die, Dana is thrown into the antebellum era. When she is scared she may die in the past, she returns to the present. Sex and reproduction are key themes throughout the novel because Rufus, the white plantation owner and Dana's great-grandfather, becomes obsessed with seducing both Dana and Alice—Dana's doppelgänger and great-grandmother who is enslaved by Rufus. Adding to the

complication of these predatory sexual situations, is Dana's husband, Kevin. Much of the pathos of the novel is connected to the separation of Kevin and Dana who are often parted for months or years at a time when one is stuck in either the future or the present.

Unlike Sethe, Dana never literally becomes pregnant, but the narrative is suffused with the imagery of pregnancy. In this section I will argue that, in a way, Dana eventually gives birth to herself. Despite Dana's lack of literal pregnancy, because of her position of power relative to those who are permanently enslaved, she manipulates social dynamics at the Weylin plantation to ensure her own birth in the twentieth century. Conversely, because of the workings of the plantation system, Dana herself is eventually birthed into (temporary) enslavement. These conceptions are—as the text demonstrates and I will show—not due to literal sex, but instead are the re-production of time travel that is rife with sexual imagery. I will end this section by thinking about the conclusion of *Kindred*, particularly the novel's insinuation that Dana is the author of *Kindred*. My reading of the text, then, is in alignment with the broader arguments of this chapter. *Kindred* depicts a pregnancy that does not adhere to the logics of natural reproduction—it does not produce a child—but instead, like in *Beloved*, produces a narrative insofar as the implication at the end of the novel is that Dana's journal is the source text for *Kindred*.

After using deductive reasoning, Dana realizes that saving Rufus is necessary to "insure [her] family's survival [and her] own birth."[98] Although many women control their genealogy—or at least attempt to—through giving birth, Dana learns that she can control her ancestry in a different way: by choosing to keep Rufus alive. Dana realizes that Rufus is a part of her family

98. Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 29.

line because her grandmother Hagar[99] wrote down information about the family tree in a Bible in Dana's possession. Dana learns that Rufus must have sex with Alice so that Hagar will be produced and eventually Dana will be born. Although Dana does not want to participate in the perpetuation of the relationship of Alice and Rufus—because Alice does not consent to Rufus's sexual advances—she learns that she must not intervene in order to ensure that her own genealogy is perpetuated. In this way, then, she participates in her own birth and produces herself. This is reminiscent of Rich's notions about the potentiality of pregnancy as mentioned in the introduction. Rich talks about her own pregnancy as wrapped up in her desire to transform her own life. As she explains it, she "wanted to give birth, at twenty-five, to [her] unborn self."[100] Although Dana's impetus is different from Rich's, both women understand that pregnancy is connected to the perpetuations of new possibilities and fundamentally changes the self.[101]

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99. The name "Hagar," too, builds on the theme of childbearing. In the Bible, Hagar is enslaved by Sarah and Abraham and bears Abraham's children when Sarah cannot.

100. Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 193.

101. See Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember*; Linh U. Hua, "Reproducing Time, Reproducing History: Love and Black Feminist Sentimentality in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*," *African American Review* 44, no. 3 (2011): 391-407; Megan Behrent, "The Personal is Historical: Slavery, Black Power, and Resistance in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*," *College Literature* 46, no. 4 (2019): 795-828.

These new possibilities that are created by giving birth to the self are not the direct result of a consummated relationship in the traditional sense. *Kindred* is a text that includes relatively few descriptions of actual sexual acts but instead is suffused with sexual imagery—much of which is centered on the idea of sex, but not the actual act of it. Rufus is almost always portrayed in pursuit of Dana and Alice. Dana is often attempting to find her way back to Kevin and the comfort of their sexual relationship. In addition to these overt moments of sexual pursuit, Dana's journey back to the antebellum is centered on the imagery of shuttling back and forth between the past and present and underscores the way that sex is central to Dana's journeying. This sex is so often not within the context of a stable heterosexual relationship and it is not productive in the traditional sense. Its result is the production of self, not the production of a child. And so, the waiting and longing that usually is attached to the state of pregnancy is used for these nonnormative ends.

This especially becomes apparent in the doppelgänger and doubling imagery that surrounds Alice and Dana. Notably, Alice and Dana look like each other, which the book implies

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This production of self, however, is complicated by the power relationships that define the past. Speaking back to Angelyn Mitchell (45) who reads Dana as a hero, Linh Hua argues that Dana affirms patriarchal genealogy and is complicit in Alice's rape by Rufus. In Hua's words, "[Dana's] preoccupation with patriarchal history reinscribes value in the male-centered heterosexual relationship, eliding a black feminist dynamic that would indicate a critical approach to speculative time" (394). Hua argues that Dana's assumption about the rules that govern her time-traveling and the world of the past are not founded upon fact and this is something substantiated by *Kindred*. Dana thinks, "If I was to live, if others were to live, [Rufus] must live. I didn't dare test the paradox" (Butler 29). In a similar vein, Megan Behrent questions the values that guide Dana's choices. Behrent argues that "ultimately, it is self-preservation, more than nurture of her family, that guides her decisions" (810). It is clear that Dana is not fully acquainted with the rules of the universe that she has been thrown into, and despite her uncertainty, she chooses to leave Alice to a life of precarity and violence. Hua goes further in her critique of Dana's actions, and even notes that "despite the awesomeness of her abilities, the idea to rescue Alice, Nigel, Sara, Carrie, Sam, Isaac, and Mrs. Greenwood never seriously emerges" (404). And so, it is difficult to read Dana's production of herself without the context of her problematic decision-making.

is because they are related (although distantly because of the more than hundred years that separate them). When Rufus grows up, he confesses that he is in love with Alice and this love somehow extends to Dana. Rufus makes this connection explicit when he says to the pair, "You really are only one woman."[102] From this, we can interpret that one kind of reproduction that the text enacts is the duplication of Dana through the production of Alice.

During her time in Maryland, Dana notices that she is eerily becoming (or produced as) a slave in a way that echoes the duplicative relationship between Dana and Alice. Dana is becoming a slave in reality because after she escapes, she is thoroughly beaten as though she is rightfully the property of the Weylins. But also, she realizes that she is falling into submission.[103] Her attitude is falling easily into the mindset of slavery and is assimilating to it. In this way, then, even though Rufus and Dana never have sex, the result of their relationship is the creation of an enslaved person—Dana herself—and in a way, Dana produces a slave even though she is never actually pregnant. This is another way that Dana produces herself: not only does she contribute to her own birth, but she contributes to her re-birth as an enslaved person. Although she will eventually be able to break free from slavery and return to present-day California, Dana is surprised by how quickly her subjectivity shifts when she is in the past and how quickly she assimilates to the norms of slavery.

The temporal landscape of the novel is in alignment with the narrative's preoccupation with genealogy as made possible by pregnancy. This is true insofar as waiting is a central theme of the text and is the central temporality of pregnancy. As alluded to earlier, Dana and Kevin are often stranded across times and cannot communicate with one another. In one particularly

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102. Butler, *Kindred*, 228.

103. Ibid., 220.

extreme case, Kevin becomes trapped in the nineteenth century for five years while Dana is in present-day California. Because the time of the past and the time of the present are not in alignment with each other, although Kevin has experienced five years, only a few weeks have transpired for Dana during this period.[104] Interestingly, even when Kevin and Dana first see each other after this absence, they are caught in the temporality of waiting. They stand "wasting time, staring at each other. [They] couldn't help it—[Dana] couldn't anyway. New lines and all, [Kevin] was so damned beautiful."[105] While Dana has been away, Kevin's life has been progressing—and he's even moved to the North—but once he and Dana are back in California, this former life all but falls away. Nothing that he has accumulated in the nineteenth century—his friends, wealth, or connections—are relevant in 1976. While in California, Dana's life, too, has been in stasis. She is constantly plagued by the reality that she could be hurled back to the Weylin plantation without notice and is mostly focused on recovering from her time in the past and preparing for her journey back to Kevin. And so, across centuries, Kevin and Dana are waiting for each other.

Going back and forth between Maryland and California is also inflected with the imagery of child-producing sexuality. In this temporal journeying, Dana is caught between life and death in a way that evokes the philosophical meanings of sex. Sex produces new life, so in one way, it is deeply connected to fecundity, perpetuation of new generations, and fully experiencing all that life has to offer. In another way, however, sex is deeply related to death. Orgasm is described as "a little death," an idea that is elaborated on by strains of queer theory that perpetuate the anti-

104. Butler, *Kindred*, 184.

105. Ibid., 185.

social thesis.[106] With orgasm comes a kind of spiritual release and expenditure of one's energy and bodily resources, which positions sex as figuratively dualistic, representative of both life and death.

This figurative duality is mirrored in Dana's journey between the past and the present. She shuttles back and forth between time periods because either she or Rufus is scared of dying. When Rufus is concerned that he will die, he is often placed in a life-threatening situation—he may be about to drown or catch on fire. It is up to Dana to intervene and save his life when she arrives on the Maryland plantation. When Dana feels threatened in the past—and is truly concerned that she will die—she is hurtled into the future. And so, the narrative is constantly poised on the precipice between life and death just as sex is also figured by shuttling back and forth between these two poles.

What's more, the way that sex is described in the narrative is in alignment with Dana's time-travel. Dana refers to her fantastic journeying back to the past as "going back and forth"[107]—a phrase that describes penetrative sex in a few different senses. In one sense, intercourse of this kind literally involves an in-and-out rhythm that is about going back and forth. This consonance between Dana's time traveling and sex is reinforced by the way that Dana and

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106. See Jacques Lacan, "Psychoanalysis and Medicine," in *Lettres de l'ecole freudienne* 1 (1967): 60; Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2015), 1; Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), 75.

Leo Bersani, in particular, elaborates on Lacan's notion of jouissance. According to Lacan, who first coined the term, jouissance as "the nature of tension, in the nature of a forcing…at the level at which pain begins to appear" and the excess of life that is "beyond the pleasure principle." Bersani links jouissance to "violence." Bersani finds that gay sex is rooted in anti-sociality and death. In Bersani's view, gay sex is valuable when it is "anticommunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing, [and] antiloving."

107. Butler, Kindred, 208.

Kevin talk about sex. After Dana and Kevin return to the present-day after Kevin has been in Maryland for five years, Dana convinces Kevin to have sex with her even though she is hurt. She says, "'come with me.'"[108] In a certain way, this entreaty is a pun for orgasm. But, what is more interesting about Dana's description of sex is that it is about transport. She is explicitly asking Kevin to come with her to bed. Thus, the way that she describes sex is about movement and travel. When Dana goes back into the past, she is trying to come to Kevin or have him come to her—and this specifically was her purpose in her most recent journey to Maryland.

The product of all of the time-traveling sexuality, however, is not a child. Instead, the novel intimates that Dana will write the text of Kindred. While she has been hurtling from one period to the next, Dana has kept "a journal in short-hand."[109] She later thinks about creating "a story" from her journal.[110] Maria Rice Bellamy reads this impetus towards creation as possible evidence that Dana herself will eventually pen the story of *Kindred*.[111] This idea, that a story is the product of traumatic events and sexuality rather than a child is reminiscent of *Beloved*'s plot. Interestingly, these literary endings do not end in closure—or even the production of a finished text—but the possibility that a narrative may be generated. Like Jacobs's autobiographical account, they do not end in a traditional way that validates heteronormative constructs like childbirth or marriage, but instead in unfulfilled, but promising new outcomes.

***The Underground Railroad*: Birthing the Possibility of Freedom**

108. Ibid., 190.

109. Ibid., 229.

110. Ibid., 190.

111. Bellamy, *Bridges to Memory*, 63.

Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad* is also a meditation on time travel that foregrounds questions of race and the effect of the past on the present. Although, unlike *Kindred*, it is entirely set in the past and centers on the fictional life of Cora—a young, enslaved woman—as she runs away from the Georgia plantation she grew up on. Cora leaves the Randall plantation when her master, James, dies unexpectedly. She is accompanied by two other enslaved people: Lovey—who quickly is captured and killed—and Caesar—who originally suggested the escape and tells Cora that he believes she is a good luck charm. Cora and Caesar are able to allude the slavecatchers in Georgia and make it to an Underground Railroad station which transports them to new a new time and space. With and without Caesar, Cora travels all over the United States and encounters several anachronistic visions that produce a text that is truly "multitemporal."[112] For example, Cora sees skyscrapers in South Carolina on her journey to the North. At a scheduled doctor's appointment in a hospital, Cora is confronted with an out-of-time eugenics practice designed to limit the number of children produced by mentally ill people and people of color. These anachronisms continue throughout the novel as Cora travels through several states. In North Carolina, she is captured by the formidable slavecatcher, Ridgeway, who attempts to bring her back to Georgia. He is foiled by a young man from town, Royal, and Cora is able to escape. Royal brings Cora to the Valentine farm where she is able to live out a kind of pastoral ideal, contributing to the farm according to her own desires. This utopia is soon interrupted by Ridgeway and a group of white townspeople who raze the farm. After traveling through Tennessee, Cora uses her own guile and strength to overcome the significantly humbled

112. Daniel Grausam, "The Multitemporal Contemporary: Colson Whitehead's Presents," in *Literature and the Global* Contemporary, ed. Sarah Brouillette, Mathias Nilges, Emilio Sauri (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 117.

Ridgeway. After conquering Ridgeway, Cora finds a Railroad station and pumps her way to at least a temporary freedom.

My examination of *The Underground Railroad* will center on the way that the text figures pregnancy and represents womanhood in the context of enslavement. Like Dana, Cora never becomes pregnant in *The Underground Railroad*, but the text includes the imagery of pregnancy in order to imagine a life outside of forced heterosexual reproduction for enslaved women. By the end of the novel, Cora has produced something more than a child—she has produced the means for her escape, the railroad itself. This section will first consider a recent and potent essay written about the text by Stephanie Li, which aims to delegitimize *The Underground Railroad*. By questioning Li's argument that the text panders to white audiences, I will show the queer logics of the text that destabilize easy conclusions. Next, this section will move to discuss the way that the imagery of pregnancy attaches to moments that on face value are not related to this condition. Finally, I will define Cora's final act of creation as the result of these pregnancies and will show how the text understands women's bodies and gestation in nonnormative modes.

The Underground Railroad is Whitehead's most popular and commercially successful novel by far. It won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the 2016 National Book Award for Fiction, and was chosen for Oprah's Book Club.[113] Its notoriety has yet to produce an abundance of written scholarly work—perhaps because the novel's symbols are slippery—but those that have reviewed it have mostly praised it for its relevance to contemporary issues,[114] "vivid detail,"

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113. Stephanie Li, "Genre Trouble and History's Miseries in Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad*," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 44, no. 2 (2019): 19.

114. Stacy Parker Le Melle, "*The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead (Review)," *Callaloo* 39, no. 4 (2016): 937.

and "magical sentences."[115] But, not all scholars have followed this popular option. In particular, Stephanie Li broadly pans the novel because of the way that it blurs truth and fiction.[116] One particularly potent critique from Li considers the provenance of the railroad itself:

> Whitehead's underground railroad struggles to signify. Presumably built by slaves, the trains and tunnels might reflect that population's fundamental ingenuity and strength…Its very existence undermines its political import; no enslaved population would possess the freedom to construct such a complex network. Whitehead asks us to believe in a fantasy that contradicts the need to escape, for if the slaves had built this network, they simply would not need freedom.[117]

Essentially, according to Li, Whitehead's world does not fully cohere since a literal underground railroad built by enslaved people could not co-exist with slavery itself. Whitehead provides no explanation for this contradiction and only obliquely references the labor that created the railroad. Li argues that this inconsistency and others including the "happy ending" of the novel are not narrative choices motivated by truths of the text but rather are ploys to "pander to audience appetites involving tales of black suffering."[118]

Li's critiques are particularly potent, and—if accepted—render *The Underground Railroad* unavailable for thoughtful consideration, since she claims that the text's core is centered on the whims of popular opinion rather than truths about either the antebellum period or contemporary culture. Despite these critiques, I argue that the text's slippery signification and fantastic logic are not based on audience pandering, but instead cohere to create a complicated

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115. Tyrone Simpson, "*The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead (Review)," *Callaloo* 40, no. 2 (2017): 184.

116. Li, "Genre Trouble and History's Miseries in Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad*," 2.

117. Ibid., 3.

118. Ibid., 4.

text that requires contemplation and a thorough investigation. In particular, the text's lack of obvious coherence at times makes it a good candidate for the kind of queer reading that is in alignment with the methodology of this chapter and dissertation. Furthermore, under scrutiny, Li's claims do not always hold up. She claims that the text has a "happy ending,"[119] but it is truly unclear if Cora will ever successfully make it to freedom. When the novel ends, Cora meets a group of travelers who are going to St. Louis and then California,[120] but California did not exist as a state during the Antebellum period, so it is hard to apply the logics of escape that adhere to a normative understanding of time and space to Cora's last act. There really is no evidence that the railroad has finally transported her to freedom since none of the other "states of possibility"[121] have delivered her to emancipation and, furthermore, there is no way to apply the novel's oblique logics to project any particular conclusion.

Li's other main critique of the novel revolves around the fact that an early reviewer's copy of the book included a letter from the white Doubleday editor-in-chief William Thomas that operated in the same vein as William Lloyd Garrison's authentication of Frederick Douglass's autobiography to "incite real white emotion."[122] Whitehead's canny novel uses satire throughout

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119. Ibid.

120. Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad* (New York: Anchor Books, 2016), 366.

121. Ibid., 82.

122. Li, "Genre Trouble and History's Miseries in Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad*," 8.

This letter was removed from the text before it was published to a mass audience, so it does not quite seem fair to critique the novel on this account. Furthermore, even if the letter is genuine, and was meant to authenticate the text, it is completely possible that Whitehead understood the ironic nature of Thomas's statement and wanted to include it in order to signal the deep connection of the past to the present—that even today a white authority has the power to

the text to remap readers' understanding of the historical past and narratives around slavery.[123] Given this, it does not seem fair to say that the novel blurs fact and fiction in a way that is impossible to disentangle and that Cora's actions are "not merely inexplicable" but "mysterious as his underground railroad."[124] In Matthew Dischinger's words, the novel "recalibrate[s]" our understanding of fantasy" and through its enmeshment of fact and fiction "provides a path to *engage* the particulars of history and seek symbolic justice."[125] And so, because of the text's serious commitment to thinking about the experience of American slavery, it is possible to seriously engage with the novel's understanding of pregnancy and enslavement and these themes' unwieldy coherence in Cora's time-traveling experience.

Throughout *The Underground Railroad,* Cora's sexuality operates as a recurring theme that merges her gendered experience of enslavement and the text's often unstable imagery. Cora is raped at the beginning of the narrative when her "chest started to sprout" and the enslaved men at her Georgia plantation determine that she is of age.[126] After this painful introduction to sexuality, Cora is reticent to enter into a consensual sexual relationship. Although there is evidence that she is in love with Caesar and later Royal, the cruelty in Cora's past makes her cautious to explore an intimate relationship with either man. At one point, she considers "running her hands through the soft black curls by [Royal's] ears" but she stays her hand when "a memory

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authenticate a Black text.

123. Peter Dischinger, "States of Possibility in Colson Whitehead's: *The Underground Railroad*," *The Global South* 11, no. 1 (2011), 84.

124. Li, "Genre Trouble and History's Miseries in Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad*," 17.

125. Ibid., 84 & 86.

126. Colson Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad,* 25.

of old violence reared up."[127] So, Cora not only never becomes literally pregnant, but never enters into a consensual sexual relationship that could result in a pregnancy.

Despite this, however, *The Underground Railroad* is suffused with the imagery of pregnancy. This theme is most evident when Cora is exposed to the medical establishment of South Carolina. As she navigates the mandated doctors' appointments she attends, she realizes that the governmental program that undergirds the state apparatus is guided by biological racism. She learns that her doctors are attempting to regulate the birth of Black children and Black people's mental health. During her first visit, Dr. Campbell's examination is reminiscent of the sexual violence she has endured earlier. Cora finds the exam "painful" and it she is "ashamed" by his invasive probing with "gleaming steel tools" that remind her of instruments "Terrance Randall might have ordered from the blacksmith for sinister purposes."[128] Dr. Campbell does not address Cora directly, but instead after learning about her rape, he "turn[s] to the nurse and she wri[tes] down his speculations over [Cora's] ability to mother a child."[129] In this moment, the medical establishment enacts violence on Cora in the name of promoting her health. This scene reminds the reader explicitly that sexuality and brutality often go hand-in-hand in this narrative and in the lives of enslaved women.

In addition to this overt mention of pregnancy and reproduction, however, the text often figuratively signals these elements. In North Carolina, under the watch of the sympathetic Martin and his wife Ethel, Cora is forced to wait in an abolitionist's attic for months, longing for news that a train from the railroad system will visit the town so that she can escape to a safer state.

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127. Ibid., 305.

128. Ibid., 120.

129. Ibid., 120.

This waiting extends indeterminately into the future because the abolitionist with whom she is staying is prevented from contacting the underground railroad's operators or coordinators. Because of this, it is unclear if or when the train will visit the out-of-order stop in North Carolina. While in the attic, Cora thinks to herself,

> For all the close calls, she was in the same place as she had been for moths, becalmed. Between departure and arrival, in transit like the passenger she'd been ever since she ran. Once the wind picked up she would be moving again, but for now there was only the bland and endless sea.[130]

In this moment, Cora experiences entrapment that is reminiscent of Harriet Jacobs's extended stay in the "loophole of retreat."[131] The allusion is strong especially because the space of Cora's attic nook is described in spatial terms: "It came to a point three feet from the floor and ran fifteen feet in length."[132] Like Jacobs, Cora cannot move forward toward linear progression. This obvious allusion to Harriet Jacobs's narrative shuttles the reader back and forth between the historical past and the fictional one. When Cora is forced out of her hiding place, she manages to escape to the railway station where she continues to wait for days, longing for a train to serendipitously pass by. When one finally does pass through the station, it almost misses Cora. In these moments, because of the erratic underground railroad, Cora is unable to move forward toward the North, productivity, or any other normative goal in a way that signals Jacobs's statis and the waiting of pregnancy.

Cora is eventually caught because she becomes sick. She is delirious and unable to keep herself hidden while Fiona—the maid—is inside the house. For this reason, Ethel and Martin tell

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130. Ibid., 215.

131. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* 91.

132. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad,* 184.

her that Martin has caught an exotic disease. Fiona suspects the subterfuge and turns the couple into the authorities and Cora is forced from her hiding place. Cora's sickness is reminiscent of pregnancy, both in its symptoms and ultimate effects: "That night she took ill. Spasms in her belly woke her…she lost the contents of her stomach."[133] Earlier, in a fever dream she has while waiting in the South Carolina station for a locomotive to pass by, Cora gives birth to "a thousand black spiders" when "Miss Lucy cut[s] open [her] stomach."[134] These strange births, of stomach bile and insects, are particularly interesting because they occur when Cora is in a state of waiting—hoping for a salvation in one way or another. In this way, then, they not only mimic the imagery of pregnancy but the time of it. In giving birth to vomit and spiders, Cora is not a mother to progeny who can fit inside of a heteropatriarchal descendance schema. Instead, these pregnancies show that a normative understanding of motherhood and enslavement cannot easily go together.

Another key site of the figuration of cis female reproduction is the literalized Underground Railroad itself that shuttles passengers from one locale to the next and one time to another. The train moves though the void of the tunnel, and this void is something on which the narrative specifically focuses. Lumbly, a conductor on the railroad, gives Cora and Caesar instructions about the environment of the railroad and specifically the tunnel though which it runs. He says, "If you want to see what this nation is all about, I always say, you have to ride the rails. Look outside as you speed through, and you'll find the true face of America."[135] Looking

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133 Ibid., 216.

134. Ibid., 172.

135. Ibid., 69.

out at the tunnel that surrounds her, Cora thinks, "There was only darkness, mile after mile."[136] The darkness is suggestive of at least two different sets of meanings—one associated with African American identity and one that is related to the vagina and womb.

Thinking about these meanings in turn, because of the premise of this text, the color of the tunnel immediately signals darkness in a racial context. In one sense, associating darkness with Blackness indicates an othering of African American identity. This othering is embodied in colorism and negative connotations associated with darkness in American culture. This association implies a certain unknowability and impenetrability of Blackness. The connection of darkness with African American racial identity results in an erasure of Black identity insofar as darkness is the absence of color whereas Blackness is connected to a rich identity system that goes beyond a reductive binary understanding of race where darkness is always the opposite of the light and white. Through this perspective, Lumbly's philosophical statement is pessimistic and negative: the true face of America is the fear of the other. It is conflict that operates across racial lines, racism, and white-supremacist ideology.

Reading Lumbly's advice in a different way, though, the true face of America is darkness, or, African Americans writ large. If, as Ta-Nehisi Coates tells us, "race is the child of racism, not the father,"[137] then it is impossible to fully disassociate Black identity from racism since Blackness is created by it. In this formulation, associating Blackness with darkness is not in-and-of-itself a racist act, but instead is an acknowledgment of the way that Black identity has been figured in the American imagination. This two-sidedness of African American identity as it

136. Ibid., 70.

137. Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 7.

appears as a trope in literature has been described by Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark.* Morrison explains that "Africanism," as she uses the term,

> Suggests [not] the larger body of knowledge on Africa…[or] the varieties and complexities of African people and their descendants who have inhabited [the U.S., but] as a term for the denotative and connotative blackness that African people have come to signify as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people.[138]

In this formulation, darkness has been attached to "Africanist peoples."[139] If there is only darkness in the tunnel, and darkness is the face of America, then we can think of Lumbly's words as a more optimistic prognostication about the core of the American experiment—it is one that always has been predicated and reliant on the work of Black Americans.

Thinking more about the black void of the tunnel itself, we can imagine other possibilities for this space. Historically, cis female anatomy has been connected to nothingness and emptiness, so we can think of the void as symbolic of the vagina and the womb. Thus, the tunnel can be seen as a dark void that births possibilities—the possibility of escape to a new environment and new spaces. It envelops Cora and her companions, pushing them to new lives and realities. The tunnel is supremely unknowable; Cora never is able to see where the trains or going or when they will arrive, which reminds us of the way that the medical establishment has long regarded cis female anatomy. Once Cora enters the tunnel, which is evocative of fallopian tubes, she is not sure exactly what she will find or where she will end up. She also does not know how long it will take for the train to transport her from one destination to the next. She is in a

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138. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1992): 6-7.

139. Ibid., 11.

fully liminal space, enveloped by darkness, and can only hope that she will emerge in a favorable location and time.

More particularly, darkness is often used as a metaphor for Black womanhood, and even Black lesbian identity. In an early entrant to the field of queer studies, "Black (W)holes and the geometry of Black Female Sexuality," Evelynn Hammonds points out that Black lesbian identity has not been fully theorized as anything except for its "restrictive, repressive, and dangerous aspects."[140] Advocating for increased attention to the theorization of Black female sexuality, Hammonds calls for an analysis of preference and desire in these contexts.[141] Despite this, however, there has been a consistent figuration of Black lesbian desire along the lines of holes, negations, and absences. According to Hammonds, "Black women's sexuality is often described in metaphors of speechlessness, space, or vision, as a 'void' or empty space that is simultaneously ever visible (exposed) and invisible."[142] This invokes the idea of hyper-visibility and invisibility as twin sides of one coin in which racism interacts in the visual sphere to produce situations where Black women are either ignored or intensely scrutinized.

In order to combat this hyper/in-visibility, Black women participated in what Darlene Clark Hine calls the "culture of dissemblance." According to Hine, the culture of dissemblance is "the behavior and attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors."[143]

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140. Evelynn Hammonds, "Black (W)holes and geometry of Black Female Sexuality," in *The Black Studies Reader*, ed. Jacqueline Bobo, Cynthia Hudley, and Claudine Michel (New York: Routledge, 2004), 307.

141. Ibid., 307.

142. Ibid., 305.

143. Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle

Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham describes this as a culture of "silence, secrecy, and invisibility."[144] In articulating these arguments, Hine shows how enslaved women used secrecy and strategy to fight against rape and the threat of rape in the antebellum period and beyond. In all of these formulations, Black female sexuality is described as either in the context of unknowability and hegemonic cultures' lack of recognition or as a reaction to a similarly dehumanizing hyper-visibility.

Finally, in a more figurative sense, Black female sexuality has been consistently thought of in relation to various forms of physical darkness and imagery. Michele Wallace uses the idea of a black hole—the physics phenomenon which is "a region of spacetime from which gravity prevents anything, even light, from escaping"[145]—to describe black female creativity.[146] Danielle L. McGuire links the location of the kidnapping and rape of Black women—"the dark end of the street"—with the silence and disregard from white people that accompanied these attacks.[147] Kathryn Bond Stockton describes another kind of darkness in *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*. In reading Toni Morrison's *Sula,* Stockton thinks about anal economies and the way that shame is attached to the sexual practice of Black women and Sula in particular. Stockton links the part

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West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989): 912.

144. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (1992): 166.

145. James J. Kolata, *Neutron Stars, Black Holes and Gravitational Waves* (San Rafael, CA: Morgan & Claypool Publishers, 2019), 6-1, http://iopscience.iop.org.

146. Michele Wallace, *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory* (New York: Verso, 1990), 218.

147. Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance- a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), xxiii.

of the town in which *Sula* takes place—the bottom—with anal penetration through the imagery of dirt.[148] Importantly, Stockton's description of Sula's sexuality is rooted in queer identity, which resonates with the way that Stockton thinks about Black women's sexuality writ large to Hammonds's earlier notions about the way that darkness attaches to Black lesbian identity.

Thus, there are clear resonances between darkness and Black female sexuality that are evoked by the tunnel of the Underground Railroad. In addition to Lumbly's statement about the darkness of the tunnel and all that the imagery of the void evokes, we see allusion to cis female sexuality in the description of the railroad station when she first sees it in Georgia. The station is described in the novel in detail:

> The stairs led onto a small platform. The black mouths of the gigantic tunnel opened at either end. It must have been twenty feet tall, walls lined with dark and light colored stones in an alternating pattern. The sheer industry that had made such a project possible. Cora and Caesar noticed the rails. Two steel rails ran the visible length of the tunnel, pinned into the dirt by wooden crossties. The steel ran south and north presumably, springing from some inconceivable sources and shooting toward a miraculous terminus.[149]

It is interesting that the tunnel's openings are described as "black mouths" since this is another instance where the imagery of the railroad is mapped onto the Black body. The "mouths" can easily become placeholders for other parts of cis female anatomy and indicate that the railway cars are penetrative objects that travel inside of the Black body. The "inconceivable sources" and "miraculous terminus" are also in alignment with this reading that associates the Black female body with unknowability and a mysterious kind of seductive pleasure. Within patriarchal racist antebellum logics, the Black female body was associated with all that the white female "angel of

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148. Kathryn Bond Stockton*, Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where Black Meets Queer* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 68.

149. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad,* 80.

the house" denied—lasciviousness and the pleasures of the body. This is described in detail by bell hooks. As she explains,

> Since woman was designated as the originator of sexual sin, black women were naturally seen as the embodiment of female evil and sexual lust. They were labeled jezebels and sexual temptresses and accused of leading white men away from sexual purity into sin.[150]

And so, the Black and inconceivable source of the tunnel figure this opposite of purity and a straightforward narrow path as upheld by Christian morality.

Furthermore, we often see this vacillation in the way that the tunnel is described. At times, it seems to validate an affirming way of thinking about Black women's bodies—as possibility and autonomy. Although it is perverse to link Black female sexuality to darkness, it seems reasonable to think that Whitehead uses this symbolism in the novel not to reinforce it, but to refigure unknowableness into new possibilities. Certainly, the Underground Railroad affords Cora with the ability to escape her circumstances and survive until the end of the novel. But in other moments, the railroad seems to support racist imagery and western expansion—technology and progress that is predicated on forward movement toward a utopia designed for white people. The Underground Railroad is often used as a metaphor for other ideas or forces. Cora thinks about all of the devastation that white people have caused: "Stolen bodies working stolen land. It was an engine that did not stop, its hungry boiler fed with blood."[151] And this metaphor continues later in the book. When Cora is in North Carolina in the attic, she compares the steam engine to the lure of cotton: "The ruthless engine of cotton required its fuel of African bodies…the pistons of this engine moved without relent."[152] At other points, the railroad reminds Cora of a ship,

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150. bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 33.

151. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad,* 139.

152. Ibid., 193.

especially on her journey between South and North Carolina when the reader is informed that the "planks [of the railway car] taught her about ships and squalls."[153] And so, the railroad also represents the slave ship that transported enslaved people through the perilous waters of triangular trade.

Its most potent figuration, however, is the body of Cora herself. In a chapter focalized through Caesar, we learn that he thinks of Cora as not a "rabbit's food to carry with you on the voyage but the locomotive itself."[154] In the last scene of the chapter, Cora escapes from the clutches of Ridgeway by literally becoming the locomotive that runs through the tunnel:

> Cora leaned into the pump of the handcar. It didn't move…At her feet on the wooden platform was a small metal buckle. She snapped it and the pump squeaked. She tried the lever again and the handcar crawled forward…She pumped and pumped and rolled out of the light…She discovered a rhythm, pumping her arms, throwing all of herself into movement…Was she traveling through the tunnel or digging it? Each time she brought her arms down to the lever, she drove a pickax into the rock, swung a sledge onto a railroad spike.[155]

Finding the machinery of the railway car lacking, Cora uses her body to stand-in for its mechanisms and propels herself forward. Literalizing Caesar's premonition, Cora becomes the Underground Railroad. This suggests that the metaphors in this novel are decidedly mixed. At one point, the railroad is a destructive force, like manifest destiny, claiming the land and lives of all those who do not fit into white capitalistic prospects. At other times, though, the railroad is more indeterminate, figuring a sea that is all-encompassing. At others, it is a Black woman's body, which is described both through the varying lenses of racism and empowerment.

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153. Ibid., 176.

154. Ibid., 281.

155. Ibid., 362.

In the last scene of the chapter, Cora's body becomes productive and fertile. It is important that the space of the tunnel is the site of Cora's first consensual sexual encounter—one that is in Cora's imagination. She dreams of having sex with Royal:

> When he spread her legs she was wet and he slid inside her, saying her name as no one had ever said it and as no one ever would, sugary and tender. She awoke each time to the void of the tunnel and when she was done weeping over him she stood and walked.[156]

Her imagination in these scenes seems to go beyond a fleeting fantasy or vision. She is all-consumed by these dreams, to the point where it seems as though she is not fully conscious of the world around her when she slips back into these hallucinations. Ultimately, these visions have productive power. They do not create a child or marriage—Cora does not dream of either—but instead, create Cora herself. She births her own safety, produces at least a temporary freedom, and creates something from her body—in this case, the railway car. By becoming the railroad car, she makes use of what she can—the railroad that is both emblematic of racism and freedom—to get where she needs to go. Here, she produces a new reality for herself and the outcome of Black cis female sexuality, as it is represented by the void of tunnel, becomes clear—it is not the reproduction of heterosexual modes of being, but instead is the production of the self.[157] The ending of *The Underground Railroad* does not let us forget that there are no positive absolutes within the world that white heteronormative hegemony constructs. As mentioned

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156. Ibid., 364.

157. See Laura Dubek, "'Fight for It!': The Twenty-First- Century Underground Railroad," *The Journal of American Culture* 41, no. 1 (2018): 68-80.

There have been many interpretations of what Cora produces at the end of *The Underground Railroad*. Laura Dubek, for example focuses on the way that Cora learns how to read critically during her journey: "This ending suggests that fighting for freedom means rebuilding the library and then learning to read between the lines…The significance of *The Underground Railroad* lies in its faith not just in the power of art to inspire such a journey, but in the courage and capacity of the reader" (79).

above, Cora does not reach freedom at the end of her story. When she emerges from the earth after an indeterminate amount of time spent laboring in the production of the railway, Cora meets with travelers heading to states that would not be historically a part of the American experiment.[158] Her journey to produce her free self does not end in this moment, but rather, it seems as though she will continuously be shuttling from one "state of…possibility"[159] to the next. In other words, her production of self is never fully over, and does not adhere to a linear understanding of pregnancy—she will forever be birthing herself.

Conclusion

Despite the difference in characters and themes, there is a clear overlap in *Beloved*, *Kindred*, and *The Underground Railroad* even though these texts were written decades apart. Their neo-slave narrative genre dictates that each novel will be interested in time and from there it seems natural that each would center on genealogy and reproduction. Although pregnancy is evinced explicitly in each text, what is produced as a result of this pregnancy is different in each. In *Beloved* and *Kindred*, the conclusions of the text emphasize the idea that a literary narrative will be the product of the sexuality. Although it may be tempting to read these creations as future-oriented signals that signify each text's commitment to reproductive futurism, both Sethe and Dana are still deeply embedded in the past by the end of their respective stories. Because Dana's arm is "a part of the wall" and therefore is a part of the past, it is clear that she will never

158. Whitehead, *The Underground Railroad*, 366.

159. Colson Whitehead, "Colson Whitehead's *Underground Railroad* Is a Literal Train to Freedom," interview by Terri Gross, *Fresh Air*, 8 August 2016, https://www.npr.org/2016/08/08/489168232/colson-whiteheads-underground-railroad-is-a-literal-train-to-freedom.

be able to fully forget her time in the nineteenth century because of its visible mark on her body.[160] In *Beloved*, Sethe cannot get past her own history.[161] For Cora, in *The Underground Railroad*, because her body becomes the machinery of forward progress, we may also be tempted to link her narrative with a futurity that is separate from all of the pasts she has experienced. But, her future, too, is indeterminate and the imagery of the railroad does not provide easy answers. In the end, all of these pregnant women are mired in the temporality of waiting. They cannot easily move forward or onto new futures. In the midst of this uncertainty, however, they are creative. They produce ways through, if not forward. And in doing so, they produce new orientations and possibilities.

This stasis that creates unexpected and non-normative productivities also animates the subject of the next chapter—protest. While we may think of pregnancy and protest as having little in common (and may think of enslavement and protest as truly polar opposites), waiting permeates all of these states. What's more, we can trace a rebellious current in this waiting—a sometimes quiet dissent that runs through the combination of pregnancy and enslavement *and* is clearly fundamental to protest. Because this current of dissent is essential to working against the norm and imagining a just future, protest is a through line of this dissertation—certainly we can think of Linda, Sethe, Dana, and Cora protesting the conditions that restrict them. And so, while the next chapter in this dissertation will move forward chronologically to consider the way that the "extra" can attach to protest in a contemporary context, its arguments can be retroactively considered alongside of all of the chapters of this dissertation, including this first one, because of

160. Butler, *Kindred*, 261.

161. Morrison, *Beloved*, 324.

the way that waiting and a broadly defined protest collide to produce the new possibilities that animate this dissertation.

While this dissertation will move conceptually from ideas that are connected to discrete periods in American history—for example, enslavement is thought of in relation to antebellum chattel slavery and protest is often connected to the Civil Rights era—this forward motion belies the enmeshment and unwieldy temporalities that necessarily complicate this easy division. For this reason, as we move to the next chapter and to the next ideas, we will see how the specter of enslavement attaches in complicated ways to contemporary moments—most explicitly, perhaps, in chapter three when we will turn to imprisonment. This enmeshment, this lack of ability to move on, this living with is waiting. While chapter two will focus our attention on how protest and waiting can go together, we must remember to look backwards, too, because protest in the American context is always protest against the ruptured promise of democracy that is represented by the "original sin" of slavery. And so, while we must go on, we are not going forward.

Chapter Two—Living and Dying in Extra Time: Everyday Protest in *Paris is Burning* and *Sula*

Introduction: "Extra" Time as Protest Time

The characters of Sethe, Dana and Cora from the novels discussed in chapter one elucidate the non-normative productivities that emerge from the various degrees of stasis they experience in the context of pregnancy. Through another lens, their experiences of waiting can be interpreted as a form of protest, whereby these women protest directly against the oppressive conditions they are bound by. These notions of waiting, and of protest, are equally significant in more contemporary settings than the antebellum period of the novels discussed previously, and this will be the core focus of the current chapter. This introduction defines a kind of protest through "extra" embodiment in the context of social media—and particularly through analyzing an Instagram post from a popular influencer and trans internet celebrity, Nikita Dragun—which I use later in the chapter in order to read two texts that have protest at their core: *Paris is Burning* and *Sula*.

On March 29, 2019, Dragun posted a short video on Instagram that now has over ten million views.[162] The video features Dragun walking around the New York City subway as though she is on a runway, wearing a latex minidress printed with the Louis Vuitton logo, platform heels, a 30-inch electric blue wig, and a full face of makeup. The caption for this video reads "they call me the queen of being EXTRA and i think i finally know why 😂🤍."[163]

Without more context for this video, we might read it as setting the feminist movement back at least a few decades because it seems expertly constructed to entice the basest form of the

162. As of May 2021.

163. @nikita_dragun, "They call me the queen of being EXTRA." Instagram video, March 29, 2019. Accessed April 1, 2020, instagram.com/p/Bvm6zrBlrBy.

heterosexual male gaze. Dragun's expensive and obviously designer dress is short and low-cut. It is almost a miracle that she can walk in her tan platform heels, which add at least seven inches to her height and make her legs seem impossibly long. Slinking around the subway, Dragun's figure is reminiscent of Kim Kardashian's—her waist looks incredibly small and despite her ample hips, her stomach is perfectly flat. Her makeup is subtle but enhances her symmetrical features. What's more, the male gaze is explicitly incorporated into the video. Although the camera is mostly focused on Dragun walking around the subway station and riding in a subway car, it frequently cuts to focus on the faces of men who are taking in this spectacle.

But actually, these men's faces give us a hint that there is something more subversive going on in this video than we might initially perceive. The men that the camera focuses on are not lasciviously lusting after Dragun. Instead, they are shocked—one man literally does a double-take. It seems like they cannot believe that someone is walking around the subway during the daytime in the clothes she is wearing. Far from trying to get her number, some subway denizens are shooting her dirty looks. Many stop in their tracks to take in her spectacle. Dragun encounters all sorts of commuters presumably bustling off to their vocations. Instead of bustling along with the other subway inhabitants, she languidly walks along the platform, down the stairs, and struts around a subway car. Although she is using public transportation, she is going nowhere and is out of sync with the tempos of those around her who are actively engaging in the capitalism of this place[164] and who have destinations outside of the subway. By choosing to film

164. See José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

this video in the subway, Dragun purposefully juxtaposes her own expression with the commerce of New York City and highlights how she has opted out of the nine-to-five workday and the other tempos of productivity. Given Dragun's relationship to the temporal workings of the subway, I read her performance as an intentional protest of the status quo rather than an embodiment of the restrictive beauty norms that may be associated with her expertly constructed bodily presentation. She is traversing the boundaries of the natural and authentic in order to explode these categories and protest them through her complicated performance of femininity. What's more, Dragun theorizes her own protest through her use of the term "extra" in her caption and through her embodiment of all that this term connotes.

Extra is a term that has recently entered into the vernacular to describe a way of going above and beyond what is conventional and expected. It is at the heart of the kind of critique that Dragun performs. Being extra might involve being dramatic for the sake of attention, but it may also mean presenting oneself in a way that does not conform to white heteropatriarchal standards of propriety, comportment, or beauty. Although the origin of extra used in this way is not well understood, much of contemporary American slang has its roots in Black and queer

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This is complicated, of course, by the fact that Dragun posted an Instagram video documenting this strut. By doing so, she is participating in capitalism since she is growing her brand in a way that will indirectly increase her own income and status within the marketplace of social influencing. Although Dragun is clearly working in this video—she is not just walking around the subway for fun and has most likely hired a videographer, stylist, and beauty experts in order to create this post—there is something different about the kind of capitalism that Dragun engages in by creating this post because of its entrepreneurial nature and the fact that Dragun received no direct compensation for this particular post. It is impossible to act outside of capitalism in the context of the U.S. in the twenty-first century, and we because of this, we see that Dragun's actions still have some connection to economic productivity. José Quiroga, in particular, does a nice job of distilling this complicated critique and simultaneous implication, arguing: "Gays and lesbians are not simply beings who engage in a series of sexual practices. They are at this point cultural constructions of capitalism and at the same time, they may represent modes of defiance that use the tools of capitalism in order to undermine its repressive paradigms" (12).

communities, as will be described in more detail later in this chapter. More recently, extra is a term that is frequently heard in this register on the now mainstream *RuPaul's Drag Race* or in the increasingly popular vernacular of makeup videos found on YouTube that are influenced by drag culture. Because of its roots in the queer community, the extra's connotations are influenced by this culture and defined by it. Being extra is not just about traversing societal boundaries but doing it in a way that performs a critique of these systems.

The term "extra" in this chapter will be used to denote a way of moving through society in a way that exceeds and therefore protests the norm—and specifically, what is thought to be natural and authentic—by challenging white heterosexist modes of being in a way that is pleasurably transgressive. I argue that the those who are extra inhabit this pleasurable transgression in a way that exceeds the frivolous or self-centered purposes that are often attributed to their behavior. Although embodiment of the extra involves transgression in a variety of ways, this chapter in particular will focus on the temporal aspect of being extra—in the way that those that embody the extra take up what is perceived to be "extra" time. Because these individuals move according to time scales that exceed the norm, they take up "too much" time and protest chrononormativity in the every day.

In order to illustrate the way that the extra can be occupied along these non-normative temporal inhabitations, we can notice the queer temporal mechanisms of Dragun's performance. First, by unhurriedly striding around the New York subway, Dragun's pace is fundamentally out-of-sync with the bustling New Yorkers around her. She is out-of-time with the capitalistic pursuits of the city in a way that recalls Roderick Ferguson, Jack Halberstam, and José Quiroga's critique of this unequal and exploitative economic system.[165] At one point, Dragun *does* enter a

165. Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*

subway car, but she has no coat, no purse, and instead of sitting in a seat or holding onto a poll, she continues to strut along and mug for the camera. She effectively treats the subway system as her own personal runway. Dragun's lack of progress, here, places her in alignment with the temporality of waiting—a state of being that is central to the workings of the subway itself since waiting for the next train is built into the mechanisms of the public transportation system.[166] But, instead of waiting in a conventional way—by sitting on a subway bench and anticipating the arrival of a train—Dragun's purpose for being in this location *is* the waiting.

The temporality of Dragun's performance is also made apparent through her bodily appearance, which is fully and skillfully constructed. Her clothes are meticulously selected in order to connote a sense of wealth, but not sophistication—as explained above, she is wearing a dress covered in the iconic Louis Vuitton logo, but the dress's style does not seem to be in alignment with the more subtly branded dresses typically sold by the designer. In a style that has become ubiquitous on social media and especially Instagram,[167] Dragun's body is constructed just as meticulously: her skin is wrinkle-free, her face is fully symmetrical, and her body is exactly in accordance with contemporary beauty standards that value being "slim-thick."[168] The

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(Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 11; Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011), 199; Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire*.

166. Trans time has been theorized at length. See Leah Devun and Zeb Tortorici, "Trans, Time and History," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (2018): 518-539 and Simon D. Fisher, D. Elin, Rasheedah Phillips, and Ido H. Katri, eds., "Trans Temporalities," Special issue, *Somatechnics* 5, no.1 (2017).

167. For an example of influencers on Instagram called "dolls" who document their journeys with plastic surgery online see Chaseedaw Giles, "Plastic Surgery and the Secret World of Instagram Dolls," *New York Times*, Sept. 25, 2019.

168. This impulse—to modify the body in ways that exceed the "natural" is not new. Historically, people have bound their feet, used rings to stretch out their neck, permanently

recent infatuation with plastic surgery not only makes this re-fashioning legible, but also pushes back against the nineties and aughts' obsession with "no makeup" makeup, "invisible" bodily alterations, or purity itself.[169] One central theme of Dragun's YouTube channel and Instagram account is body modification. In part, this is because Dragun has documented the many surgeries she has had in order to construct a body that matches her gender identity through procedures like facial feminization surgery. Dragun has also, almost certainly, undergone surgeries in order to align her body with traditional beauty standards. And so, the line between these sets of modifications becomes blurred.

Eric Plemons has recently theorized about the way that gender manifests itself in the body in places that are not related to the sexual organs. His book, *Facial Feminization Surgery and the Aims of Trans-Medicine*, notices the way that gender inheres throughout the body—in particular, in the face—revising an understanding of gender that locates it purely in performance, the performative, or in the genitals.[170] Plemons's theorization helps us understand that a person's face is their own conceptualization of their body that may or may not be realized through a surgeon's technique. Reading Dragun's wrinkle-free aesthetic through this lens, we can think of *all* of her surgeries and cosmetic procedures as elements of constructing her ideal gender presentation—it turns out that no clear distinction is necessary or fully possible. And so,

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cinched in their waists to create a tiny waist, and have modified their bodies in order to achieve beauty goals that are not in alignment with beauty norms that are biologically possible without human intervention. See Harold Koda, *Extreme Beauty: The Body Transformed* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001).

169. Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 27.

170. Eric Plemons*, The Look of a Woman: Facial Feminization Surgery and the Aims of Trans-Medicine* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2017), 34.

Dragun's perfect—and, importantly, completely *youthful* appearance—can be read as a component of her gender expression. As a part of creating a body that matches with her particular hyper-feminine and hyper-sexualized gender-expression, Dragun has manipulated time's effect on her body. Although Dragun is only twenty-four, because her face and body are evidently marked with the surgeon's scalpel—both because of feminine facilitation surgery and other cosmetic procedures—her age is ambiguous. She reads young but could as easily be thirty-five as in her early twenties. For this reason, Dragun's appearance stretches out time—she waits in a temporally ambiguous bodily presentation that is not in accordance with the normative aging process.

For this reason, both Dragun's physical movement and appearance work together to place her outside of normative temporalities. She waits on the subway platform and she waits in her own perpetually youthful bodily inhabitation. Both of these forms of waiting contribute to Dragun's extra appearance and performance—she is fully exceeding the gendered conventions that govern her inhabitations.

With this very twenty-first century context in mind, this chapter will think about the extra as a form of protest in a willfully anachronistic manner, primarily considering its valences in the 1990 film *Paris is Burning* directed by Jennie Livingston and in Toni Morrison's 1973 novel, *Sula*. I will begin this exploration first by explaining the relationship between waiting, protest, and the extra. Here, I will define the extra as an intentional act that protests temporal norms through the extension of time and interrupts normativity in the visual sphere. Using these definitions as a departure point, I will turn to *Paris is Burning* to discuss a potential genesis of the term "extra," arguing that the queens depicted in the documentary are living in extra time by radically dreaming of futures that will be foreclosed by the realities of the AIDS epidemic.

Finally, I will consider Toni Morrison's *Sula*—a novel that has often been read in a queer context—to show the converse of living in extra time. Sula, and eventually many in the local community, melancholically die in extra time by embracing the queer potentiality of death. This chapter will end with a meditation on the current protest movement of the summer of 2020. Ultimately, I will argue that the time of protest is the time of waiting because protest that can interrupt structures so endemic as racism must occur in the protracted actions of everyday life.

Extra and Protest

Although protest is traditionally conceived of in relation to exterior, unambiguous, and organized struggle, this chapter contends that protest can occur on a quieter[171] and more ambiguous scale. I argue that we can view embodiment of the extra as continuous with historical and iconic protest movements within American culture, although it exists at the level of the individual. Other kinds of more traditional protests—like marches and public demonstrations—may rely on mass congregation, legal sanction, disruption of traffic flow, collective chants, signage, and other elements of conventional protest demonstrations. In a similar way, protest through being extra requires individuals to break norms in order to become legible and rise to the level of others' perception. Although individuals can certainly protest internally in a way that is not obvious to others, this chapter is concerned with a kind of external protest that is perceptible by people other than the protesting individual—the kind of protest that has the capacity to effect social change.

171. For more information about the intersection of the quiet and protest, see Quashie, *The Sovereignty of the Quiet*.

Being extra is a type of protest that is deeply embodied and is fully material in a way that is similar to gender. In literally encountering the material realities of the way that gender is inscribed on the body by observing a facial femininization surgery, Plemons makes an argument about the way that the materiality of the world necessitates an embodied understanding of gender:

> If how we think the body is constituted and how we understand its material properties matter as sites and forms of meaningful difference, and if the body marks a physical limit to the play of gendered signification, then identifying the conditions of that limit is a distinctly anthropological problem, one that begins with patients and their surgeons acting in the world. It demands attending to that world, in all its bloody mess.[172]

In other words, Plemons finds that although we may think of gender as a construct, it cannot be disentangled from the material. Gender is written on the body and so is the extra. For this reason, protest through the extra can be illuminated through the field of visual studies.

In particular, Nicole Fleetwood's ideas in *Troubling Vision* are instructive here insofar as she discusses the way that the Black body is regarded in the public sphere and theorizes the term "excess," which has much in common with the extra. Fleetwood invents the term "excess flesh," arguing that the Black female body has always been thought of as in excess.[173] Excess flesh is an enactment that makes visible the workings of hyper visibility on the Black female body.[174] Fleetwood shows how the Black body is always conceived of in the public square as an excess of "idealized white femininity" and further, illustrates how these conceptions can be thrown in the

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172. Plemons*, The Look of a Woman*, 127.

173. Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Excess Flesh-Black Women Performing Hypervisibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 105.

174. Ibid.

face of the conceivers through agential and expert management of body and perception.[175] In one example, Fleetwood locates the excess in the figure of late 1990s/early 2000s Lil' Kim, who embraces the "power she derives from sexual enactment as commodity form."[176] When considered in light of the definition that we have been using here, Lil' Kim is certainly an extra figure. We can think of her as protesting and simultaneously inhabiting the overt sexuality that is ascribed to her body. However, importantly, Fleetwood does not explain Lil' Kim's performance through the lens of time.

Temporal habitus is something that is determined by our orientations and so breaking with this habitus is a legible form of protest. Since the world is governed by the workings of straight time, people moving in accordance with this temporal mode seem normal and uninteresting to the majority who are also moving according to this rhythm.[177] Those moving against this temporal framework, those who are taking up "extra" time like Dragun, become legible against this straight background. This legibility works in a way that is similar to the more conventional forms of protest because in both cases and marks individuals as protesting the norm. In defining queer time in opposition to chrononormativity, we can see how an expansive reading of queer time—one that is not necessarily tied to non-normative desire—might

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175. Ibid., 111.
176. Ibid., 142.

177. See Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006).

This is elaborated on by Sarah Ahmed in regard to physical orientations. She argues that "what 'comes into' view…is not a matter simply of what we find here or there, or even where we find ourselves when we move here or there. What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations that we have already taken" (31). And so, out worlds are constructed by what is already familiar to us. This concept also is applicable to temporal habitus and my thinking in this section draws on the way that Ahmed understands environments and their construction.

encompass the kind of anti-productivity and anti-capitalist tempos of protest. For example, Kemi Adeyemi describes "the practice of slowness" in the Slo' Mo party in Chicago.[178] Adeyemi describes a group of Black queer people who express themselves through mid-tempo music in the Chicago queer dance scene, fighting for their right to be centered and valued within this space. Adeyemi posits slowness as a queer way of relating to time and shows how these individuals' dance—that is outside of the fast rhythms of most dance parties in the city—allows them to access a kind of pleasurable solidarity with one another. In literally taking up extra time by dancing slowly, Adeyemi and her friends protest the centrality of whiteness and straightness in this co-opted space.

By defining protest in this way—as an intentional act that disrupts temporal norms—whether or not this action occurs collectively or as a part of a broadly recognized movement or demonstration, I build on ideas about resistance proposed by thinkers like Kevin Quashie, Erica Edwards, and Ralina Joseph. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, Quashie focuses on the way that Black body can be quiet, and Edwards dispels counteracts stereotypes of Black charismatic leadership.[179] Joseph posits the idea of strategic ambiguity—a strategy used by people of color and especially Black women in order to combat the "post-racial" era. Joseph defines strategic ambiguity in conjunction with dissemblance and other forms of "everyday resistance"—borrowing Stephanie M. H. Camp's term[180]—that allow minoritized subjects to

178. Kemi Adeyemi, "The Practice of Slowness: Black Queer Women and the Right to the City" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 25, no. 4 (2019): 545.

179. Quashie, *The Sovereignty of the Quiet*, 3; Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*, 4.

180. Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2.

fight systemic oppression "foregrounding cross-over appeal, courting multiple publics, speaking in coded language, and smoothing and soothing fears of difference as simply an incidental sidenote."[181] In conjunction with Quashie, Edwards, and Joseph, this chapter rewrites assumptions about the role of broad-reaching and loud resistance in Black protest, insofar as I consider protest at a smaller scale in which people of color take up space and time in order to counteract everyday racism.

In this chapter, I locate protest in everyday spaces, in small moments, in bodily presentation, and in the quotidian lived experience of people who do not fit into the expectations set by racist and heteropatriarchal societal structures. What is at stake here is a reimagining of protest that makes room for actions that do not immediately look like political rebellion. Through this reimagining, I argue, we can better understand quotidian moments of "rudeness" as resistance, "making a scene" as "taking up space," and "impoliteness" as pushing back against what Fanon would call the "hostile white gaze," and a historical schema that is always already racialized.[182]

Paris is Burning **and Living in Extra Time**

The extra has proliferated across the internet in the twenty-first century, especially on platforms like Instagram and YouTube in a form that is over-the-top and self-knowing, but in a way that does not necessarily protest white heteropatriarchy. While we see that the extra has been used to question white beauty norms and behaviors, it has often been appropriated in order to

181. Ralina L. Joseph, *Postracial Resistance Black Women, Media, and the Uses of Strategic Ambiguity* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 3.

182. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 111 & 91.

cause shock and attain internet vitality. More than ever, then, it is necessary to return to the roots of this phenomenon and to think about its constitutive parts. By examining the way that the extra has lived in African American literature and culture before this current moment is vital to understand the extra's proliferation online in the twenty-first century.

One possible origin of the phrase "extra" is in the language of drag performance. In *Paris is Burning*, one key focus is the house of Xtravaganza, in particular Venus Xtravaganza—a young Latina trans woman who performed in drag and was a part of one of the most important New York City drag houses. Although extra was not used in its contemporary form in the late 1980s world of Harlem drag—or at least this was not captured in *Paris is Burning*—it would not be too far a leap to think that "extra" and "Xtravaganza" may be related. Despite the fact that the word "extra" was not articulated explicitly in the film, there is no clearer representation of the extra than in the performances of the queens who grace the stages the film depicts.

In this section, I will turn to *Paris is Burning* in order to think about a particular valence of the extra—living in extra time. *Paris is Burning* is a particularly apt text on which to center this discussion because the queens it features have a raucous relationship to heteropatriarchy and capitalism which marks them as protestors. In particular, the way that the film captures these queens in moments of becoming and living in extra time marks them as temporarily out-of-sync with the tempos of chrononormativity. I will begin this section by discussing Pepper LaBeija's extra performance and the way that her over-the-top dress counters bell hooks's notorious critique of the film and places her in alignment with the extra as I have described so far in this chapter. From there, I will move a consideration of the extra as a temporal phenomenon within the film. Here, I argue that the queens, who are referred to as "children," are not visions of Lee Edelman's future-oriented Child, but instead exist in accordance with Jack Halberstam's

understanding of queer failure that is rooted in childishness. In the stasis that the film creates, the drag queens can stay in drag—they can stay in the slowed-down extra moments of articulating their dreams just as children imagine their future vocations and lives. These queens are, therefore, the embodiment of the extra as this chapter defines it because they imagine lives in extra time thereby protesting heteropatriarchal normativity by articulating new futures.

One of the film's earliest scenes focuses on Pepper LaBeija, the "legendary mother of the house of LaBeija."[183] She is wearing a fully gold dress that looks homemade but is fully fabulous. She walks slowly into the hall where the queens are performing, languidly gazing at all who are there. After strutting elegantly to the music, LaBeija begins to remove her inner-tube-sized sleeves. She has the attention of everyone in the room—so much so that they are transfixed by her performance, and the camera is too. LaBeija radiates confidence. Her performance indicates that she feels as though she deserves everyone's attention, and she luxuriates in their gaze in a way that is reminiscent of Dragun's walk described earlier in this chapter.

In many ways, LaBeija's drag represents the epitome of being extra. There is no capitalistic reason for her performance—no one[184] is monetarily gaining from her walk and she is not being productive in any traditional sense. Furthermore, her unhurried and transfixing pace slows everyone else down in the room as they take in the spectacle of her performance. In this sense, "drag" takes on a new meaning. Not only does drag become related to the gender-bending performance we are familiar with, but it crosses over into the general meaning of drag, which is

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183. Jennie Livingston, dir. *Paris is Burning*. Off-White Productions, 1990, Netflix.

184. Of course, Livingston, the filmmaker of P*aris is Burning* is gaining financially from LaBeija's performance in this particular instance, but we have to assume that LaBeija's performances are similar when she is not being filmed. What's more, LaBeija herself is not being financially compensated—at least not in a way that would motivate her performance.

defined as "to delay deliberately, hold back deliberately."[185] Although the connection between Black and queer identity and slowness evokes a whole history of scientific racism[186] and Freudianism[187] that connects atavism and these identities, LaBeija's performance resides in new orientations that link the slow to a critique of normativity because of the way that slowness can disrupt the chrononormative pace of capitalism.

Besides LaBeija's physical movement, her outfit and appearance, too, are extra. They represent time spent outside of free market productivity. As I say above, LaBeija's dress and sleeves look homemade, especially because it is not common for commercially produced dresses to have humungous removable puff sleeves. But, even if this dress were not homemade, later in the film, one member of the drag scene describes mopping: the act of going into a store and "look[ing] for whatever," in other words, "stealing."[188] And so, even if the dress is retail, it is likely that LaBeija did not participate in creating profit for a clothing establishment in obtaining this frock. Furthermore, because of the dress's extreme style, LaBeija cannot move quickly. The unattached sleeves require her to walk slowly and elegantly. It has a similar effect on those that partake her in her spectacle. Her dress is not only gold but is made out of a glittering material. She is not only wearing a gold church-lady-esque hat, but also gold feathers. As mentioned above, LaBeija's sleeves are detachable and voluminous—they are only outdone by the by the

185. OED Online, "drag," s.v. March 2020. Oxford University Press. www-oed-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/view/Entry/57407?rskey=HUw3iA&result=2&isAdvanced=false (accessed April 03, 2020).

186. See Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2000).

187. For a discussion Freud's theory of homosexuality that links same-sex desire with a failure to mature, see Heather Love, *Feeling Backward*, 22.

188. Livingston, dir. *Paris is Burning*.

poof of the bottom of her dress. As though she is unable to even take in her own personage with uncovered eyes, LaBeija is wearing sunglasses. All of this adds up to a visual presentation that is designed to make people stop and stare. It is pure costume and a pure expression of going above and beyond—of being extra.

Although *Paris is Burning* has been criticized for its valorization of straight norms, LaBeija's performance complicates these critiques. In particular, bell hooks's now-iconic analysis of the film focuses on the way that Octavia Saint Laurent and Venus Xtravaganza idolize both wealth and whiteness. In particular, hooks argues that

> The whiteness celebrated in *Paris is Burning* is not just any old brand of whiteness but rather that brutal imperial ruling class capitalist patriarchal whiteness that presents itself—its way of life—as the only meaningful life there is.[189]

In hooks's reading, not only does the film depict these queens' fantasies of "ruling class capitalistic patriarchal whiteness,"[190] but she also argues that the film does not "interrogate whiteness."[191] It does not question the way that these characters dream of respectability, fame, and white identity. But, this critique overlooks queens like Pepper LaBeija who do not fit into these hegemonic structures. Her drag does not attempt to approximate white middle-class identification. There is no way that her brilliant gold costume could help her fit in, pass, or be "real" in a normative setting. Instead, it is designed to stand out and question the norms that govern respectability. She disrupts and makes viewers disengage from whatever was preoccupying them beforehand.

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189. bell hooks, "Is Paris Burning?," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 149.

190. Ibid., 149.

191. Ibid., 149.

We see another valence of the extra—and the proliferation that it entails—in the nomenclature of the drag participants. Throughout the film, queens are referred to as "the children." Many of the individuals who are featured in *Paris is Burning* are quite young—for example, Venus is twenty-two, and individuals as young as fifteen and thirteen appear in the film—but the term "children" is not necessarily applied because of age. On one level the term "children" is used because many of the performers are formally members of a drag house, like Saint Laurent, Xtravaganza, and Willi Ninja. They have drag mothers and—in some cases—fathers, who serve as the heads of these houses and proxy parents for the children.[192]

On another level, however, the name "children" is apt because of the aspirational yearnings that proliferate throughout this community. As discussed above, Octavia Saint Laurent and Venus Xtravaganza are hoping to transform—at least on some level—into rich, white, women. Indeed, almost every queen featured in the documentary is aspiring to some goal that eclipses their current situation. For example, Dorian Corey discusses her ability to dress like an executive, which she equates with an ability to *be* an executive: "If I had the opportunity, I could be one, because I could look like one."[193] Willi Ninja, the mother of the house of Ninja, teaches female models how to express their femininity. He talks about his desire to make voguing global and mainstream. He wants to "be a big star…known in every corner of the world."[194] Not all of

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192. See E. Patrick Johnson, "Introduction," in *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies,* ed. E. Patrick Johnson (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016).

This language is not specific to *Paris is Burning*. For example, in *No Tea, No Shade*, a recent anthology of Black queer theory, E. Patrick Johnson refers to his mentee and advisees as "children" (23). His explains this usage, by noting that "'Children' is a black gay vernacular term that refers to other gay folks of any age" (23).

193. Livingston, dir. *Paris is Burning*.

194. Ibid.

these queens would be considered "children" in the parlance of the drag scene—Corey and Ninja are mothers of their respective houses—but they all inhabit the temporality of childhood. They all articulate dreams that exist along a spectrum of achievability. They are hopeful about their future—and are waiting on this future to be fulfilled. In articulating these hopes, they respond to a silent question from Livingston that is akin to "What do you want to be when you grow up?"—a question that is often asked to children who have not "grown up" and achieved their full potential. In this way, then, these drag participants are always on the edge of becoming and anticipating the change—in gender, class, status, race, or vocation—that will come in a future that almost always does not arrive. These are the "legendary children and the upcoming legends" who are hoping for an unstable and tenuous success.[195]

And this, of course, is the tragedy of *Paris is Burning*. The second act of the film features the New York of 1989. Two years have passed since the beginning of the documentary and two very different futures have been fulfilled. Venus Xtravaganza is dead. She has been found "strangled…in a sleazy motel."[196] In stark contrast, Willi Ninja's voguing has gone mainstream and has been appropriated in the dance culture of the late eighties. But, the probability of achieving these futures is not accurately represented by the two outcomes of Xtravaganza and Ninja. As succinctly described by Jesse Green in a 1993 *New York Times* article opining on the occasion of Angie Xtravaganza's funeral: "Of nine featured players [from *Paris is Burning*], five are gone or going. Paris is no longer burning. It has burned."[197] The AIDS pandemic has decimated the cast of the documentary even by 1993—only six years after its filming—which

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195. Ibid.

196. Ibid.

197. Jesse Green, "Paris has Burned," *New York Times,* April 18, 1993.

has meant that the fantastic goals articulated by the children have not been brought to fruition. Even Willi Ninja ultimately does not escape this fate. He dies in 2006 from AIDS-related heart failure at the age of forty-six.[198]

By wishing for new and different futures, the children of *Paris is Burning* are acting like children—in the best way. They are dreaming outside of the boundaries of adult responsibility and the constraints of racism and homophobia. This vision of childhood is fundamentally out-of-sync with Edelman's understanding of "the Child."[199] This child is the promise of a future conceptualized by capitalism and straightness—a future that is constructed linearly from teleological narratives of reproduction, marriage, and productivity. Instead, we see resonances with the way that Jack Halberstam conceptualizes the rambunctiousness of youth by acknowledging the "unsentimental, amoral, and anti-teleological narrative desires of children."[200] Writing in opposition to Edelman, Halberstam aligns childhood with failure because of children's chaotic energy and lack of expertise. Here, failure is equated with positivity insofar as it "allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods."[201] Failure is also a key element of the drag performers featured in *Paris is Burning*. As discussed above, the children are ultimately unable to achieve their goals or achieve success. Applying Halberstam's reading to the children of *Paris is Burning* necessitates thinking about their lives in

198. Lola Ogunnaike, "Willi Ninja, 45, Self-Created Star Who Made Vogueing Into an Art, Dies," *New York Times*, September 6, 2006, nytimes.com/2006/09/06/arts/dance/06ninja.html.

199. Edelman, *No Future*, 21.

200. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 199.

201. Ibid., 3.

a similar way—not as tragic disappointments, but in accordance with rebellious anti-normativity.

The truth is, however, that the drag performers featured here are not actually children. They may be young, but since they are actually in their twenties and older, chrononormativity would say that they should be at the point in their lives when they are ramping up their careers, entering into "serious" relationships, and contributing to capitalistic agendas. From this perspective, the children are Peter Pan fantasies who exist in an extra time that they have created for themselves. This extra time has been carved out from the trappings of productivity. When the children name their dreams, they are dreaming in extra time. Straight time would tell them that they are not on a trajectory to achieve fame, wealth, and stability—and the realities of AIDS foreclose these possibilities. Despite this, however, the children hope for and live in their own vision of extra time. Because these visions are not achieved, the children are always in a state of becoming. This understanding of becoming is in alignment E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen's "unbecoming."[202] McCallum and Tuhkanen posit a tension between life and becoming, which critiques Western thought's focus on monumental history. Instead, unbecoming is a way of being liberated from teleology in opposition to being.[203]

The significance of this unbecoming and this failure, however, is not just tragedy in opposition to heterosexist hegemonic capitalism. The lives of the children can be read through José Muñoz's concept of utopia. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz builds on the work of Ernst Block, a Frankfurt School philosopher, who distinguishes between abstract utopia—"untethered from any historical consciousness"—and concrete utopia—"the hopes of a collective, an emergent group,

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202. E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, "Introduction: Becoming Unbecoming: Untimely Mediations," in *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, ed. E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2011), 2.

203. Ibid.

or even the solitary oddball who is the one who dreams for many...the realm of educated hope."[204] Further theorizing this concrete utopia, Muñoz argues that even conceptualizing utopia—even hoping—is the first step to achieving this utopia. In his words, "Hope is spawned of a critical investment in utopia, which is nothing like naive but, instead, is profoundly resistant to the stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present."[205] Positing a new future, then, is an act of hope and is revolutionary. Applying Muñoz's conception of utopia to the children of *Paris is Burning*, we can understand their dreaming not as a fanciful act rooted only in disappointment. Instead, we can read their failures as the first step to creating "a space outside of heteronormativity" and a conceptualization of "new worlds and realities that are not irrevocably constrained by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and institutionalized state homophobia."[206]

With all of these perspectives in mind, it is clear that the children are extra in a few ways. They inhabit an anachronistic twenty-first century extra identity insofar as they push on the norms that undergird their gender, race, and class by inhabiting personas that are too much and doing the most. This form of being extra critiques the norm and therefore is a protest of conventional forms of behavior that structure respectability. Additionally, their protest jolts onlookers from their everyday schedules and activities and causes them to wait for a moment—entranced by visions so bold that they transcend all expectations. We see this, for example, in the spectacle of Pepper LaBeija, as discussed above. Outside of this quotidian extra performance, the drag children also articulate an extra sense of time. In dreaming about futures that largely will not be achieved, they are longing for and living in borrowed (extra) time. Captured by *Paris is*

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204. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia,* 3.

205. Ibid., 12.

206. Ibid., 35.

Burning in the midst of articulating and conceptualizing these dreams, they are forever kept in stasis, in waiting. They will never become the white, rich, women they envision. Further, although they fail to achieve their dreams, this failure catapults them from the productivity of capitalism and formulaic maturity. Ultimately, their lives represent the utterance of new futures and utopias not in accordance with the trappings of chrononormativity.

Sula and Dying in Extra Time

With this example of the extra in its most overt form taken from *Paris is Burning* in mind, we can return to the more literary roots of this project in order to think about how this way of being is manifested in examples from contemporary African American literature. Although the term "extra" is most alive in a twenty-first century online context—as I have explored above—I argue in this section that this kind of embodiment has been with us for much longer than this current iteration would portend. In this section, I turn to Toni Morrison's *Sula*, a text which has often been read through a queer lens, to explore how identity, waiting, and protest coincide in the context of African American literature to push back on normativity. Juxtaposed against *Paris is Burning*, we can track the theme of death in *Sula*—and holding onto death as a form of extra time—to think about how melancholy works to confront the tempos of capitalism. Through this context, we can see new contours of Sula's rebellious disposition that are in accordance with the kind of protest this chapter describes and, in particular, with the queer time of waiting.

Death in *Sula* occurs through extra time in the full sense of the meaning of the term. As defined above, "extra" is a way of being that is informed by queer experiences. To die in extra time, then, has a two-fold meaning. Literally, it means that death is stretched out in a way that is outside of the norm so that the temporality of waiting is attached to death. More conceptually, to

die in extra time indicates a connection between death and the queer experience, and in particular, implies a queer understanding of death. In order to explore these lineages, this section of the chapter will first retrace the way that *Sula* has been thought of as a queer novel. Building on this framework, I will explore how Sula's body marks her as broadly anti-normative and in opposition the values of the Bottom community. Next, I will note the way that death is an overwhelming theme in the novel and will then discuss Sula's relation to it in order to connect Sula's anti-normativity to the way that she understands and then experiences death. Turning to the temporality of death in the novel, I will sketch the way that death is stretched out and delayed and then will connect this relationship to time with the queer temporality of the extra. Finally, I will discuss the outcome of all of this waiting and protest through the extra by turning to one of the final scenes of the novel when those in The Bottom demonstrate against a transportation project in their community that tried, but ultimately failed, to provide meaningful vocation for community members. Ultimately, I will show how the extra—as embodied through the temporality of waiting and delay—is materialized in *Sula* in order to protest the racist capitalist workings of the local government and the normative more generally.

Since *Sula* centers the relationship between Nel and Sula—two girls who become women through the course the novel—it has long been read as a queer narrative in a way that is broadly in alignment with the origins of the extra as described earlier in this chapter. Writing soon after *Sula*'s publication, critics like Barbara Smith, Loraine Bethel, and Adrienne Rich read Sula and Nel's relationship within the context of a lesbian relationship or identity.[207] As Smith explains,

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207. Barbara Smith, "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism," *The Radical Teacher* no. 7 (1978); Lorraine Bethel, "Conversations with Ourselves: Black Female Relationships in Toni Cade Bambara's *Gorilla, My Love* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*," unpublished paper, 1976. (Cited by Barbara Smith); and Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5 no. 4 (1980).

> I discovered in rereading Sula that it works as a lesbian novel not only because of the friendship between Sula and Nel, but because of Morrison's consistently critical stance toward the heterosexual institutions of male-female relationships, marriage and the family. Consciously or not, Morrison's work poses both lesbian and feminist questions about Black women's autonomy and their impact upon each other's lives.[208]

Writing within a movement to uncover homosexual identity and sexuality in novels previously presumed to only feature heterosexuality, Smith identifies Sula and Nel's closeness—a closeness not found in their relationships with men—and reads this relationship as fundamentally queer. She also notes that the ideological underpinnings of the text coincide with queer perspectives about the norms of heterosexuality. More recently, Roderick Ferguson and Kathryn Bond Stockton perform analyses of queer identity in *Sula* that read the text through the lens of Queer Theory, but do not focus on assigning lesbian desire to Nel and Sula's relationship. Ferguson posits Sula as a non-normative figure in alignment with the way that lesbianism was conceived of during 1970s postindustrialization.[209] In a similar way, Stockton argues that *Sula* "values debasement" and links this debasement with queer identity and anality.[210]

Because of the way she navigates her relationships with the married men of the Bottom—she is known to have sex with them "just once"[211]—Sula's presence also fits into a broadly-defined queer paradigm if this is defined in accordance with non-normativity writ large. This analysis dovetails with Stockton's remarkable reading of *Sula*. Here, Stockton argues,

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208. Smith, "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism," 165.

209. Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 130.

210 . Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 72.

211. Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 115.

"something on the order of anal penetrations…is the way of working out wounds in *Sula.*"[212] More specifically, Stockton posits that the book's depiction of Sula as an anal penetrator of men is somehow linked to an embrace of a kind of economic debasement that upsets and overturns the ruling class's notions of profitability and production. "Debasing" Freud, Stockton shows how Sula has adopted "different values that sit beside money."[213]

Thinking with Stockton, I come to similar conclusions. By valuing the bottom and rejecting the heterosexist modes of relation that are embedded in the trappings of respectability, Sula is able to protest productivity and the capitalistic impulses of white teleological narratives. When she has sex with Nel's husband, Jude, she has difficulty understanding why Nel has taken offense because she has "no intimate knowledge of marriage."[214] To her surprise, Sula discovers that she and Nel are not "one and the same thing" and thus, that Nel cannot easily assimilate the knowledge of the affair.[215] In having sex with the men of the community indiscriminately and by pursuing her own interests outside the scope of marriage and child-rearing, Sula certainly inhabits the extra in a way that has much in common with more contemporary examples from twenty-first century internet culture. She is too much for the townspeople in the Bottom—she exceeds and therefore protests their preconceived notions of what it means to be a woman through her everyday expression of her values.

Another way that Sula fits into this framework is through the way she presents herself through clothing. When Sula returns to the Bottom after a ten-year absence traveling the country

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212. Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*, 69.

213. Ibid., 72.

214. Morrison, *Sula*, 119.

215. Ibid.

and pursuing her education, she is dressed in a way that does not conform to the townspeople's expectations:

> Sula stepped off the Cincinnati Flyer into the robin shit and began the long climb up into the Bottom. She was dressed in a manner that was as close to a movie star as anyone would ever see. A black crepe dress splashed with pink and yellow zinnias, foxtails, a black felt hat with the veil of net lowered over one eye. In her right hand was a black purse with a beaded clasp and in her left a red leather traveling case, so small, so charming—no one had seen anything like it ever before, including the mayor's wife and the music teacher, both of whom had been to Rome.[216]

Sula is wearing clothes that designate wealth, status, and a keen attention to fashion. She is dressed in such an elaborate way that she cannot help but garner the attention of those around her. To a certain extent, Sula's reentrance is akin to Pepper LaBeija's strut in *Paris is Burning* or Nikita Dragun's languid walk around the subway. She is described as "close to a movie star" and this scene is cinematic in a way that is similar to LaBeija and Dragun's performances—all three characters make a scene and take up others' time because their appearance exceeds the norm. In a similar way, Sula's appearance is political because it lets the reader know that Sula and the community of the Bottom are at odds. Her look is symbolic of her subtle protest of community norms of behavior. As described by Sydney Fonteyn Lewis in her essay that discusses Sula's femme aesthetic and identity, Sula's choice to wear this clothing is particularly telling:

> Precisely because of the historical difficulty for women of color to mark their own bodies and their already-lack of proper femininity…femmes of color utilize a disruptive hyperfemininity in order to insert themselves into a feminine identity that has been denied to them. Through claiming and naming their own femininity, femmes of color defy patriarchal structures that define femininity as a lack of power and racist structures which define women of color as lacking acceptable femininity (without gaining any power in exchange for their lack). For femmes of color, fashion provides a critical strategy for marking their own complex terrain of identities.[217]

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216. Morrison, *Sula*, 90.

217. Sydney Fonteyn Lewis, "'Everything I know about being femme I learned from *Sula*' or Toward a Black Femme-inist Criticism," *Trans-Scripts* 2 (2012): 111.

As Lewis explains, Sula's embrace of this extremely femme aesthetic in this moment is indicative of her antagonistic relationship with quiet respectability and norms for Black women's self-presentation. And so, her self-presentation is out-of-sync with the community's values and instead disrupts racist traditional heterosexist beauty norms that attach femme appearance to whiteness.

Sula and the community are also out-of-step because of their differing relationship to death. Whereas the community members of the Bottom are frequently preoccupied with attempting to relegate death to a time schedule that is in accordance with their sense of what is normal, Sula does not attempt to regulate death in the same way and often experiences death through the temporal structure of delay and the extra. This is particularly important because death is a reoccurring symbol in *Sula*—to the point that community traditions and practices that would otherwise be oriented around celebration and life are instead inflected by the temporality of death and dying. By the end of the novel, almost as if they are inspired by Sula's relationship to death and protest, the townspeople engage in a celebration of National Suicide Day that ultimately is deathly. In so doing, they reject a normative relationship to death and weaponize the temporality of waiting in order to destroy a local construction site that has promised and then denied jobs to Black workers. Throughout the course of the novel, we see Sula's extra way of embracing death first as anathema to the community's values, but eventually, this way of being is embraced in order to protest the inequitable distribution of meaningful employment in Meridian.

Death is an important theme even from the inception of *Sula*'s introduction to the residents of the Bottom. Here, the reader is acquainted with Shadrack and his National Suicide Day.[218] National Suicide Day is a way to relegate death to one day a year. Shadrack invents this

218. Morrison, *Sula*, 6.

holiday so that "if one day a year were devoted to [death], everybody could get it out the way and the rest of the year would be safe and free."[219] Shadrack celebrates the day by "walk[ing] through the bottom down Carpenter's Road with a cowbell and a hangman's rope calling the people together. Telling them that this was their only chance to kill themselves or each other."[220] In any other town, a celebration that includes walking down the town roads with a musical instrument would be called a parade. Here, however, Shadrack has remade this tradition into an observation of death—a funeral march—the very opposite of a parade. But Shadrack's attempt to relegate death to one day is ultimately not successful. Instead, death consistently punctuates the narrative and follows no predetermined schedule. This is reminiscent of the way that Shadrack's hands expand and spread beyond what physics tells us is possible when they "grow in higgledy-piggledy fashion like Jack's beanstalk all over the tray and the bed" at the beginning of the novel.[221] Just like Shadrack's hands, death thrives and proliferates in *Sula*—it expands defying all reason and therefore troubles normative time schedules.

This is true, most literally, because of the many deaths that occur throughout the novel. Morrison's novels are often bleak and filled with the harsh realities of life told unsentimentally, but *Sula* seems to be suffused with this imagery in a way that is almost all-consuming. Plum—Sula's uncle—and Tar Baby—one of Sula's grandmother's borders—are addicted to vices in such a strong way that they live in states of death until their eventual demise. Chicken Little, an innocent boy from the Bottom community, dies unceremoniously at Sula's hand. Hannah, Sula's mother, dies because of a fire that almost leads to Sula's grandmother's Eva's death. And Eva,

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219. Ibid., 14.

220. Ibid., 14.

221. Ibid., 23.

too, eventually dies, as does Sula herself. At the end of the novel, ironically on National Suicide Day, dozens of people die in a protest of an abandoned roadways project, including the Deweys who are Eva's adopted children. Ultimately, at its most literal level, it can be said that death underscores so much of the plot of *Sula.*

The overwhelming presence of these deaths in the novel contribute to a reading of the text that illustrates thinking from Afro-Pessimism insofar as these theories find that Blackness is constructed by the social order and posit slavery as social death.[222] Here, Patricia Sharon Holland's *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and Black Subjectivity* is instructive. Although Holland does not explicitly link her study to Afro-Pessimism (Fred Moten's field-defining *In the Break* was published three years after *Raising the Dead*), the idea that Black life is intrinsically tied to death is central to both of these strains of thought. Through reading *Beloved*, Holland argues that Black bodies become a passageway between the dead and the living.[223] With Holland's insights in mind, within the broader context of Afro-Pessimism, we can see how *Sula* fits into these analyses. Death is unsympathetic and unrelenting in the novel. This proliferation of death and experience of social death is outside of whiteness—it is the antithesis of a normative experience of life in which one is able to either live until old age or to avoid social death by thriving. In accordance with an Afro-Pessimist perspective, *Sula* features a proliferation of death

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

Those that make arguments in alignment with Afro-Pessimism most notably include Fred Moten who argues that the substantiation of black agency occurred before the construction of a social order. As such, according to his analysis, blackness is a priori to white ordering systems that would seek to constrain it to social death.

223. Sharon Patricia Holland, *Raising the Dead*, 66.

that is outside of white normativity. This presents death as not being regulated according to chrononormativity, but instead occurring in abundance in this text.

One way that death is expressed in the novel is through Sula's attitudes and experience of it. One theme that underpins these attitudes and experience is Sula's lack of cohesion with the Bottom community because of her way of understanding and undergoing death. In this way, through death, Sula is depicted as being out-of-step with prevailing attitudes just as her clothing and sexual mores are also outside of community norms. This is particularly clear in the way that the community describes her experience of aging, or, in this case, lack of aging. Expressing the perspective of the Bottom, the narrator comments:

> Sula did not look her age. She was near thirty and, unlike them, had lost no teeth, suffered no bruises, developed no ring of fat at the waist or pocket at the back of her neck. It was rumored that she had had no childhood diseases, was never known to have chicken pox, croup or even a runny nose. She had played rough as a child—where were the scars? Except for a funny-shaped finger and that evil birthmark, she was free of any normal signs of vulnerability. Some of the men, who as boys had dated her, remembered that on picnics neither gnats nor mosquitoes would settle on her. Patsy, Hannah's one-time friend, agreed and said not only that, but she had witnessed the fact that when Sula drank beer she never belched.[224]

As she is described here, Sula has not aged in a way that is typical for people in the Bottom. Sula's age-defying appearance is reminiscent of Dragun as discussed earlier in the chapter. Although it does not like seem like Sula is using makeup or surgery in order to halt the aging process, her body is largely unmarked by time. Despite the fact that the community attributes a kind of super-natural origin to Sula's lack of blemish or flaw, nothing described truly would require Sula to exceed what is possible through biology. It *is* possible to be thirty without losing teeth or gaining weight. Because there are clearly other explanations for Sula's appearance, it is interesting that the community reads these bodily signs as indicative of Sula's ability to defy

224. Morrison, *Sula*, 115.

death because this suggests the severity of the rift between Sula and the rest of The Bottom. Not only does Sula dress in a way that defies their values—which is a mutable aspect of her appearance—but her very body is marked as other. This marking is particularly relevant to the broader theme of death in this novel because Sula's lack of aging—or, at least, what is described in this way by community members—signals that her body is not following a normative life-schedule prescribed by chrononormativity that includes moving from youth into middle age. Because she has no wrinkles or blemishes that the townspeople associate with her bodily life-stage, she is viewed as not aging—as not advancing towards death in the way that is described as normal for most. In a way, in this depiction, Sula is dying in extra time. In the extension of the process bodily deterioration, Sula moves according to a time schedule that is outside the norm and is—at a literal level—extra.

This extension of dying, however, is not just something that effects Sula as a character. Instead, dying in extra time has an effect on the plot that inhibits easy narrative closure. To elaborate, in some ways, *Sula* can be read as a bildungsroman because so much of the novel focuses on Sula's childhood and it shows how her values are developed due to the community's influence. Near the end of the novel, Sula dies. In this way, the text's overall structure conforms to a teleologically-based plot that moves cleanly from one life stage to the next and allows for a tidy narrative closure. But, there are significant complicating factors that point to the queer temporal workings of the text. Considering suicide as a plot device, Dana Seiter thinks about how death can serve non-normativity. In particular, Seiter argues that in these contexts:

> Death is not a sense-making mechanism that works to organize and bundle a narrative's pleasures but an aesthetic model of political possibility that functions as an intervention into existing understandings of the plots that square off the patterns for living.[225]

225. Dana Seitler, "Suicidal Tendencies: Notes toward a Queer Narratology," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 24, no. 4 (2019): 602.

Suicide, then, interrupts this clean narrative closure. And this is true, as well, in the novel even though Sula does not lose her life to suicide. Sula's death provides no answer and disturbs and provokes those around her rather than allowing them to move on from her life in a clean way. Instead, Sula's death incites a melancholy that does not cohere with what is considered a normal experience of grief.

Nel, in particular, only processes Sula's death more than a decade after it occurs. Nel cries about Sula's death at the very end of the novel. At this point, Nel finally comes to terms with the intense sadness of her friend's death in a way that is not temporally moored or neat by crying. As described by the narrator: "It was a fine cry—loud and long—but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow."[226] This portrayal, in fact, nicely encapsulates the narrative effect of Sula's death. Instead of "organiz[ing] and bundl[ing]"[227] the narrative, Sula's death explodes and complicates it. This is in part because the actual event of Sula's death does not close the novel as we might expect in a more traditional story—it occurs about thirty pages and ten years before *Sula*'s end. And so, instead of exacting retribution or providing a resolution, Sula's death is meaningless—it does not make sense why she has died so far before old age. Furthermore, it brings chaos to the community of the Bottom.

Nel's delayed mourning also clues the reader into the temporality of her grief, which is more akin to a deep melancholy than mourning itself.[228] Unlike mourning, which occupies a

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226. Morrison, *Sula*, 174.

227. Seitler, "Suicidal Tendencies," 602.

228. Freud originally theorized melancholy as a pathological condition in which the grieving person cannot let go of the grieved object. Instead, the grieving person incorporates the grieved object into their own ego. In doing so, the melancholic person turns away from the

definite temporal period, the time of melancholy is ongoing—it is grief that operates according to a drawn out and extra temporality. The mourner is expected and able to move on from mourning. Melancholy, dissimilarly, is not a process, but instead is a condition that the melancholic individual endures for an extended period of time that may have no end.[229] Despite this, many scholars have recently theorized melancholy as a way to productively hold onto the past.[230] Critiquing Freud's account of melancholy and mourning, Dagmawi Woubshet criticizes the dichotomy created by these terms, arguing that the condition of Black life does not allow for stark differentiation between the two. He claims that because death is ever-present, Black people constantly live with loss in a way that is reminiscent of the temporality of melancholy.[231] Because of the circumstances of racism, the grieving person can never fully exit the state of grief

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outside world and instead focuses on their own psyche and their grief.

229. See Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Volume XIV, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 244.

Elaborating on this condition, Freud explains that the melancholic person generally experiences "profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment." For a more extended discussion of melancholia, see chapter four of this dissertation.

230. These include David Eng, Heather Love, Dana Luciano, and Dagmawi Woubshet. Writing about the September 11 terrorist attack, for example, David Eng posits that the attack's aftermath produced a condition in which silence was overtaken by noise that incompetently communicated the losses that occurred on that day. He thinks of melancholy as a way to productively maintain the silence of the past. As he explains it, "The avowal of this silent past generates new sites for history and for tragedy." See David L. Eng, "The Value of Silence," *Theatre Journal* 54, no. 1 (2002): 88.

231. Dagmawi Woubshet, *The Calendar of Loss: Race, Sexuality, and Mourning in the Early Era of Aids* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 5.

because the grief is ongoing. When Nel experiences "circles and circles of sorrow,"[232] she is encompassed by grief that does not occupy a teleological temporality, but instead is fully mired in grief—a grief that she has not been able to fully shake for ten years. In this way, then, the narrative does not follow Nel's clear progression from one stage of grief to the next, but instead implies that she will continue to grieve in circles of melancholy even after the novel ends.

This is indicative of the confluence between dying and waiting in the text. Sula is frequently depicted as watching deaths transpire. This reoccurring theme first occurs when Nel and Sula are involved in Chicken Little's death. Sula "pick[s] up" the boy "by his hands and swung him outward then around and around."[233] Eventually, Chicken Little slips and "sail[s] out over the water."[234] Instead of taking any action, they "star[e] at the water."[235] Later, Eva accuses Nel of "watching" the death occur and not taking any action.[236] Later still, when Hannah burns to death, Sula is also transfixed by what she sees. She thinks to herself, "I didn't mean anything. I never meant anything. I stood there watching her burn and was thrilled.'"[237] At the end of the novel, Sula's experience of her own death is also told in a deadpan way that is free from emotion in the same way that has been described in these previous scenes. Sula notices the way parts of her physical body are shutting down:

Then she realized, or rather she sensed, that there was not going to be any pain. She was

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232. Morrison, *Sula*, 174.

233. Morrison, *Sula*, 60.

234. Ibid., 60.

235. Ibid., 60.

236. Ibid., 170.

237. Ibid., 147.

not breathing because she didn't have to. Her body did not need oxygen. She was dead.[238] During this time, Sula is described as experiencing her demise with a sense of "weary anticipation."[239] In other words, she is just waiting to die without taking any action that would prevent her from passing on. At Sula's funeral, the Black people who come to pay their respects do so only after the white mourners have left the cemetery. They are "not coming in, not dressed for mourning, but there waiting."[240] In this way, their actions mimic Sula's own reaction to her organ failure, so when death occurs in the Bottom community, Sula chooses to watch and wait. She is passive in the face of death and does not try to alter its course and this mentality is even echoed in the way that the community members attending her funeral react.

In this way, Sula's death and relationship to it transpires through the framework of waiting and delay. It can be presumed by the reader that some of Sula's life in the city engaged in work that did not take a physical toll on her body is responsible for at least some of her ability to present as younger than thirty. Despite this, the people in the Bottom presume that Sula has found an otherworldly way to stop time and they have used this presumption to create a case that Sula is different and therefore evil. Sula is out of time with them and their life schedules. Because this combines with the way that she expresses her sexuality, Sula is defined as other and out-of-step with the Bottom.

This out-of-step positionality is eventually mimicked in the actions of the community members in one of the final scenes in the novel that is defined by both death and the extended temporality of the extra as embodied by Sula. In 1941, soon after Sula's death, Shadrack leads a

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238. Ibid., 149.

239. Ibid., 149.

240. Ibid., 173.

protest that begins with the usual National Suicide Day parade. In this scene, the reader learns the meaning of Shadrack's earlier intonation "'always,'" which he says to Sula soon after Chicken Little is killed.[241] Shadrack chose to say this to Sula so that she "so she would not have to be afraid of the change" and specifically the change of dying.[242] Here, "always" is akin to a kind of waiting—a stasis that is defined the change that death would bring in Shadrack's estimation. But, the text itself belies this interpretation of death. Although Shadrack is concerned that death means change, because of the way that death is experienced in the text, its effects are instead ongoing and constantly embedded in the community's imagination. In other words, death functions through the temporal modes of delay and stasis rather than the change that Shadrack imagines.

On the last National Suicide Day depicted in the novel, on January 3, 1941, Shadrack leads the town to the public works tunnel project that has promised but failed to deliver jobs to the Bottom community. The townspeople wreck the tunnel and damage its structural integrity. Because of this, dozens of community members meet their end. Shadrack, ironically, is spared. Instead of taking any action, he just "st[ands] there"…high up on the bank ringing…his bell."[243] And so, when death occurs in the Bottom community, we see that the onlookers just watch and wait in a way that is similar to Sula's own experience of death.

Waiting, however, is implicated in other ways in this act. First, the protestors are demonstrating against the city's complacency and stasis in hiring Black community members for this public works project. The men in the Bottom have been hoping that the city will provide

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241. Ibid., 202.

242. Ibid., 202.

243. Ibid., 161.

meaningful vocation for them, but this promise has not been brought to fruition. And so, When the worst happens as a result of their parade, the time of waiting is invoked a second time since waiting and death are linked together in this text. By protesting, the members of the Bottom community who destroy this work site are perhaps permanently delaying progress towards its completion. They are extending the timeline for the project's fruition and weaponizing waiting in order to disrupt the normative course of the project.

This weaponization of waiting is complicated by perspectives from queer theory that link death and anti-normativity. Scholars who follow Leo Bersani's anti-social thesis and Lee Edelman's anti-futurity also pay attention to the way that death is present in and figured by the lives of minoritized subjects. Writing during the apex of the AIDS pandemic, Bersani lauds the "socially dysfunctional" aspect of gay sex—which he links with a "self-shattering and solipsistic jouissance"—because it is inherently nonviolent.[244] Writing after Bersani, Edelman's focus is anti-futurism, which definitionally is linked to death. Edelman finds that "queer" as an analytical category is an embodiment of jouissance and the death drive that rejects the Symbolic order.[245] Read through this lens, we can understand the deaths of the community members at the end of *Sula* as a rejection of futurism—and particularly the future that never arrives as represented by the promised vocation that the tunnel represents. Although it would be wrong-headed to ascribe this intent to their actions, thinking about the symbolic weight of their final destruction, *Sula* uses death at the end of the novel not only to figure the pain of a community that has been overlooked, but also to protest the current order.

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244. Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" in *Is the Rectum a Grave*, 30.

245. Edelman, *No Future*, 27.

By paying attention to death in *Sula* and the way that this death is temporally out-of-step with whiteness, we can notice how the text is alive to contemporary ways of exceeding the norm that include but then extend beyond Sula's extra self-presentation and experience of death. In the novel, death does not adhere to normative schedules. Instead, it proliferates in a way that Afro-Pessimism would tell us. This proliferation, while having dire consequences in the world of the novel, necessarily catapults the characters into an anti-normative experience of time where death abounds and melancholy flourishes. In other words, death exists in extra time. Queer readings of death tell us that an embrace of death is fundamentally queer because it is outside the futurist and heteronormative focus of white heterosexist culture. Thus, we can see that by the end of *Sula*, the townspeople die in a way that is a protest. Their deaths represent a protest of modes of behavior that marginalize their community and in so doing, *Sula* depicts the queer potential of death. By embracing death by parading in a march celebrating it, the townspeople come to terms with the extra death that is all around them.

Conclusion

Writing this chapter in the midst of the 2020 Civil Rights uprisings in Madison, Wisconsin, in some ways it feels both more and less prescient than ever. On Saturday May 30 and in the weeks following, in conjunction with cities throughout the country, hundreds (or even thousands according to some news reports) took to the capitol and downtown area of Madison in order to mourn and demonstrate against the recent police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and in remembrance of Madison's own Tony Robinson, who was murdered by a white police officer in 2015. In light of these protests, this chapter is inflected by and respondent to the way that protest has cemented itself into the everyday rhythms of our lives. But at the same time, the

embrace of the fabulous and the extra seems quotidian and small in the face of such loud and news-worthy events.

Importantly, however, these recent demonstrations are contiguous with the kind of protest this chapter describes because waiting is a key through-line in each scenario. Waiting, in these contexts, is both a condition of the always already racist heteropatriarchy and a tactic that protestors have been using in order to push back against these conditions. Waiting is a condition of the always already racist heteropatriarchy because it forces Black people and all those who fall outside of its definitions to wait for democracy to fulfil its promise. Just as Nikita Dragun used protest to disrupt the New York Subway, so do these protestors in Madison—and throughout the country—as they drive and walk in moments of delay that force others to take note of their presence in a way that weaponizes the very temporal condition of their subjugation.

This kind of protest that weaponizes waiting is perhaps most visible in the actions in Madison that occurred on Tuesday and Wednesday, June 2-3, when protestors took to the Beltline in order to disrupt traffic in the afternoon and during rush hour.[246] Activists from Freedom, Inc.; Urban Triage; and the Party for Socialism and Liberation in Madison used delay and detainment in order to upset the normal progression of transport over the course of the afternoon. We saw this at a smaller scale in the protests that occurred in the days before—demonstrators stood before police and refused to move (until police started to use forceful tactics including spraying pepper spray and tear gas). In taking up the time of passersby on Madison's highways and in compelling officers to stand in stasis, protestors were literally forcing others to wait—they forced them to stay still in extra time outside of normative modes of productivity.

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246. Brandon Arbuckle, "Fourth Day of Protest in Madison Shuts Down Beltline," *Channel 3000*, June 2, 2020, channel3000.com/westbound-lanes-on-beltline-at-john-nolen-drive-closed-due-to-report-of-protesters.

As much as waiting is a part of the act of protesting itself, waiting itself is intrinsic to the aims of the Black Lives Matter movement. Given the reality of militarized police programs, the carceral state, and the broken health care system for Black people in the United States, activists are not only fighting for the end of police violence against Black communities, but for the promise of American democracy to be fulfilled systematically so that Black people no longer have lower life expectancies than their white peers and in general have access to equitable life outcomes. In some ways, then, Black people are demanding that they have the opportunity to live in what has been constructed as "extra" time.

This is a fight that has been waged since and even before the inception of American democracy. The last chapter of this dissertation will discuss the police murder of Philando Castile and the protests that followed. Although some commentators are talking about these recent protests as a flashpoint—a set of revolutionary acts that will transform the country's relation to racism—a longer view of the history of the United States shows that the temporality of the Black Lives Matter protests and, more broadly, the ideals that undergird this movement are continuous with Black protest as it has existed for centuries. In truth, the time of protest is the time of waiting—it is not a one-time flash-in-the-pan demonstration but instead is in the long and drawn out work of everyday life of those who are minoritized by white and straight supremacy.

To be extra—as Nikita Dragun, the queens from *Paris is Burning*, and Sula are—is to be invested in these everyday acts of protest. To live in or to die in extra time is to push on the boundaries of restrictive ways of being that constrain Black and queer lives. Although these acts do not necessarily rise to the level of news coverage, they are in alignment with the work of the civil rights struggle that is at the fore of American consciousness in 2020. To make even a small systemic advance towards justice, these recent protests will need to utilize the time of delay in

order to force white Americans to stay in the distressing recognition that racism has constructed so many aspects of life in this country. And so, the texts considered in this chapter have taught us that we cannot move on, that wallowing may be the only viable solution, and that the extra can forge perspectives that protest racist normativity.

Chapter Three—Carceral Delay: Epistolary Time in *Upstate* Concurrent Sentences in *Sing Unburied Sing*

In "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King Jr. argues that African Americans can no longer wait for equality. Positing that racism will not recede solely through interventions made in the courts, King famously concludes that African Americans cannot wait for the judicial system to fundamentally change cultural attitudes about race and the lived experience of people of color in the United States. His words resound just as much now, more than half a century after King first penned them:

> For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights…When you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society…when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.[247]

King's emphasis on the temporal aspect of African American life is, of course, central to the ideas of this dissertation that have thus far been explored in relation to Sethe, Cora and Dana in the neo-slavery novels, and then through the queens of *Paris is Burning* and Sula in Toni Morrison's eponymous novel. In this case, this is true first because King centers waiting as a fundamental element of the experience of African Americans. The "340 years"[248] that Black people have spent hoping that American democracy will fulfill its promise are characterized as

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247. Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," African Studies Center: University of Pennsylvania, April 16, 1963, http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.

248. Ibid.

an untenable solution to the ongoing ills of the political structure and the broader culture. Secondly, the way King discusses waiting is particularly relevant to this chapter because it exposes a deep conflict between the way that waiting is characterized and the way that it is experienced in prison. Namely, King exhorts his audience to take action—to refuse to wait—while he himself is waiting. While King's rhetoric and cause is convincing, his exhortations are underscored by their paradoxical relationship to his current state. He was imprisoned in Birmingham Jail while drafting this letter because of his involvement with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) coordinating marches and sit-ins in Birmingham, Alabama. Although King characterizes waiting as the antithesis of action and progress against racial inequality, he is imprisoned and therefore engaging (although unwillingly) in the very state that he disparages. This chapter argues that imprisonment is a fundamental way that African Americans are forced into states of waiting—both in the 1960s and today, when the prison industrial complex has reached a new and much discussed apex. While King exhorts his readers, urging them not to wait, he is paradoxically forced to submit to one of the most typical and common kinds of waiting that African Americans experience in contemporary era.

King's letter itself is an example of the kind of important intervention that can be produced not in spite of waiting, but as a consequence of it. From its title to its content, King's own imprisonment is foregrounded in his letter and is used to perpetuate and legitimize his objectives. His argument, that the legal system itself cannot produce racial equality, is underscored by his own imprisonment—a living symbol of his extra-legal action. In penning this letter, which responded to clergymen who had written "A Call for Unity" that urged Civil Rights agitators to work within the legal system, King performs his own critique. His argument is articulated from the vantage point of imprisonment, which is the product of the very resistance

methods that King outlines within the letter. Writing within the Birmingham Jail, his commitment to extra-legal action and working outside of the law is undeniable and highly visible. King cannily deploys this element of his rhetorical position throughout his letter—in its title, in its genre (the prison letter), and in his description of his imprisoned circumstances throughout the body of the text. As a result, we might go so far as to say that the waiting of imprisonment enables King's ability to make progress towards the realization of his political goals since it lends his arguments undeniable credence and legitimacy.[249]

Introduction: Mapping the Time of Prison

The work of this chapter is to think about how the time of prison may work to generate these kinds of rebellions from the norm. Pushing back on the way that the time of prison has been rhetorically aligned with the time of the past, it asks how elements of the time of prison itself may undermine the rehabilitative or disciplinary forces of the carceral system. I show that the disciplinary time of prison—the kind of time that regulates bodies to set schedules and productive purposes—operates alongside queerer modes of time that are also engendered by prison. The queer time of prison maps out new modes of being and different relationships to power that allow imprisoned people to exert agency and undermine the function of the carceral

249. King's waiting goes even further than his imprisonment, which perhaps some would categorize as a brief moment of waiting in a life otherwise defined by its opposite. The actions that King takes in order achieve his goal of racial equality—the actions that he defines as the way to vanquish waiting—are themselves defined by waiting. In his letter, he mentions "direct actions" that the SCLC has sponsored: "sit ins, marches and so forth." Among other kinds of behavior that King describes, these forms of protest are cited as key elements of retaliation against systemic inequality. Interestingly, however, this kind of "direct action" is, in actuality, the very opposite of active behavior. Protestors engaged in sit-ins, lunch counter protests, and marches often weaponized waiting in order to effect change (as was discussed in the introduction and chapter two of this dissertation). Paradoxically, their lack of action constituted their protest—protest that is conventionally discussed in active and progressive terms.

system. This use of the time of the prison for oppositional aims is parallel to the creative resistance mapped in the two previous chapters, but here the contexts and circumstances are different. This chapter, in particular, emphasizes unchosen waiting—waiting that is outside of agential action completely because it is used as an instrument of discipline by the prison system. From readings of Kalisha Buckhanon's *Upstate* and Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, I will theorize two kinds of queer prison time that center waiting: epistolary time and the time of concurrent sentences. First, epistolary time is the temporal experience generated by the exchange of letters. In the prison economy of *Upstate,* there is a slippage between letters, books, and time. The language of the prison establishes this confluence, but the logic of this equivalence goes beyond the fact that the stamps necessary to send letters are referred to as "books" (shortened from "books of stamps"). Instead, we see the characters use the mechanisms of prison to rethink disciplinary time in a more imaginative sense through reference to, contemplation, and creation of literature—especially in ways that produce queer failure which removes characters from their progression towards normative goals.

Jesmyn Ward's novel maps out a different kind of relationship to time. It plays with the idea of concurrent sentences—a mechanism that allows for the simultaneous fulfillment of multiple prison terms—by literalizing this expression in two ways. First, the main character, Jojo, can understand multiple sentences—here defined as the grammatical unit—at the same time. Second, through a kind of magical realism or visionary fictional mode,[250] a previously incarcerated character, Richie, who has died, is reanimated as a ghostly presence and communicates with Jojo and his family. It becomes clear that he is stuck on earth in a kind of

250. Walidah Imarisha and Adrienne Maree Brown, eds., *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2015).

purgatory, forced to relive his lived experiences in a way that literalizes concurrency in a different way. In a way that similar to *Upstate*, then, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* shows how prison systems posit new and queer relationships to time. While *Upstate* shows how these queer relationships to time can produce literature, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* imagines resistance in a different mode—in the creation of new generations out-of-step with Lee Edelman's vision of the child who bring into focus new modes of familial relationship. In both novels, the characters use these queer temporal schemas to exert agency—to push back against the regulatory time of prison by imagining new futures.

Both epistolary time and the time of concurrent sentences are temporal schemas generated by the carceral system. As I will argue in more detail below, the prison system generates these experiences of time. Thus, because of their connection with the prison, they are fundamentally imbued with waiting—with delay, stoppage, and suspension. This first is true because those who are imprisoned are prohibited from continuing with the normal progression of their lives. Instead, they are forced to "wait out" their sentences while incarcerated, prevented from gaining meaningful employment, enjoying family life, or making progress towards goals that require substantial agency. When an individual first enters the carceral system because they are found guilty of a crime, they are sentenced. Once an individual is imprisoned, their day runs on a highly regulated schedule. If an imprisoned person adheres to the regulations of the prison, they may receive parole and have the opportunity to leave prison. If an imprisoned person does not adhere to the rules of prison, they usually are forced to serve their full sentence or, if they are sentenced for additional crimes, may have their sentence extended. In sum, the discipline that prison is predicated on is primarily exerted through controlling imprisoned people's time. These temporal schemas are also related to waiting because waiting is the foremost temporal

experience of individual schema. Again, I will explain this in more detail below, but briefly: epistolary time features waiting for letters to be sent and delivered and the time of concurrent sentences involves an overlapping of time that is related to the way that the psychic experience of waiting features the overlap of the past and future in the present.

Epistolary time and concurrent sentences are temporalities theorized by prison systems that imprisoned people use in order to subvert the disciplinary structure of the prison system itself. In making this assertion, my own work aligns with that of the scholarship of Simone Browne and José Muñoz. First, Browne theorizes ways that people of color use the tools of the oppressor to subvert racism.[251] She posits that in response to surveillance targeted against people of color, racialized subjects perform acts of dark sousveillance, which includes "anti-surveillance, counter-surveillance and other freedom practices."[252] By engaging in dark sousveillance, people of color—as Browne details—use the tactics of surveillance in order to resist the very same surveillance. One example of dark sousveillance that Browne includes in her introduction is the filming of police offer actions—a tool of state scrutiny that people of color have appropriated and used (in at least a limited sense) in order to undermine unjust policing.[253]

Thinking in concurrence with this recent work in Black Studies, this chapter argues that the prison system itself theorizes elements of its own destruction. This destruction-from-within

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251. By using this construction, I cannot avoid invoking Audre Lorde's essay "The Master's Tools Can Never Dismantle the Master's House" from *Sister Outsider*. Here, I implicitly argue that this deconstruction *is* possible and go even further—arguing that the master's tools inherently enable the master's destruction.

252. Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2015), 21.

253. In particular, Browne references George Holliday's video recording of Los Angeles police officers beating Rodney King in 1991. In this case, the recording did not halt the police officers' assault, but did serve to document it and allow the public to witness the attack.

also overlaps in some ways with José Muñoz's concept of disidentification. According to Muñoz, disidentification involves "transform[ing] a cultural logic from within," in other words, building on an element of mainstream culture in a way that fundamentally alters it in order to make space for identity outside of the conventional.[254] Importantly, the mainstream cultural object or form is not erased via the process of disidentification. Instead, it is reconceptualized for uses that can subvert mainstream purposes. Like in the case of dark sousveillance, disidentification can involve using forms created by the oppressor in order to undermine these very forms. In this chapter, I envision the time of prison in a similar way—as a method of control and oppression that has been reformulated by those within its jurisdiction in order to subvert its own control. Using methods that are similar to disidentification or dark sousveillance, imprisoned people undermine systems of imprisonment through a mechanism of prison itself—its temporal logics.

I will begin this chapter by discussing the way that prison time has been theorized thus far by first turning to Foucault, and then more contemporary theorists—Angela Davis and Michelle Alexander—to trace the conceptualization of prison time within historical and disciplinary modes. Next, I think about the way that imprisonment has been generally conceptualized within the canon of African American Civil Rights literature by focusing on Malcolm X's autobiography and Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, showing how these narratives

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254. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 41.

In particular, Muñoz recognizes this disidentifactory practice in Basquiat's depiction of Superman. According to Muñoz, Superman was originally created by its Jewish authors as antidote to anti-Semitism, and so, "a disidentifactory kernel was already present" in the character. Building on this kernel, Basquiat's paintings, including Action Comics, Piano Lesson, and Television and Cruelty to Animals remake the Superman persona. Instead of maintaining Superman's aura of perfection, Basquiat renders Superman and his associated imagery using rough sketching and broken lines. As Muñoz describes it, in these paintings Superman is "brought back to his roots" (41).

make room for thinking about the ways in which the systems of prison themselves creates tools for dismantling the institution. From there, I will discuss how this chapter's conception of prison time dovetails with thinking from the field of queer studies. Finally, I will turn to two close readings: first of *Upstate* and then of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, both of which show how prison systems creates temporal schemas that exceed previous theorized models.

The Cultural Rhetoric of Prison: Moving Beyond the Past

Time is a fundamental element of the cultural discourse that surrounds imprisonment. One genesis of this discourse is Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, which works in a historical mode to discuss the origin and evolution of the modern prison system. He explains that in the nineteenth century punishment shifted from the direct control of the body to the more indirect control over the time of the body. No longer was imprisonment considered an interim solution—a mechanism to manage individuals' bodies until the ultimate corporeal punishment was realized.[255] We can see Foucault's historicizing influence in more contemporary theorizations of the prison system because prison is often discussed in the same breath with the past—as an outmoded institution that is out-of-step with the contemporary every day. Building on this logic, Angela Davis and Michelle Alexander make arguments that compare prison in the twenty-first century to historical intuitions—chattel slavery[256] and Jim Crow, respectively. Davis claims that prisons' interest in creating rehabilitated and perfect citizens replicates the way that

255. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans: Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 106.

256. Davis is not alone in making this argument. See Patrick Elliott Alexander, Ava DuVernay, Tara T. Green, and Colin Dayan, Margo V. Perkins, Joy James, Michael Hames-García, Dylan Rodríguez, Dan Berger, Mechthild Nagel, and Lisa M. Corrrigan.

proponents of slavery claimed that the institution domesticated and taught newly arrived Africans about "American" modes of being. Furthermore, she notes that many corporations have begun to sell their goods to prisoners and correctional facilities.[257] Because of this, Davis argues that the current economies of the prison system overlap with America's past dependence on slavery. Linking slavery with a more recent institution, Michelle Alexander identifies the Jim Crow period as the primary site of comparison for the prison industrial complex. She comes to this conclusion because the outcomes of the modern-day carceral system often mirror the outcomes of the Jim Crow South.[258] One of these outcomes is disenfranchisement since Black people are and were excluded from voting by the carceral system and Jim Crow laws. Moreover, she argues that the prison system has redefined Black people, and especially Black men, as former, current, or future criminals because of the sheer number of African American men who will have an interaction with the criminal justice system. This association between Blackness and criminality has similar material outcomes as ideologies from the Jim Crow era that connected Blackness with stupidity or laziness. The force of Davis and Alexander's arguments comes from our cultural belief that society has become drastically more just and equal since the antebellum or Jim Crow eras. Since Davis and Alexander point to the similarities between the prison industrial complex and discrete systems of oppression in American history that were indisputably racist, they hope to convince readers that the prison industrial complex is similarly indisputably built on

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257. Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 99.

258. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration In the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 157.

Alexander comes to these conclusions, in part, drawing on legal scholarship, most notably Reva Siegel's concept of "preservation through transformation" (1111). Siegel argues that the laws adapt to preserve white supremacy, but do not ever fully eradicate it. The language and rhetoric of the laws change, but they continue to enforce social stratification.

racist structures.

Although these rhetorical moves, insofar as they are successful in convincing the general public that the prison system needs either reform or complete restructuring, represent important interventions against the status quo, I wonder about the rhetorical effects of thinking about the time of prison in alignment with the time of the past. While it is certainly true that the prison system relies on racist thinking—the same thinking that underscored the antebellum and Jim Crow eras—the effect of comparing imprisonment with past intuitions is the implication that one needs to look to the past for examples of the kind of systematic inequality that the prison system perpetuates. It is important to recognize that the dehumanization of the prison system replicates the logics of police brutality in the current decade. For example, poorly paid prison labor can be equated to the underground economy of modern-day undocumented workers in the United States. By comparing the prison to Jim Crow or slavery, previous scholarship has generated a rhetoric that positions imprisonment as an anachronistic and out-of-date institution that is out of step with the contemporary period, but the racism of the prison system draws on is alive and well in the twenty-first century. For this reason, I argue, we need a more robust way of understanding the time of prison—one that goes further than equating the time of prison with the time of the past.

This is true first because of how integral time is to the prison system and how creatively it theorizes time. For example, prison sentences can be concurrent, consecutive, indeterminate, determinate, suspended, or intermediate and each one of these sentences manages time in a different way. Once an imprisoned person is paroled or completes their sentence, it can indeterminately hang over them. In some states, even after convicted felons have served their sentence, they are barred from voting.[259] In addition to formal legal constraints that continue

259. Christopher Uggen, Ryan Larson, and Sarah Shannon, "6 Million Lost Voters:

even after the sentence is completed, societal stigma continues to affect formerly imprisoned persons. This is further perpetuated because it is often legal for states to ask about criminal records on job applications and to discriminate based on applicants' answers. In this way, then, the time of prison raggedly supersedes the actual time that an imprisoned person spends incarcerated. In fact, it appears to attach oddly and extremely to formerly incarcerated bodies in a way that requires a more nuanced analysis than a simple equation of the time of prison with historical institutions. Because of the complicated way that prisons manage time, a more substantial theorization is needed in order to take its complex temporal procedures—both formal and informal—into consideration. My argument in this chapter is that the time that prison conceives makes it possible for people affected by incarceration to carve out sites of agency—agency that allows them to begin to dismantle the prison system itself.

Reading Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver: Radicalization in Prison

Several classic prison narratives, including *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *Soul on Ice*, work in alignment with the second part of this argument, depicting the counterintuitive ways that the prison system works to radicalize those it incarcerates in a way that undermines the implicit goals of the prison industrial complex—to deter others from committing crimes and to "rehabilitate" prisoners so that they can better contribute to the productivity of the nation. Malcolm X's experience of imprisonment as it is described in his *Autobiography* immediately comes to mind. After he is sentenced to ten years in prison for his involvement in a burglary ring, Malcolm X uses his time in prison in order to first learn the fundamentals of English grammar

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State-Level Estimates of Felony Disenfranchisement, 2016," *The Sentencing Project*, October 6, 2016, https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/6-million-lost-voters-state-level-estimates-felony-disenfranchisement-2016.

and language.[260] In Norfolk Prison, the site of an "outstanding" library, he begins to read prolifically.[261] His friend Reginald introduces him to the teachings of the Nation of Islam prophet Elijah Muhammad and the idea that "the white man is the devil."[262] He uses his newly acquired knowledges and takes advantage of the prison's resources in order to read more about Islam and develop his views about American racism that would later influence his political action and contributions to the Civil Rights movement. Malcolm X's time in prison was certainly demeaning, terrifying, boring, and infuriating. It was also a space where radicalization and deep thought occurred that eventually did not contribute to Malcolm X's rehabilitation into a docile subject, but, in part because of the abjection of prison, generated an important rebellion against American racism and the systems that perpetuate it.

A similar relationship between imprisonment and radicalization is evident in the life of another important Civil Rights thinker: Eldridge Cleaver. His memoir, *Soul on Ice*, was written in Folsom State Prison in 1965 when Cleaver was serving time for possession of marijuana.[263] In *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver details his growing understanding of the teachings of the Nation of Islam (although these teachings are later mostly disavowed), intense reading habits, and budding philosophical arguments about the nature of American racism. While in prison, Cleaver obtained his high school diploma and reads the work of Voltaire, Marx, Lenin, and DuBois. Although he came to prison without a clearly defined set of beliefs about American racism—he recalls living

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260. Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballatine Books, 1964), 179.

261. Ibid., 182.

262. Ibid., 184.

263. Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), 21.

in an "atmosphere of novocain"[264]—this changes while he is in prison. He describes "[falling] in with a group of young blacks who, like [him], were in vociferous rebellion against what [they] perceived as a continuation of slavery on a higher plane."[265] Cleaver's views are forever altered because of his intermingling with other imprisoned people who help him to reach new conclusions about the way that the racism of slavery persists in the contemporary period.

To be clear, this chapter is in no way advocating for imprisonment or the perpetuation of the American prison industrial complex. Although it details the ways in which people have used the space of the prison to come to radical conclusions that disrupt white systems of oppression and contribute non-normative thinking, it does not argue that that the way that some have found purpose within its walls somehow outweighs the massive toll that the prison industrial complex takes on the nation. It is outside the scope of this chapter to detail the many ways that prison exhaustively denies full personhood to the people that it imprisons, disrupts communities, and perpetuates racial inequalities, but these realities underscore the thinking of the chapter and are implicit in its arguments. Instead, the objective here is to map out moments and instances of agency and imagination within the walls of the prison that allow people to posit futures outside of normative scripts. While it may not seem revolutionary to posit new futures, Muñoz and Robin D. G. Kelley argue that positing alternative realities is the first step in creating utopia or bringing to fruition modes of living that are not predicated on racism and other forms of oppression.[266] Importantly, I show not only that this imagining occurs in spite of prison's

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264. Ibid., 22.

265. Ibid., 22.

266. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*; Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

machinations, but instead that the structure of prison itself—and more specifically the way that prison systems theorize time—engenders these moments. In spite of itself, the time of imprisonment has the potential to create sites of agency that have been overlooked by other research.

Theorizing Waiting in the Context of Imprisonment

In thinking about the queer time of prison in *Upstate* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, I draw from the work of Daylanne English. As referenced in the introduction to this dissertation, English argues that in the context of the carceral system, Black people may inhabit including "laboring time" and "fugitive time"—temporal schemas that are not experienced by white people.[267] Building on English's work, I too think through how people of color may experience time in a way that is outside of normative trajectories. However, while English concentrates on how African Americans have been temporally misrepresented by dominant notions of time as they are influenced by the prison system, I focus on the counter-intuitive notion that the time of prison as experienced and theorized by African American literature may open up new avenues for new modes of being and temporal states outside the norm.

One of these temporal states that prison system engenders is waiting. As I have theorized more fully in the introduction of this dissertation, waiting is an experience that takes people out of productive movement forward in time and instead forces them to dally and dawdle in states that are inherently oppositional to capitalism (although they may be engendered by capitalism itself). While the autobiographical narratives of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X., and Eldridge Cleaver generally show how imprisonment—an experience defined by waiting—

267. English, *Each Hour Redeem*, 29 and 41.

produces sites of agency and resistance, novels—including *Upstate* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing*—use the tools of fiction to elaborate on the specific temporal states that the prison system produces. These novels go beyond reality, and sometimes, even beyond the logic of reality, to show how the queer time of prison can posit new imaginary states. These more contemporary texts also reframe the way that we understand imprisonment—not as a relic of the past as the classic examples of prison narratives now posit, but as an element of our present.

Epistolary Time in *Upstate*: Queer Failure Interrupting Respectability

In particular, *Upstate*'s focus on the contemporary machinations of the prison industrial complex provides an interesting meditation on waiting because the plot of the book explicitly tracks gaps and pauses in the narrative. In this section of the chapter, I will argue that the epistolary time foregrounded by the novel creates queer failure that interrupts respectability politics and makes space for modes of living outside of convention. In order to make this argument, I will gloss the novel's plot, discuss its contribution to the genre of prison literature and the epistolary novel in order to show how *Upstate* disrupts many of the conventions of these literary forms, argue that the breakdowns in communication produced by the exchange of letters creates a kind of queer failure, demonstrate how this queer failure generates new possibilities, and finally connect the production of writing inside the novel to prison literature's transformative potential.

In *Upstate*, the two main characters, high school students Antonio and Natasha, write letters to each other while Antonio is imprisoned. Antonio is convicted of the murder of his father—for which his brother is actually responsible—a fact that we learn late in the novel. Antonio and Natasha build their romantic relationship over the course of the first years of

Antonio's imprisonment through their letter exchange, which—because of their form—allude to the seminal letters written by King, Cleaver, George Jackson,[268] and Mumia Abu-Jamal.[269] Diverging from the political content of these letters, Natasha and Antonio's missives are more personal. They even say that they love each other for the first time in their letters. As the years wear on, however, the letter exchanges become more infrequent and the periods of waiting increase between them. Their relationship flounders and eventually stops. It is clear that Natasha has moved on—she goes to college and then graduate school, eventually becoming a lawyer and achieving middle class success. Antonio, however, because of the literal structure of the prison, cannot move on from his feelings for Natasha. He wallows in his grief and never fully gives up hope that Natasha will return to his life until the end of the novel, nine years after his relationship with Natasha began and years after he has been released from prison.

Upstate is a recent fictional entry into the genre of prison literature, a category that has been well established in the United States at least since the advent of slavery.[270] Its narrative is similar to Asha Bandele's classic memoir about her relationship with her incarcerated husband, *The Prisoner's Wife,* and many other fictional accounts of relationships that extend across the walls of the prison. To put it tritely: boy meets girl, boy is in prison, complications ensue. These are romantic narratives, fictional or real accounts that focus on relationships that develop between two people divided by the walls of the prison. *The Prisoner's Wife*, for example, is self-conscious about the way that it fits into this genre. The narrator explicitly states, "this is a love

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268. George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1970).

269. Mumia Abu-Jamal, *Live from Death Row* (New York: Perennial, 1995).

270. H. Bruce Franklin, ed., *Prison Writing in 20th-Century America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 2.

story," and although this story is not without turmoil, Bandele's relationship with Rashid (her incarcerated husband) does survive until the conclusion of the memoir.[271] Many novels and memoirs that feature a romantic relationship between an incarcerated man and a woman on the outside focus on the woman's waiting—how she deals with her partner not being physically present in her everyday life. Indeed, we often see the direct disciplinary structure of prison working on women—extending past the physical structure of the carceral cell to regulate their life schedules. For example, in both *An American Marriage* (a recent novel by Tayari Jones) and *The Prisoner's Wife*, the women who are in relationships with incarcerated men choose to have abortions[272]—even though they eventually want to raise children with their partners—because they do not want to give birth to a child without daily in-person support from their spouses. In both of these narratives, the women who are technically not imprisoned find that the prison system has managed to find a way to influence the course of their lives.

Upstate interestingly reverses this script. Natasha does not wait for Antonio. Because the narrative is not told only from the perspective of the female partner—we see letters from both Antonio and Natasha—their inner consciousness and thought process is more on display than in some of the earlier examples of this genre. Although Natasha does put her life on hold for a spell while Antonio is in prison, she rather quickly decides to move on without him. In this way, then, this novel differs from the standard fare of this genre and instead focuses on two divergent stories—one that is centered on prison and on waiting and one that is more progressive and

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271. Bandele, Asha. *The Prisoner's Wife* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 214.

272. Not all women who become pregnant with the children of incarcerated men, of course, choose to have abortions. Notably, Assata Shakur became pregnant with Sundiata Acoli's child while both were on trial in 1974 for the murder of a New Jersey state trooper and gave birth to Kakuya Shakur.

forward moving. For this reason, *Upstate* is an interesting case study for this chapter since it specifically depicts the kind of waiting that imprisonment involves in Antonio's story and shows a counter-example to this condition in Natasha's narrative.

In addition to working within the genre of prison literature, *Upstate* also fits into the category of epistolary literature—another form that implies strict regulation. As Janet Gurkin Altman explains, "for the letter novelist the voice of the epistle as narrative instrument can foster certain patterns of thematic emphasis, narrative action, character types, and narrative self-consciousness."[273] Thinking about societal definition and categorization from a different perspective, Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook notes that this genre, "puts into play the tension between the private individual, identified with a specifically gendered, classed body…and the public person…discursively constituted and functionally disembodied."[274] Although Cook focuses on the distinction between these two subjectivities, it is clear that both the public and private self in this equation are equally informed by societal categorization. Indeed, we see the effects of societal categorization and the prescribed behavior that is derived from it in the primary examples of the epistolary genre from the eighteenth century—Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*—since they are formulaically predicated on morality and virtue. We need not look further than *Pamela*'s alternative title—*Virtue Rewarded*—to get a sense of the teleological workings of its plot. While scholars have thought broadly about the way that the epistolary novel depicts interior consciousness[275] and accurately gives voice to the female

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273. Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus, Ohio: University of Ohio Press, 1982), 9.

274. Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, *Gender and Genre in the Eighteenth-Century Republic of Letters* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 8.

275. Bray, Joel. *The Epistolary Novel Representation of Consciousness*. (New York:

condition,[276] because of its association with the eighteenth century, the genre is typically perceived in more conventional terms.

Furthermore, the process of letter exchange as it is engaged in within daily life is often thought of as something linear and associated with normative modes of relation. Letters are usually associated with old-fashioned convention, respectability, and authenticity. They often adhere to highly ordered conventions because they typically include a formal heading, greeting, body, salutation, and signature.[277] Additionally, letters are sent formulaically from one party to the other—a letter begets another letter and communication proceeds via this one-to-one exchange. For these reasons, letter-writing is typically thought of as adhering to strict conventionality and almost capitalistic reciprocity.

Upstate is notable because, although it is a member of several genres that are usually predicated on convention—the romance genre, the prison literature genre, and the epistolary genre—it significantly diverges from the expectations that these genres imply. In departing from these expectations, *Upstate* exposes how the complications inherent in each of these categories make room for departures from conventional life narratives. The epistolary conversation in which Natasha and Antonio engage truly changes the trajectory of their relationship and gives Antonio the room to imagine a future that is different than the one prescribed to him by normative scripts.

Routledge, 2003).

276. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989).

277. In her recent book, *Epistolary Acts: Anglo-Saxon Letters and Early English Media*, Jordan Zweck calls the protocols surrounding the act of letter writing "epistolary acts" and notes the highly structured nature of the process in the medieval period.

More than in-person communication, conversations that are held though letters are subject to glitching, miscommunication, one-sidedness, and nonnormative temporal logics.[278] This is true, for example, in the letters that Antonio and Natasha exchange at the beginning of part two of the novel. At the end of part one, Antonio tells Natasha that he has taken a plea deal and has decided not to go to trial.[279] This means that he will have to serve ten years in prison. Natasha does not immediately write back to comment on this decision. After two weeks pass, Antonio sends Natasha another letter. He tells her "this is the last time I'll ever go this long without communicating with you,"[280] but it is Natasha who has been neglecting him since she has not responded to his previous missive. Three days after Antonio's letter has been sent, Natasha responds, but it is unclear if she has received Antonio's most recent letter because she does not reference anything that he has said in it. Instead, she just discusses the occurrences in her own quotidian life and being overlooked at prom: "Everybody had a date but me. Well, probably not everybody, but that's the way it seemed to me."[281] In these moments in the text, communication breaks down. It becomes clear that in this moment Natasha and Antonio are not constructing a world together, but instead are wallowing in their own concerns and problems. They do not respond to each other and ignore what the other has to say or perhaps miss it altogether since it is unclear if Natasha receives Antonio's letter before she writes.

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278. In making this claim, I do not mean to suggest that all epistolary novels produce queer time. As I have argued, epistolary novels like *Pamela* and *Clarissa* certainly do not uphold queer sensibilities that positive non-normative relations to desire and romance. Instead, I argue that the way that *Upstate* uses the epistolary form highlights the glitching and failure of the kind of communication required by prison and shows that this failure produces queer modes of being.

279. Kalisha Buckhanon, *Upstate* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 60.

280. Ibid., 69.

281. Ibid., 70.

This breakdown in communication enables the kind of failure that opens up new possibilities. As Jack Halberstam explains, "Under certain circumstances, failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world."[282] This failure does not involve a kind of "getting lost" that enables "finding yourself." It does not involve goal achievement or a kind of teleological ending.[283] Failure as Halberstam describes it allows individuals to carve out new relationships with the exterior world and inhabit modes that are outside of capitalistic production. Eventually, because Natasha is not satisfied with their epistolary relationship, Natasha finally tells Antonio that "it's over."[284] She wants to move on with her life in a way that would be impossible as Antonio's fiancée. In other words, the relationship fails. Antonio does not achieve the American Dream or find a way to "pull himself up by his bootstraps." Instead, he enters the precarious working class without a partner to shelter him from the realities of his decreased job prospects and forfeiture of respectability. While each of these outcomes creates significant and undeniable hardship in Antonio's life, they also free him from the path that Natasha has taken. While Natasha is enrolling in the University of Chicago's undergraduate program, earning her law degree at the University of Pennsylvania, and getting engaged, Antonio is serving time, impregnating his girlfriend, and entering the working class. Instead of following Natasha to Black respectability, Antonio's future is more uncertain and less prescribed. There is more room for imaginative possibilities that are outside of the script that Natasha has followed. Despite the difference in their circumstances, it is Natasha who longs for Antonio. She tells him "I felt for

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282. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 2.

283. Ibid., 24.

284. Buckhanon, *Upstate*, 170.

you what I felt for no man since."[285] In his final letter, Antonio responds by tearing up all of Natasha's letters that he has saved since the beginning of their correspondence. He writes that he is "finally letting go."[286]

Ultimately, *Upstate* does not end in the glorious reunion of Natasha and Antonio. By ripping up the letters that Natasha has sent him at the end of the novel, Antonio rejects and foregoes the script of romance—marrying his high school sweetheart—and instead embraces the failure of their relationship. The novel also does not conclude with Antonio achieving middle class respectability. Instead, its final pages tell the story of failed communication, a failed relationship, and the temporality of prison life that extends past Antonio's sentence. By the end of the novel, Antonio has a son with an ex-girlfriend and is working at job that pays the bills. He has not achieved the American Dream, but unlike Natasha, he is not pining for his high school sweetheart. He is focused on the future and tells Natasha, "we aren't living in the past anymore. Now, it's all about the present—you got your life and I got mine. I got a son, an education to get, a job to maintain, a past to overcome."[287] Natasha implicitly disconnects herself from the temporality of prison. In his response to her letter, Antonio laments, "I'm a felon for life, baby. I won't be able to shake that shit."[288] In making this claim, it is clear that the temporal logics of prison have changed the way that Antonio understands himself. Even when the physical constraints of prison have ended, the psychic ones will continue past his sentence. He will

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285. Ibid., 245.

286. Ibid., 247.

287 . Ibid., 247.

288. Ibid., 177.

always be associated with a kind of failure—whether this association is formally ensconced through a criminal record or cognitively established in his memory. In this way, then, the epistolary time that the prison constructs—a subset of the waiting that prison engenders—moves Antonio towards new modes of being and alternative forms of living. Despite the restrictions that he experiences because of his criminal record, Antonio is not restricted in the same way that Natasha is. He is able to live outside of the requirements of respectability and is no longer infatuated with Natasha or hoping their relationships will continue. He has failed, but his failure has opened him up to scripts outside of the disciplinary norms Halberstam describes.

The production of literature is an outcome of the temporality of prison that makes visible these alternative forms of living. At the level of the fictional narrative, the letters Antonio has produced collectively articulate his own experience with the prison system. Outside of the fictional reality, *Upstate* itself is an entry into the genre of prison literature. The creation of art and literature that envisions and reflects lives outside of the norm is one result of the prison system—both in fictional accounts and in factual memoirs. Underscoring the power of narrative to inspire these alternative forms of living, the letters in *Upstate* frequently allude to autobiographies that exhibit narratives about imprisonment or the prison system including *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, *The Autobiography of Malcom X*, and *Soul on Ice.* And so, it writes itself into this genre. In the language of prison, there is a conflation between books and stamps—the mechanism that makes it possible for Antonio and Natasha to send letters. Conventionally, books of stamps are sold at the prison commissary. These books of stamps, or just "books" in prison parlance, are so vital to the way that prison works that they are exchanged as a form of currency in the informal bartering system that imprisoned people use in order to circumvent formal prison economies. Going beyond the

simple equivalence in name between books of stamps and literary books, *Upstate* dramatizes the confluence between literature and letters, first because the exchange of letters is facilitated by books of stamps. Second, like the work of Davis, Cleaver, or Malcom X, Antonio and Natasha together make room for new modes—narratives where women decide not to wait for their imprisoned partners, stories that highlight the failure of romance, epistolary novels that do not value chastity, and narratives that embrace queer failure. Therefore, *Upstate* articulates and recalls the power of literature to move us to futures outside of the norm and to new modes of living.

Concurrent Sentences in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*: A Legal Mechanism and Queer Temporal Structure

Working in another vein, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, shows how a different element of the time that prison imposes—concurrent sentences—can allow imprisoned people to carve out agency despite its ostensibly disciplinary purpose. In order to make this argument, I will summarize the plot of the novel briefly before explaining how the novel fits within the genre of visionary fiction. Following this, I will discuss the way that concurrent sentences operate within the legal system and as a queer temporal system. This will facilitate a close reading of the metaphor of concurrent sentences within the text of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, and a contemplation of many of the main characters' simultaneous lives that expounds on the connection between this concurrency and prison time. Additionally, I will explicate grammatical and structural forms of concurrency within the novel, and finally argue that the outcome of this concurrency is the imagination of a kind of simultaneous familial structure that goes beyond the conventional nuclear core.

Sing, Unburied, Sing is centered on a strange family road trip to the Parchman Penitentiary that is undertaken in order to pick up Michael, the main character Jojo's father, who

has recently been paroled. While on this road trip, Richie, a man who died while escaping prison, is hauntingly reanimated and appears to Jojo. In this moment, Richie's past overlaps with Jojo's present life. Richie, too, experiences a kind of overlapping existence. After he dies, he does not go on to an afterlife. Instead, he hauntingly lives on, reminiscing about the past. In this way, then, he lives in a concurrent manner that fundamentally changes the way that he relates to reality.

Sing, Unburied, Sing is relevant to the purposes of this chapter because it represents a recent entry into the genre of visionary fiction. Visionary fiction, defined by Walidah Imarisha, is "a term we developed to distinguish science fiction that has relevance toward building new, freer worlds from the mainstream strain of science fiction, which most often reinforces dominant narratives of power."[289] We can think of *Sing, Unburied, Sing* as an example of this genre because it includes speculative elements and—as I will argue—posits new modes of being. Unlike other somewhat recent entries into the genre of speculative fiction that have reached canonization in the field of African American Literature—like *Beloved* and *Kindred—Sing, Unburied, Sing* is not a work of historical fiction. Instead, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is set in the present-day, so its temporality mirrors the temporality of the prison system as I envisioned it earlier in this chapter. It is not a recapitulation of the past in the present. Instead, it depicts the past's haunting of the current era via concurrency, and, importantly, through its centering of children's power, articulates a new future—one that is not beset by the reproductive futurism that Edelman imagines.

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289. Walidah Imarisha and Adrienne Maree Brown, eds., *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2015).

Although she chooses to use the umbrella term "speculative fiction," this is the literature that Sami Schalk discusses in *Bodyminds Reimagined,* which she argues envisions new worlds (17).

The metaphor of concurrency operates at many levels within this text. From a legal perspective, concurrent sentencing allows judges to permit a convicted person to serve multiple prison terms synchronously. Judges may give this sentence because of empathy, as a result of a plea bargain, or due to the interrelated nature of the crimes for which the person is convicted. Concurrent sentencing, however, breaks the norms of temporal reality. If a sentence is defined as a period of time in which a person is confined to prison, it is physically impossible to serve more than one sentence at once since one cannot live through two periods in time simultaneously. Despite the literal impossibility of living concurrently, concurrent sentencing is a codified instrument of the legal system. Therefore, this legal mechanism in-and-of-itself rewrites norms of temporal experience and imagines a different kind of time than the straight and disciplinary time that Foucault describes.

Playing with this temporal arrangement that is unchained to linearity, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is riddled with allusions to concurrent time that dramatize the expansive way that prison systems theorize time. The reader is first introduced to the idea of concurrent sentences at the very beginning of the novel that commences with an epigraph from Eudora Welty:

> The memory is a living thing—it too is in transit. But during its moment, all that is remembered joins, and lives—the old and the young, the past and the present, the living and the dead.[290]

As Welty describes it, memory is not particularly tethered to one particular time period, either the present or the past. Instead, it fluidly inheres simultaneously to all time periods. Past memories are recalled in the present and memory takes on a life of its own circulating outside of the bodies of the living and dead. It exists in a kind of external repository that somehow "joins" memories together. Indeed, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* takes Welty's suppositions about memory and literalizes

290. Jesmyn Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (New York: Scribner, 2017), n.p.

them in the form of Richie and other ghostly memories who somehow live on past their natural death. As Jojo's grandmother, Mam, describes it late in the book, "We don't walk no straight lines. It's all happening at once. All of it. We all here at once."[291] In positing this mode of existence, Mam implies that people's lives are not linear, but instead double back on each other and move in a kind of circularity—or simultaneity that implies an existence where the past haunts the present.

Haunting, in general, has been theorized in terms of its ability to break down the binaries of past and present[292] and disciplinary categories.[293] Although *Sing, Unburied, Sing* includes a haunting in a conventional sense, its version of the past returning in the present is slightly different than the one described by haunting as scholars define it. Avery Gordon describes haunting as "one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with."[294] For example, we can think of the way that the illogics of slavery infect our present, although we may wish or assume that this were not the case. Carla Freccero thinks of haunting as a way of ethically engaging with the past. She explains the central motivations of her project by mapping the possibilities of this kind of engagement:

> I thus want to explore the possibilities of spectrality for queer historiography, why it might describe a more ethical relation to the past than our current historicisms permit, and how it might counter the symptomatic fantasy of reproductive futurity (so scathingly interrogated by Lee Edelman in *No Future*) without necessarily adopting its binaristic

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291. Ibid., 236.

292. Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006); Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, xx.

293. Patricia Sharon Holland, *Raising the Dead*, 66.

294. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, xvi.

representation of 'death' as the only (compulsory) alternative.[295]

Sing, Unburied, Sing replicates some of this logic, positing a ghostliness that undoes assumptions about the segregation of lives and implies a concurrence between the living and the dead. The haunting that these scholars describe is profoundly melancholic in that it maps a relationship with the past that rejects the kind of "moving on" that mourning prescribes.[296] *Sing, Unburied, Sing* posits a slightly different relationship to the past—one that certainly respects the past's influence on the present—but ultimately is more about simultaneity and involves holding all temporalities (past, present, and future) together at once instead of focusing on how the past is alive in the present.

While Richie and the other ghost-like beings in the text are perhaps the most obvious representations of this simultaneity, Jojo, Kayla (Jojo's sister), Leonie (Jojo's mother), and Michael, also live simultaneous lives. Each physically inhabit particular ages that we might associate with their familial roles—Jojo is a teenager, Kayla is three years old, Leonie and Michael are adults—and yet each character is explicitly described in terms that contradict their physical age. The novel begins on Jojo's thirteenth birthday, emphasizing his stage in life and the normative linear passage of time insofar as Jojo seems to be moving steadily from one age to the next. Despite the linearity that birthdays imply, however, Leonie gives him a baby shower cake to celebrate the day. It features "blue and pink pastel sprinkles [and] two little blue shoes."[297] It is

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295. Carla Freccero, "Queer Spectrality: Haunting the Past" in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, ed. George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry, 194-215. (Malden, Massachusetts: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 2007), 195.

296. See Anne Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

297. Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, 27.

as though the cake commemorates Jojo's birth thirteen years too late. Later in the novel, Leonie explains that she imagines that Jojo is perpetually "stuck…at five" years old.[298] Even though he has reached adolescence, it is difficult for her to conceive of him as past his early childhood. Complicating these notions is the parental role that Jojo plays for Kayla. He anticipates her needs and selflessly attempts to satisfy them, even when this involves going against the wishes of his mother or procuring food for her in dubious ways. He also is one of the few family members who is able to commune with the ghostly subjects, exhibiting a kind of skill and composure that exceeds his physical age. In this way, then, he is depicted simultaneously as much older and much younger than his thirteen years. It is also as though he is living out multiple ages at once—early childhood, nascent adolescence, and adulthood.

Jojo's parents, too, are described in terms that contravene their physical age. Misty, Leonie's friend, says that Leonie becomes like a "corpse"—"dead still"—when she's prevaricating.[299] Here, although Leonie has not reached middle age, she is characterized as someone who has already passed away. Conversely, when Michael returns home to his family, he's depicted as an infant. Maggie, Michael's mother, hugs him while "thump[ing] his back with the flat of her hand" as if she is burping him.[300] In this instance, Michael, the adult, is transformed into a baby. This shows that time in *Sing, Unburied, Sing* is arranged strangely so that characters can at once be their physical age and an age that is significantly different from it. The linearity that Jojo's birthday signals at the beginning of the novel is not adhered to in the text's remaining pages. Instead, characters live concurrently occurring lives.

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298. Ibid., 37.

299. Ibid., 35.

300. Ibid., 210.

Displaying a maturity that is present in her brother's fantastic abilities, Kayla—although she is materially only three years old—extraordinarily is able to master the otherworldly spirits (including Richie) who seek closure at the end of the book. Because Kayla is so young, she represents the future—the generation that will come from Leonie and Michael's union. Although we might associate her with Edelman's "child," it is clear that Kayla has little in common with Edelman's fantasy. Scholars have often criticized Edelman for ignoring the way that a child's identity intersects with their ability to represent reproductive futurism. As Juana María Rodríguez explains,

> By ignoring race, Edelman fails to consider how children of color function as the co-constitutive symbolic nightmare of our nation's future. Rather than signifying reproductive futurity, African American male children represent racialized fears of criminality, violence, and sexual danger. Similarly, Latin@ reproduction, projected through the discourse of Mexican 'anchor babies,' serves as the ever-present threat against which AngloAmerican whiteness must assert its disciplinary mechanisms. These children are never the imagined future subjects of the nation.[301]

Because she is Black, poor, the daughter of intravenous drug users, and able to commune with the dead, Kayla has a much more complex relationship with reproductive futurity than Edelman articulates in *No Future*. Instead of figuring as a proxy for the nation's hope, Kayla represents concurrency because she brings together so many temporal periods—the past beings that she communicates with, the present of the book's narrative, and her own precarious future.

What is most interesting for this chapter's argument, however, is the fact that this simultaneity is explicitly connected to the time of prison. This is first apparent at the level of plot. The main action in the novel revolves around a road trip to Parchman Penitentiary to retrieve Michael. He has recently been paroled even though he has only served three years of his five-year prison sentence. Michael does not literally serve concurrent prison terms—or if he

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301. Rodríguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings*, 35.

does, this is not mentioned in the text of the book—but he does serve a term that is shorter than his original sentence. This compression may remind us of the type of abbreviation that occurs when concurrent sentences are given. Additionally, many of the main characters in the novel—Michael, Richie, and River (Jojo's maternal grandfather who he calls "Pop")—are all former inmates at the Parchman Penitentiary. Because of this, although the narrative is rarely inside the walls of the prison, the specter of this institution haunts it. This haunting means that the central themes of the text are inflected with its influence, which is clear in the way that the time of prison is described. Richie explains that "Parchman was past, present and future all at once…time is a vast ocean, and…everything is happening at once."[302] For this reason the text's incessant temporal simultaneity—although it is not explicitly connected with the Parchman prison or the terms that the men serve—strongly recalls the legal mechanism of the concurrent sentence.

Although none of the main characters explicitly serve a concurrent sentence, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* recalls the term in a different way. When Jojo is communicating with animals on his grandfather's small farm he understands their thoughts concurrently. As Jojo explains it,

> It was impossible not to hear the animals, because I looked at them and understood, instantly, and it was like looking at a sentence and understanding the words, all of it coming to me at once.[303]

In this moment, Jojo is able to gaze at an animal and immediately understand what they're trying to convey. He describes their language in terms of the grammatical unit of the sentence—reformulating the carceral sentence—and revealing that he sees the sentence "all at once" or, in other words, concurrently. Jojo's communication with nonhuman animals, therefore, signals the

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302. Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing,* 186.

303. Ibid., 15.

legal mechanism for compressing prison terms. We see grammatical forms of concurrent sentences at least once more in the text when Leonie leaves a note for Michael's mother telling her that she is going to pick him up from prison. In lieu of communicating with Maggie in person—"to talk to Michael's mother in halting starts and stops"—she leaves a note in their mailbox. She describes the note as "breathless…what [she] would have said in a rush. No punctuation. The note signed: Leonie."[304] Because there are no periods, commas, or other grammatical marks in this note, Leonie has in effect combined multiple sentences together. In other words, her sentences run concurrent with each other because there are no periods to show where one begins and another ends. By playing with the form of the grammatical sentence, both Jojo and Leonie undo conventions of the English language and communication. Jojo's comprehension of a sentence "all at once" defies the typical way that a sentence is understood and processed. He contravenes its linearity and undermines its structuring intent. Leonie's note signals her hurried approach and disinclination to spend time discussing Michael's situation at length with his mother using the traditional "starts and stops," or, in other words, punctuation of the English language. By using or perceiving concurrent sentences in this way, as a kind of revision of the way that language is used, Jojo and Leonie break free from the dictates of rigid grammar and also signal the legal mechanism of the prison.

At yet another level, this concurrency is replicated in the very structure of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. Each chapter is written from the perspective of one central character. Usually, this character is Jojo, but often Leonie's voice or another character's voice is privileged instead. In a few chapters, the switching of perspective is realized in a way that includes overlap. Because of this, the sentences of the novel occur concurrently—more than one character explains the

304. Ibid., 53.

same situation. This is true, for example, at the beginning of a chapter that is told from Richie's perspective. Richie has recently installed himself in Leonie's car and is newly visible to Jojo. He describes watching Jojo in the car as he is performing actions that were previously reported in the previous chapter through Jojo's perspective. The doubling of perspective literally means that the time of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*'s chapters run concurrently.

The latter part of Richie's chapter makes other non-linear temporal gestures as it gauzily explains what has occurred since Richie's death. Namely, that after his death he has existed in a languorous state until he comes across Jojo:

> I burrowed and slept and woke in the milky light, my time measured by the passing of all those Black faces and the turning of the earth, until the scaly bird returned and led me to the car, to the boy the same age as me sitting in the back of the car, Jojo.[305]

While he is in this lethargic state, Richie has been half cognizant of the changing world around him, but this is not all that he has perceived. Richie has also spent time thinking about his own past. In his afterlife, Richie remembers his own past thus he lives concurrently—wrapped up in the hazy happenings of the world around him while he is recalling his previous life. As Richie recalls:

> I spread my arms and legs and felt a laugh bubbling up in me, but it died in my throat. Because I remembered. I remembered before. I remembered being spread-eagle in the dirt, surrounded by hunched, milling me, and a teenage boy at my shoulder who stood tall under the long shadows. River.[306]

Richie does not exist only in the present of the world around him, watching "black faces and the turning of the earth," but instead is wrapped up in the affect of his own memories. In other words, Richie's life doubles back on itself. While he is literally existing in the present moving

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305. Ibid., 135.

306. Ibid., 135.

forward in time, he also psychically travels back to the events that surround his death and Parchman prison. In this way, his life mimics the text's doubling back and concurrency.

By the end of the novel, the outcome of all of this concurrency is clear. In the last chapter, Jojo learns that Richie and the other ghostly presences that haunt his house want to return home. They are tired of waiting in the indeterminate middle ground between living and the afterlife. Showing a wisdom that is far beyond her three years, Kayla begins to sing. The ghosts respond to her hymn and collectively intone "home."[307] It is not clear if the spirits will go onto the afterlife, but it seems promising given their rejoinder to Kayla. Interestingly, this change in state is occasioned because Kayla is able to "take the pieces of everybody and hol[d] them together."[308] She can gather all of the pieces of people that are stratified out across time and hold them together in one moment—in other words, make them concurrent. Interestingly, Kayla does not make people's lives linear or order them according to a particular schema. Instead, she holds everyone's particularities together and makes them overlap with each other. Her actions show the use of the metaphor of concurrent sentences to show that new modes of relation can be achieved. In holding everyone's past, present, and future together, Kayla literalizes what Mam has said earlier, "We don't walk no straight lines. It's all happening at once. All of it. We all here at once. My mama and daddy and they mamas and daddies."[309] As Mam describes it, there is a certain continuity between all of the generations of "mamas and daddies," which Kayla makes real in her magical song. In doing so, Kayla imagines a kind of familial structure that goes far beyond

307. Ibid., 285.

308. Ibid., 284.

309. Ibid., 236.

the conventional nuclear core because her family clearly extends across multiple generations of her biological relations as well as to those outside of strict genealogy like Richie. This deep concurrency, where lives and memories overlap with one another, revises norms of singular family life and normative family structures. By mapping this new mode of being, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, shows how the legal mechanism of prison—concurrent sentencing—is much more imaginative and less disciplinary at its core than we might imagine. In doing so, the text describes the time of prison as expansive. Because the characters in the novel use concurrency for their own purposes, they show how prison systems theorize new modes of living that go beyond its disciplinary or capitalistic purposes.

Conclusions: Prison as an element of the Past, Present, and Future

Returning to King's supplications from the beginning of this chapter and the overall scope of this dissertation, I argue that waiting is fundamental to the temporal schemas that I posit are articulated in *Upstate* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. When Antonio experiences epistolary time, more broadly, he is waiting for Natasha's letters and waiting for his life outside of prison to begin. When Jojo, his family, and ancestors experience the simultaneity of concurrent sentences, they are waiting to retrieve Michael, waiting for prison terms to be completed, and waiting to leave states of purgatory. The waiting that prison engenders, as these texts show, complicates the historical and disciplinary mode that the time of prison has often been described in and asks us to consider the expansive modes of being generated not in spite of prison, but because of it. Ultimately, these novels enable us to see the time of prison queerly—not as a relic of the past, as slavery and Jim Crow are—but as an element of our present, past, and future. It is "difficult to wait" as King explains but waiting also moves us to new futures and different realities. Versions

of these realities that perhaps King could not possibly have envisioned will form the central focus of the next chapter, in which I explore the waiting associated with the very contemporary context of social media videos that visualize the aspects of the Black experience in America. However, these realities, in one way or another, begin to construct the very outcomes that King imagines from Birmingham Jail, but they have not yet truly been brought to fruition. And so, we are still waiting.

Chapter Four—"Your Life is Waiting": Rewind in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric*

because white men can't
police their imaginations
black men are dying

—Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*[310]

Philando Castile was fatally shot by police officer Jeronimo Yanez on July 6, 2016, after Yanez pulled over the car that Castile was driving. Castile's girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, and her four-year-old daughter were in the car when the shooting occurred. When Castile was pulled over, Yanez asked for Castile's driver's license and registration. While reaching for these items, Castile told Yanez that he had a gun permit and was armed. Presumably in reaction to this information, Yanez shot Castile seven times. In the moments after the shooting, Reynolds began streaming live video of what could have been a routine police stop on Facebook Live. At the beginning of the video, Reynolds relates what has happened in the moments before she starts to stream. She recounts the police shooting and attempts to make sense of her heartbreak. At one point, we can hear her attempting to wrestle with the incongruousness of her perception of her and her boyfriend's identity and this atrocity: "He's [Castile's] a good man, he works for St. Paul Public School…We are innocent people. We are innocent."[311] About twenty minutes after he was shot, Castile died in the emergency room. Yanez was charged with three felonies but was not convicted.

In the reverberations of this shooting, Reynolds's video was posted again and again on

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310. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf, 2015), third printing, 134.

311. Diamond Reynolds, "Facebook Live Video," in "Read the Transcript of the Video Taken During the Philando Castile Shooting in Minnesota," ed. Emma Ockerman *Time.com*, July 7, 2016, http://time.com/4397189/minnesota-shooting-philando-castiles-facebook-live-transcript.

social media. Social media users were barraged with footage; it was almost inescapable. Just one day after the shooting, the video had been viewed 3.7 million times.[312] Five days after the shooting, the video had been viewed 5.6 million times and had been shared more than 317,000 times.[313] Seemingly every major news outlet picked up the story. It was impossible to be online without encountering it.

While this shooting raises concerns about implicit racism within police departments all across the United States, its aftermath also forces us to consider the ethical implications of sharing images and videos of Black death(s) on social media. Some critics are concerned about what they deem to be over-exposure in this incessant sharing and reposting.[314] They argue that because our lives are saturated with content from social media, our psychological well-being is affected.[315] When social media reiterates Black death again and again, these images have the ability to linger in the memory in a way that can negatively affect self-perception and understanding of Black identity. For this reason, some argue that a steady stream of images of Black death negatively impact the mental health of people of color. Critics also argue that exposure to Black abjection causes those who view these images and videos to become immune

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312. Kathleen Chaykowski, "Philando Castile's Death on Facebook Live Highlights Problems for Social Media Apps," *Forbes*, July 7, 2016, https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathleenchaykowski/2016/07/07/minnesota-womans-facebook-live-videos-highlight-unsolved-issues-of-social-apps-hosting-live-streams/#5f399ba16a6d.

313. Sherri Williams, "Editorial: How Does a Steady Stream of Images of Black Death Affect Us?," *NBC News*, July 11, 2016, http://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/editorial-how-does-steady-stream-images-black-death-affect-us-n607221.

314. See Sherri Williams and Alexandra Juhasz.

315. In her 2016 editorial, Williams asks, "How does the steady stream of death that flows into our social media feeds, our minds and our souls affect us?" Later in the article, she explains that "as a black woman [she's] also worried about the mental and emotional health of [her] people as [they] continue to consume these videos."

to the emotional impact of this suffering.[316] Some scholars who discuss the Reynolds video even refused to watch it in order to avoid becoming immune to violence perpetrated against people of color.

Other critics[317] find that the video—and those like it—has positive effects for the Black Lives Matter movement and its ideological underpinnings. Nicholas Mirzoeff, for example, finds that videos like this demonstrate a "right to look" that speaks back against the authority of visuality. According to Mirzoeff, visuality is "an early nineteenth-century term," which means "the visualization of history" whose first domain is the slave plantation.[318] He argues that looking back creates a connection between us and "the other" and therefore is anti-authoritarianism and anti-racist.[319] Although this looking is something that occurs "live," i.e., in person, Facebook Live can be thought of as a proxy for this live encounter if the viewer is able to identify with those in the video. In these cases, the look can happen remotely, but Mirzoeff cautions that this look is not enough to cement change. Once an individual makes a connection to someone they observe in a video, they must then work to dismantle the extant institutions of

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316. See Alexandra Juhasz, "How Do I (Not) Look? Live Feed Video and Viral Black Death." *JSTOR Daily*, July 20, 2016, https://daily.jstor.org/how-do-i-not-look.

In her article, Alexandra Juhasz corroborates this view. She argues that she cannot watch Reynolds's video because of the "possible…deadening effects of the over-exposure to images." She argues that "ethical viewing considers not just our own looking at viral videos but at the broader political-economic and technological structures that produce, hold, and frame the videos that we see and share." Juhasz never demands that others refuse to watch the video, but implies that its proliferation may be counterproductive to the cause of antiracism.

317. See Nicholas Mirzoeff, Katherine Stanutz, Michelle Prettyman Beverley, and Caetlin Benson-Allott.

318. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Right to Look," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 3, (2011): 475.

319. Ibid., 473.

racism if the look has been meaningful.[320] For this reason, Mirzoeff provides an important perspective that urges us to be cautious about unilaterally praising the dissemination of troubling videos and images.

In the same vein as Mizoeff, other scholars rethink the negative affect that these videos produce as a way to produce galvanization and social activism.[321] They find that these videos have similarities with the horror genre because the videos are profoundly upsetting and therefore defy assimilation to the quotidian corporatism of Facebook. In this reading, the videos' incomprehensibility is precisely what makes them compelling.[322] Still others find that these videos allow us to understand Black life because they memorialize the dead.[323] In general, these scholars argue that although the images that flood our social media feeds are troubling, they have

320. Nicholas Mirzoeff, "Decolonizing the Space of Appearance: #BlackLivesMatter #Charlottesville" (lecture, Center for Visual Culture, University of Wisconsin at Madison, Madison, WI, September 28, 2017).

321. See Katherine Stanutz, "'Dying, but Fighting Back': George Jackson's Modes of Mourning," *MELUS: The Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 42, no. 1, (2017): 32-52.

In particular, see Katherine Stanutz. She finds that mourning—and the texts that cause us to publicly mourn including Reynolds's—have the ability to "mobilize resistance against political and cultural structures that treat black lives as expendable."

322. Caetlin Benson-Allott contends that horror can drive change. She identifies Reynolds's video as one that is "deeply upsetting" in a way that has similarities to the horror genre. As she explains it, the injustice of Castile's death and the urgency of Reynolds's live stream defy assimilation in the context of Facebook's quotidian corporatism. That incomprehensibility is precisely what makes the video horrifying and therefore, as she explains later, compelling.

323. See Michelle Prettyman Beverley, "No Medicine for Melancholy: Cinema of Loss and Mourning in the Era of #BlackLivesMatter," *Black Camera* 8, no. 2 (2017): 81-103.

Michelle Beverly claims that the images associated with the #BlackLivesMatter movement complexly situate us in relation to mourning and ultimately argues that these texts allow us passage to transformative understandings of black life via their capacity to memorialize the dead.

the potential to incite real change in the world. This potential can be likened to the potential that could be inferred from the waiting of Martin Luther King Jr. in prison, or the different potentialities realized by Natasha and Antonio in *Upstate* or of the characters in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, which were discussed in detail in chapter three of this dissertation.

In chapter four, I will show how Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* and *Citizen: An American Lyric* posit a new way to think about the violent images that crowd our television and social media streams. Siding with those who find that these videos have some redeeming qualities, I will ultimately argue that the type of waiting that these videos force can engender positive outcomes.

Rewind as a Means for Social Change

Both *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric*—which was written in 2004 largely before the advent of social media—and Rankine's newer work *Citizen: An American Lyric*—which shares a subtitle with its predecessor—posit that forms of waiting connected to technology can create the conditions for social change. Although these books mostly differ in terms of subject matter—*Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is concerned with the modern pharmaceutical industry, mental health, the television, and loneliness whereas *Citizen* centers on racial microaggressions and overt aggressions as they are perpetrated in virtual and analog life—they both importantly reflect on the way that violence against Black people is portrayed on television and the media writ large. While *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*'s narrative is personal and internal, *Citizen* is more outward-facing and external. We can think of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* as offering an extended meditation about how social change can be created on the individual level and *Citizen* as explicating this issue in terms of its broader socio-cultural context.

In this chapter, I argue that Rankine's books show that the temporality of media landscapes can positively contribute to our individual and collective processing of traumatic events of violence against Black people like Philando Castile's murder. Specifically, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* shows that the media can positively affect individuals' imagination by letting them linger in states of abjection, queer openness, and mourning that help them to empathize with those who are directly affected, connect with others, and finally, encourage criticism of the media itself. *Citizen* primarily argues that our collective histories cannot stay in the past. When the past—and the culture's racism that is often associated with the past—rears its head in the present and threatens to engulf our futures, we cannot assume that we live in a colorblind, post-racism world. Instead, *Citizen* reminds us that direct action is necessary in the present in order to confront the ongoing racism that has been and is currently a feature of American culture. While *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* exhibits the effects of rewind at the individual level, *Citizen* moves more broadly to determine how rewind can help us to rethink outmoded understandings of the way that racism operates. Both suggest that rewind enables new futures and new modes of thinking that reject our current condition.

These texts make these arguments by featuring temporalities that are not in alignment with a progressive movement toward teleology. In order to explicate these temporalities, I utilize the metaphor of rewind to position the waiting that they discuss as a method to affect social change. In terms of its the most common definition, however, rewind specifically refers to winding something backwards—and so, it can seem antithetical to the kind of social progression that social change implies. Rewind's earliest appearance in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) refers to a 1650 usage from *Somnium Cantabrigiense*, which refers to "rewind[ing] a then

unravel'd life."[324] The OED's definitions show that the substance being rewound can be almost anything, including watches, yarn, and tape recorders. In this chapter, I will use "rewind" more specifically to signal the phenomenon that occurs when the disruption of linear time coincides with technology. Often—for example, in the case of the VCR—technology enables the rewind. For example, because of the VCR, the user is able to go back in time to an earlier scene in the recording, moving outside of the linear progression of the narrative and starting the tape over again. For this reason, we can think of rewind as something that follows a path that is more unwieldy than a simple kind of moving backward. While an individual reviews events that have happened in the past—either mentally or with the help of technology—they take a step outside of the forward march of linear time and instead decide to wait in a moment outside of it. For this reason, rewinding involves moving through time in a way that is out of sync with forward-moving progression to a linear end. This chapter will show how this out-of-timeliness can lead to productive outcomes that advance social change rather than working against it.

This chapter will explicate moments of rewind enabled by the media in both *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* and *Citizen* that provide an opportunity for enacting social change. I will discuss these texts in turn starting with Rankine's earlier work, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely.* In this book of prose poetry, individuals are often encouraged to productively rewind—both literally and metaphorically. This rewinding allows for several outcomes: abjection, empathy and queer openness, mourning, and criticism of the media.

Connection through Individual Rewind in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*

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324. Post to the Muses, *Somnium Cantabrigiense, or a Poem Vpon the Death of the Late King Brought to London* (1650), *Early English Books Online,* accessed February 28, 2017, 9, http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:165578:6.

To the extent that *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* has received critical attention, scholars seem to fundamentally agree that the text criticizes the media environment of the late twentieth century. Tana Jean Welch, Emma Kimberley, Kevin Bell, and Elizabeth Frost posit that *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*'s recurring depiction of the narrator watching television and frequent engagement with televised media serves to critique the pervasiveness of this technology and its misrepresentation of reality. They variously claim that the text shows that the media inhibits critical engagement, distorts the truth, and is overly fragmented.[325] Additionally, they argue that the television creates a passive subject—one who has no real engagement with the world depicted on the television. Arguing against this perspective, I show that the text has a slightly more nuanced relationship to the media. Instead of broadly panning the media, I argue that *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* depicts the media in a way that underscores both its ability to create positive change in the non-virtual world and its capacity to encourage criticism of its content. I show that although the television watchers may seem passive, they are far from it—something that *Don't*

325. Tana Jean Welch argues that the disjointed "I" pronoun that the narrative often employs—the narrator(s) speak in the first person, and it is not clear that each individual narrative is connected to the others—is a way to portray the fragmented nature of the media environment. Working against the technological bombardment that often characterizes our experience of the twenty-first century, Welch posits that contemporary media sources disallow and discourage the viewer the from critical engagement. Emma Kimberley argues that *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* protests the way that the media uses words and images to communicate its meanings. Kimberley finds that the news links images and words together to create an illusion of "semiotic completeness" to fix meaning and to create the aura of truth, even when the truth is distorted. Working in the same vein, Kevin Bell takes a deconstructionist approach to *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, arguing that the text critiques language itself, especially, as it appears on television. Essentially, Bell finds that the media makes the news digestible, but robs it of its complexity and meaning. In addition to this concern, Bell is troubled by the way that the media makes us passive receptors to its information. Also critiquing the media, Elizabeth Frost posits *that Don't Let Me Be Lonely* illustrates the problems that occur when a corporeal experience is converted into a virtual one. As such, she finds that Rankine's text criticizes the disembodiment of the media environment.

Let Me Be Lonely underscores by focusing on the psychic lives of television watchers and the virtual connections that are established through this technology. These connections are facilitated by waiting created via rewind. In the first examples to be discussed here, we see rewind happening internally; individuals rewind in a way that causes affect to transfer from the television to the viewer. These viewers disprove scholars' conclusions that the television only transforms people into docile receptors who are unable to connect to people they see through the television and make changes in the real world based on this connection. Later, we see people affected in a way that propels them from their homes into the public sphere where they wait collectively, together creating a visual statement that shows how they are impacted by the television. Finally, I will argue that the medium of the television itself invites criticism of the media.

First, Rankine's text demonstrates that virtual connections can be created through the rewind that the television encourages. Experiencing the power of these virtual connections, the narrator in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* feels pain—a pain that exceeds the virtual and becomes physical. In the eighth chapter of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, Rankine's narrator mulls over the police's assault of Abner Louima. After being arrested outside of a Brooklyn nightclub in 1997, Louima was attacked by a group of New York City police officers. When he was brought to the station precinct house, he was beaten further and forcibly sodomized with the handle of a broomstick. Describing a scene that occurred four years after this assault, the narrator recalls the broadcast of Louima's agreement to take an eight-million-dollar settlement from the New York police union. On these pages, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* includes two still captures from a television news broadcast of the event. The narrator comments,

> Louima looks okay. A reporter asks him how it feels to be a rich man. Not rich, says Louima. Lucky, lucky to be alive. Instinctively my hand braces my abdomen. And the

> other: All the shots all forty-one never add up, never become plural, and will not stay in the past.[326]

The narrator here experiences an affective response to the newscasts of the settlement. Seeing Louima causes her to experience some of his pain—to "brace her abdomen" because she physically feels the injustice of Louima's experience.[327] His past abjection becomes the narrator's own in the present.

Thinking about this kind of degradation and dehumanization, Scott theorizes Franz Fanon's concept of the "native's" tensed muscles, a necessity in the face of colonial domination, which Scott reads as collapsing the past, present, and future because the racialized person is constantly in a state of readiness, prepared to address future harms as informed by historical trauma.[328] In Scott's words, "muscle tension suggests a state of interarticulated temporality insofar as the past fully determines and occupies the present."[329] This interarticulated temporality ultimately allows opportunity and freedom because it lets individuals "linger, dangle, over the empty space of our possibilities" and ultimately to supersede the oppression of linear time and temporalities.[330] For Scott, viewing or experiencing abjection can engender a kind of vertigo that has the ability to throw the individual into a strange temporality that allows them to exceed linear time and find new possibilities. When *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*'s narrator watches and re-watches elements of Abner Louima's trial and original abuse at the hands of the police, she dwells in

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326. Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf, 2004), 56-7.

327. Ibid., 56-7.

328. Scott, *Extravagant Abjection*, 71.

329. Ibid., 75.

330. Ibid., 82.

these moments of abjection and experiences the kind of vertigo that Scott describes—she is physically affected by what she sees on television, so strongly that she feels a displaced pain in her abdomen. This causes her narrative to become less straightforward. After she mentions her pain, the narrative reads, "And the other: All the shots all forty-one never add up, never become plural, and will not stay in the past."[331] It is not apparent what she is referring to when she talks about "the other," but it becomes more evident in the next sentence: "It felt wasteful to cry at the television set as Amadou Diallo's death was announced."[332] Amadou Diallo was shot forty-one times by New York city police officers in 1999. All officers were later acquitted. For the narrator, Louima's settlement recalls Diallo's death, and perhaps the deaths of others. She cannot reside in the present but instead experiences the pain and the strange temporalities of abjection and therefore vertigo because she mentally shuttles between these two events. She cannot fully keep them straight. This extreme emotional reaction that becomes physical creates a fractured narrative that does not fully reside in either Louima or Diallo's temporality, but instead in a moment of rewind that exceeds both times.

This vertiginous reaction is important because it signals that physical change can be created via the television. Further illustrating this argument is the narrative's reflection on the alterations that occur virtually. At the end of this section, the narrator reflects, "Sometimes I think it is sentimental, or excessive…to value each life like that, to feel loss to the point of being bent over each time."[333] Attempting to make sense of her response to the newscast, the narrator cites Myung Mi Kim—a South Korean American poet—who suggests, "it [is] okay to cramp, to

331. Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, 57.

332. Ibid., 57.

333. Ibid., 56.

clog, to fold over at the gut, to have to put hand to flesh, to have to hold the pain."[334] The narrator understands her words to mean, "that what alerts, alters."[335] While concise, this phrase indicates that these painful images and videos have the ability to change those viewing them, that dwelling in this transference of abjection, eventually leads to new futures and horizons, even—following Scott's logic—to freedom. Ultimately, understanding television as a medium that allows for repeated and radical contemplation, Rankine's work envisions a world wherein technology can incite temporal vertigo, highlighting past traumas that allow for resistance in a way that refuses passivity.

In addition to transferring abjection, Rankine's narrative makes it clear that the television can create empathy in the viewer. In the final chapter, the narrator muses, "All of life is a form of waiting, but it is the waiting of loneliness."[336] After this proclamation, the text quotes from Emmanuel Levinas's "The Transcendence of Words," in which Levinas posits that "existence" or "being" is "for the other."[337] Specifically, he argues that "being for the other is the first fact of existence."[338] While Rankine's text is riddled with death and depression, some of its most poignant moments occur when the narrator describes time she has spent others, watching television or just discussing their perception of current events. And so, we can understand the inclusion of Levinas's postulations not as a discouraging statement on the inherent isolation of

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334. Ibid., 56.

335. Ibid., 56.

336. Ibid., 120.

337. Emmanuel Levinas, "The Transcendence of Words," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1989), 149.

338. Seán Hand, Preface to "The Transcendence of Words," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1989), 144.

existence, but rather as the quintessential expression of queer openness. While the narrator internally rewinds when watching television, she is constantly open to the possibility of contact with the other—someone who is inherently different from her. We can see this openness in her relationship with her television, which she keeps on in her bedroom. The narrator explains that she will go into her room during the day in order to change her outfit and "people are conversing," by which she means that actors on television are talking to one another.[339] Interestingly, the narrator does not seem to make a clear distinction between the real people in her life and the characters being transmitted into her bedroom via the television. She invites the other into her home, and even into her bedroom through this device. It is an almost ever-present connection to those outside of her confined world. Acting as a kind of intimate partner, it even lulls her to sleep while her husband slumbers in bed next to her. We can thus see that while the narrator waits, casually watching and rewinding television programs, she is open to those on screen in a way that is outside of reproductive futurism and normative relationships.

This openness is fundamentally queer because she embraces the other in a way that is not in alignment with heteronormativity, which is necessarily discriminatory in some fashion. Heterosexuality is premised on having sexual preferences that involve discriminating against at least one gender identity insofar as, for example, a straight woman will not usually have sex with another woman. Some forms of queer expression, however, do not involve this kind of discrimination. Because the narrator keeps the television on in her bedroom at all times, she does not always monitor its content—it plays whatever it wishes. There is no mention, either, that she chooses to turn it off at any point. The narrator does not seem to reject anyone that comes into her bedroom via her television set; she is open to anyone. This is reminiscent of a scene from

339 . Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, 15.

Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, in which he describes and theorizes barebacking culture in a way that depicts barebackers' extreme openness and willingness to encounter the other. Within this paradigm, Dean recalls a man that he saw in the Mack-Folsom Prison sex club in San Francisco. This man stood "spread-eagled, facing the wall…as various men…fucked him bareback from behind." [340] What is perhaps most unusual about this man—and what Dean is particularly fascinated by—is his apparent lack of interest in knowing the identity of the people who are entering him. According to Dean, "this very handsome guy never turned his head to see who was penetrating him; clearly anyone was welcome to do so…he was so good-looking…that he could have been extremely choosy."[341] Dean argues that it is only this kind of intimate relationship that involves complete openness to the other: "it is the intimate encounter with the other that does not attempt to eliminate otherness…[that is] ethically exemplary."[342] In other words, to Dean, this man's intense openness is admirable because he encounters the other in a way that ongoing partnered sexual relationships or even one-night-stands that include knowing the identity of one's partner do not allow.

Of course, this man's barebacking experience and *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*'s narrator's television-watching practice are different in many important ways, particularly because the narrator from Rankine's book does not directly engage in any physical contact with the other. If we were to think about her sexual practices in a literal sense, we might even think of her as

340. Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 180.

341. Ibid., 180.

342. Ibid., 180.

epitomizing heterosexual identity since she seems to be in a monogamous long-term relationship with her cis-gendered husband (although many of these attributes are not stated explicitly). If, though, we consider the narrator's relationship to television, we can understand it through Dean's paradigm. She chooses to let anyone from the television penetrate her bedroom and lull her to sleep. In this way, she is fully open to the other in a way that is ultimately queer.

In experiencing both abjection and queer openness, we see the narrator leave the confines of the present and psychically travel to other moments in time that allow her to be affected by what she sees on the television screen. Here, Scott helps us to understand that these viewers do not passively receive information, but instead can be so transformed by the content that they see that they can experience vertigo and find new possibilities outside of linear temporalities. The narrator and other characters in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, however, are not always affected in internal ways that have no immediate external manifestation. This text shows that the new possibilities that viewers find exiting linear time can involve leaving the house and waiting in ways that are more visible and collective. This not only depicts the many valences of rewind, but also shows how the effects of television as depicted in Rankine's text far exceed the kind of passive reception that scholars have associated with this media form.

We see this external manifestation in the way that the text describes the aftermath of Princess Diana's death. The much-loved Diana, Princess of Wales, was the first wife of Prince Charles. She died a year after her divorce from Prince Charles in a car crash that many believe was caused by the paparazzi following her car. Seemingly wondering about the legitimacy of those grieving her death, the narrator asks, "Was Princess Diana ever really alive? I mean, alive

to anyone outside of her friends and family—truly?"[343] On the page below these questions is a TV showing crowds of mourners gathered outside of a building, perhaps a home associated with the princess. The narrator later asks, "Weren't they simply grieving the random inevitability of their own deaths?"[344] While this may be one reason for the crowd, people do not gather for the deaths of people to whom they feel no connection. Their very presence, which the text confirms visually, reflects the fact that they had an emotional attachment to Princess Diana that was real, whether or not she was truly "alive" to them. Their physical presence signals that they have been affected in the virtual sphere in a way that has spilled over into the physical.

The mourners' connection with Diana was specifically facilitated by the television because this was one major way that people across the world kept up with the royal family. These mourners wait while they are experiencing this grief, rewinding the images and videos of Diana that they have seen on television. In the present, they mentally slip back into the past and consider the way that Diana has affected their lives across the virtual divide, mourning the future that Diana does not have. Although the demographic composition of this gathering was substantially different from the kind of mass protest enacted by a movement like Black Lives Matter—this assemblage was certainly a white middle-class one—it is still one where grief is real and one that created substantial impact and action in the non-virtual world. For this reason, although the narrator questions virtual bonds, the images in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* speak back against this perspective via the visual evidence of crowds of people who appear to be seriously affected by Diana's death.

In gathering to mourn Diana's death, middle-class grievers were lamenting not only the

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343. Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, 39.

344. Ibid., 39.

loss of Diana, but their own personal losses. Princess Diana, in all her white royal majesty symbolized the promise of heterosexual fulfillment. Her wedding, which occurred just sixteen years before her death, was a media circus of its own. Resplendent in a puffy white dress that defined bridal fashions for at least the next decade, Diana—the beautiful princess—represented the pinnacle of heterosexual success. Diana's fairy tale, and even the illusion of it, however, was not long lasting. We know that Diana was soon separated from her husband, and fifteen years after her marriage, she was divorced. When Diana was killed a year after her divorce, we can assume that mourners were not only grieving her physical death, but her cessation of life as a heterosexual ideal. Diana's divorce and death belied the fairytale myth associated with her. When they mourn Diana's death, they may have mentally rewound or thought back to her wedding day—to Diana stunning in white. Their temporally unmoored understanding of her death propelled them from their homes and into the public. From this we can see how their mourning—the act of grieving the past in the present—creates change in the real world.

Rankine's perception trauma experienced by Black people as it is made evident in interviews has some correspondence to the experience of these mourners, especially in terms of the unmoored temporalities exhibited in each case. In a *Times Magazine* article, Rankine argues that the everyday condition of Black life is mourning because of the daily violence that is perpetrated against people of color. Here, she posits that mourning is not something that is temporary but, instead, is part of a lived experience that extends past the present into a future that simultaneously prolongs indefinitely and feels limited. As she explains it,

> Having coffee, walking the dog, reading the paper, taking the elevator to the office, dropping the kids off at school; All of this good life is surrounded by the ambient feeling that at any given moment, a black person is being killed in the street or in his home by the armed hatred of a fellow American."[345]

345. Claudia Rankine, "The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning," *The New York*

Rankine argues that Black people carry grief with them throughout their everyday life because of violence that racism engenders.

Princess Diana's death created one of the first wall-to-wall media events. For the weeks after Princess Diana's crash, television news programs followed each detail surrounding the event with extreme scrutiny. During this time, this event undergirded and permeated the lives of millions all around the world. It was persistent and pervasive in a way that is reminiscent of the mourning that Rankine describes. Of course, there was an end date associated with the collective mourning of Diana's death—the day that the media ceased to cover the event with the same furor. This is not present in the context of Black grief. Although mourners grieving Diana might have seen some of their dreams die with her, they had no reason to believe that their own life was actually threatened. Again, Black grief does not operate in this way, since those dying at the hands of the police have a strong correspondence to the Black population writ large. Despite these differences, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely's* inclusion of images depicting Diana's mourners shows that television has the power to engender real-life sentiment and attachment—initially through replaying news stories about Diana's life, extended via incessantly dwelling on her death, and finally exemplified by mass moments of waiting that occurred when mourners gathered in England. While Diana's mourners seem to be included in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* in part to criticize the absurdity of connections developed virtually, they provide a model for understanding how virtual connections can signal personal attachment, something enabled by the media and rewind. Furthermore, they show how these kinds of personal attachment are not superficial, but instead compel people to leave their couches and take action en masse.

Times Magazine, June 22, 2015.

Finally, viewers of the television in this text move even beyond these displays of affect; they develop a critical attitude toward the television itself. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* shows how the medium of the television invites criticism of its content. This is primarily apparent in the text's formal qualities. First, the book of prose poetry is an unusual size—it is longer than most other books of its width. Because of this, the book itself resembles a newspaper. Emma Kimberley claims that this format "challenge[s] the relationship between truth and fiction in the text," presumably because *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*'s fictional content clashes with the factual information that a newspaper would generally relate.[346] Confronted with this strange physical form, from the very beginning of the reading process, the reader is forced to have an active relationship with the text—and by proxy, media in general. In addition to questioning whether the text is fact or fiction, the reader is encouraged to question the genre of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* because it is physically unlike other books that they may have encountered.

Supporting this active reading process is the book's textual layout. The long lyric poem is divided into chapters. Separating each chapter is an image of an analog television displaying static. This television is exhibited on its own page—no text is present on the page with the television or on the page's reverse side. In an interview with Jennifer Flescher and Robert Caspar, Rankine explains that George Bush is actually present in the static. In her words:

> You can't really see that it's him, but if you squint you can see a male figure in the static. While I was working on the book, my husband—the photographer John Lucas—said, "Why don't you put an image of George Bush here?" Initially I said no because I wanted to show that America is much larger than an individual. That's how we arrived at the static.[347]

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346. Emma Kimberley, "Politics and Poetics of Fear after 9/11: Claudia Rankine's Don't Let Me Be Lonely," *Journal of American Studies* 45, no. 4 (2011): 782.

347. Claudia Rankine, "Interview with Claudia Rankine," by Jennifer Flescher and Robert N. Caspar, *Jubilat* 12 (2006).

And so, Bush leers at us between each chapter. He is, at once, himself, but also, as Rankine alludes to, a cipher for much more, perhaps America itself or even all that is wrong with the U.S. in the Bush era. Generally, static occurs when the signal on the television has been lost or the television has been turned on or off. By including these visual recesses, Rankine's text shows us that the medium of the television itself gives us the opportunity to reflect on its content.[348] Using an analog television inherently involves waiting—waiting for signal, waiting for the television to turn on, and waiting between channel changes.

This waiting, to a certain extent, is mirrored by commercial breaks in contemporary television viewing, whether this viewing occurs via the television itself or another device. Although marketers might like to think that viewers give as much of their attention to commercials as other televised content, in practice, this is hardly the case. Viewers often use commercial breaks to step outside of the world of televised content, return briefly to their non-virtual life, or to reflect on the televised program. By drawing attention to these pauses and gaps that are inherent to the television viewing experience, Rankine shows how the medium itself encourages us to be active consumers of the media. Although we might be bombarded by its content, watching television involves disassociating ourselves from a strict linear viewing experience. This viewpoint contradicts some media scholars, including, for example, Matthew Fuller, who believe that the television "subject[s]" and "enslave[s]" the viewer who recognizes that they are being enslaved but somehow cannot extricate themselves from this enslavement.[349] Instead, Rankine's text shows us that television creates gaps that throw us outside of a linear narrative and give us the opportunity to reflect on what we just witnessed.

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349. Matthew Fuller, *Behind the Blip: Essays on the Culture of Software* (Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 2003), 20.

Because this image of a singular television separates each of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*'s eighteen chapters and the formatting of the text, white space proliferates in this book in a way that is atypical of most genres. The text itself often is arranged so that white space is maximized. The words on each page often do not reach to the bottom. Frequently, only a paragraph will appear on a single leaf. Because of this, the reader must scan over and page through an unusual amount of blank space to get to the content of Rankine's text. This white space almost acts like a commercial break. In these moments devoid of information, the reader has a chance to wait. They are forced to pause briefly and reflect on the narrator's musings.

Don't Let Me Be Lonely emphasizes the media's power to engender a kind of rewind that enmeshes the past, present, and future. This temporal enmeshment encourages imagination, empathy, and connection—emotions that have the power to incite real social change in the non-virtual world. However, this is not a text that unreservedly praises the twentieth-century media environment. This attitude is further complicated by Rankine's comments outside of her poetry. In a *New York Times Magazine* article, Rankine notes that there are limits to the activism that can occur because of the relationships that people develop via the media. She suggests that simply viewing this media is not enough to engender an active response. As Rankine explains,

> Though the white liberal imagination likes to feel temporarily bad about black suffering, there really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black.[350]

Rankine posits that white people cannot comprehend what it means to live with the condition of mourning and that no amount of exposure to the news cycle will engender in white people the kind of empathy required to make real change because it is something that that they can easily scroll away from. Although Rankine is certainly right that white people will not be necessarily

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350. Rankine, "The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning."

moved by the Black experience as they see it on social media and that encountering Black suffering virtually cannot compare to living in a Black body, white people can certainly be affected and moved to action because of repeated exposure to experiences that are different than their own.

Another impediment to the media's ability to adequately communicate Black suffering is the fact that the media is structurally biased. For example, user interfaces that undergird social media platforms are founded on the idea that users should be able to intuitively navigate their form. In order to maximize ease-of-use, user interface designers and testers imagine the way that users would react to their site in order to create a system that can be navigated without difficulty. Silicon Valley notoriously employs very few people of color,[351] so this user interface design is often based on assumptions white people make about how other white people will navigate the site in questions.[352]

Furthermore, one look at Facebook Live's homepage shows that Facebook never intended for their Live videos to capture disturbing or political content. The copy on this page mentions that Facebook Live videos will allow users to "hav[e] engaging conversations with followers" and "express [themselves] in ways that delight [their] followers," implying that their target demographic is not the average Facebook user, but instead is brands or influencers who have "followers" or "fans."[353] Facebook Live's homepage lists some of their "favorite" Live videos, which range in focus from "humor," to "food," to "sports"—no mention of campaigning,

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351. Anna Wiener, "Why Can't Silicon Valley Solve Its Diversity Problem?" *The New Yorker*, November 26, 2016.

352. Michelle Kendrick, "Invisibility, Race, and the Interface," *Rhetoric Review* 24, no. 4 (2005): 396.

353. "Facebook Live: About," *Facebook Live*, October 1, 2017, https://live.fb.com/about.

awareness raising, or documenting police violence.[354] In other words, the platform was not designed to disseminate disturbing videos that make users question our political justice system.

Despite these impediments, however, it is clear that people of color have interacted with the television and contemporary social media platforms in a way that exceeds some of the structural racism that is inherent in these services. For example, when Diamond Reynolds decided to broadcast Castile's death, she remade Facebook "Live" videos into videos that document death.[355] Subverting the capitalistic intention of the Live videos, Reynolds found new use for Facebook's "live" function. Although the interface of Facebook makes sharing these videos possible, it is people of color who ultimately are responsible for recreating the service in a way that suits their needs and achieves their purposes. In so doing, they create spaces where individuals can rewind in ways that connect their own experiences to the experiences of others—both those who have similar and very different life experiences.

Here, in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, the media and television do not represent loneliness, but rather community; they are not intrusions, but connections; and they do not engender passivity, but empathy. As the narrator waits—through news broadcasts, for sleep, or for meaningful connection with the other—we see her become engaged and have affective relationships with those that she does not know personally, which parallels more modern-day interactions with social media. As such, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* envisions a world in which the

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354. "Facebook Live: Home," *Facebook Live*, October 1, 2017, https://live.fb.com.

355. Although Reynolds was never a part of constructing the code that makes Facebook Live possible, we might think of her as a creator of the service since she contributes to changing its function. In working to remake Facebook Live, Reynolds works in tangent with a variety of un-authorized creators—many of whom write code for open-source applications and programs—who do not fit into traditional conceptions of software developers. Matthew Fuller refers to this group as "hordes of what are seen as rather insignificant non-experts: teenagers, illegal workers, gossip-mongers, and so on."

waiting engendered by technology can provide modes of resistance to reproductive futurism and capitalism, thereby creating new opportunities for world-making.

Social Change via Collective Rewind in *Citizen*

Citizen moves from the individual scale of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* to the collective. While Rankine's earlier text focused on how individuals are affected by the media, *Citizen* thinks more broadly, to consider how rewind might operate in terms of larger cultural norms and contexts. Although the first part of *Citizen* focuses on microaggressions that occur between individuals, the first-person narrator is a cipher for a universal subject who experiences individual racism in a way that is ubiquitous for Black people in the United States. In the second half of the book, the text veers even more broadly to consider cultural events that explicate some of the wider ways that racism affects people of color in the United States. For these reasons, *Citizen* is a less personal text than *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* and offers us the opportunity to understand how rewind operates at the level of culture.

At first, we will consider how the text itself rewinds via its several re-printings that connect to the recent media attention given to police violence against Black people. From there, this chapter will consider several cultural texts. These texts include the image on the front cover of the book, David Hammons's "In the Hood"; Nick Cave's *Soundsuits*, which are included as one of the artworks displayed in *Citizen*; racism perpetrated against Serena Williams during several important tennis matches, which the text discusses at length; and finally, the altercation between France's Zinedine and Marco Materazzi at the 2006 football World Cup, which is also considered in *Citizen* and is accompanied by a video created by Rankine and hosted online.

The primary argument put forward in the chapter will be that *Citizen* depicts the logic of

melancholy—a state that involves the temporality of rewind—as it operates within the broader culture via the texts mentioned above. Ultimately, this second section of the chapter argues that *Citizen* shows that the past cannot remain in the past, that the racism of the past not only exists in the present but needs to be recognized as such in order to make progress towards a better future. If the first part of this chapter has shown how the television has created moments of rewind that allow individuals to experience affect that has real effects in the non-virtual world, the second part shows the broader context of these effects, positing that the intersection of technology (be it the printing press, the technology involved with artistic creation, the tennis Hawk Eye machine, or a digital video) and strange temporalities can engender recognition of the past that rectifies incorrect assumptions about the present.

First, I consider *Citizen*'s many re-printings that enact the temporality of rewind, arguing that the rewinding of *Citizen*, the way that the text is revised and reprinted, refuses to let the past stay in the past. *Citizen* is an ever-evolving text. According to its publisher, the book has been printed seventeen times as of January 2018.[356] Although this is not extraordinary given the popularity of the text, what is surprising is that the text has changed within the course of this reprinting, even though it is only three years old. Specifically, two pages in *Citizen* have been consistently altered in some of the printings in order to memorialize the growing number of Black people who have been murdered by police. This revision, made possible by the technology of the printing press and digital editing software, is seemingly ongoing—Rankine has not mentioned that she will stop updating the book.

Because Rankine continually updates *Citizen*, the text foregrounds the fact that we are in

356. "Citizen in the Classroom, Citizen in the World," Graywolf Press, accessed October 1, 2017, https://www.graywolfpress.org/resources/citizen-classroom-citizen-world.

the middle of a continuous assault against Black lives. These murders do not recede into the past and instead are ongoing. In other words, the past does not stay in the past. The narrator implies that she is keeping these individuals in her memory and that their lives should not be forgotten. They are held in state by *Citizen* and those who read the text are invited to mourn their collectives loses. By revising *Citizen* again and again, Rankine rewinds production of her book, edits the current version, and then sells this copy. When we read and purchase these subsequent printings, we rewind with Rankine, repeating the process of encountering *Citizen*. We are faced with the microaggressions that populate the first section of this book again and relive the narrator's experience of violence and degradation. Although subsequent editions of books like textbooks may signal progress or the author's wish to include new information or new approaches in the revised version, *Citizen* does not progress in the same way. Instead, it reiterates the same story of Black people's deaths at the hands of police. When we engage with *Citizen* we wait with the text, rewinding the same troubling story.

On page 134 in the first printing of *Citizen*, the page reads only "November 23, 2012/In Memory of Jordan Russell Davis."[357] Davis was a black 17-year-old who was killed in Jacksonville, Florida by Michael David Dunn after they had an argument about loud music that Davis and his friends were playing. On the next page, *Citizen* read "February 15, 2014/The Justice System."[358] On February 15, 2014, Dunn's trial ended in a mistrial, although Dunn was later convicted of first-degree murder. The second printing of *Citizen*, however, includes an updated version of these pages. In the second printing, page 134 reads,

November 23, 2012/In Memory of Jordan Russell Davis.

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357. Rankine, *Citizen*, third printing, 134.

358. Ibid., 135.

August 9, 2014/In Memory of Michael Brown.[359]

Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 by Darren Wilson, a white police officer. The third printing of *Citizen* is different from each of the previous versions. The third printing remembers Jordan Russel Davis, Eric Garner, John Crawford, and Michael Brown. Each of these names are preceded by "In Memory of" on page 134.[360] The next line vertically on the page, the text reads "In Memory" and this phrase repeats all the way down to the bottom of the leaf. On page 135, the text reads "because white men can't/police their imagination/black men are dying."[361] The most recent printing, the tenth version of *Citizen*, includes many more names including Akai Gurley, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, and Freddie Gray—all Black men or boys who have died at the hands of the police.

The temporality of this rewinding Black death mimics the temporality of melancholia. Freud originally theorized melancholy as a pathological condition in which the grieving person cannot let go of the grieved object. Instead, the grieving person incorporates the grieved object into their own ego. In doing so, the melancholic person turns away from the outside world and instead focuses on their own psyche and their grief. Unlike mourning, which occupies a definite temporal period, the time of melancholia is ongoing. The mourner is expected and able to move on from mourning. Melancholia, dissimilarly, is not a process, but instead is a condition that the melancholic individual endures for an extended period of time that may have no end. Elaborating on this condition, Freud explains that the melancholic person generally experiences:

> profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to

359. Rankine, *Citizen*, second printing, 134.

360. Rankine, *Citizen*, third printing, 134.

361. Rankine, *Citizen*, second printing, 135.

> a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.[362]

Today, this description of the melancholic's symptoms resonates with popular conceptions of depression. Because of this, it may seem as though there is nothing redeeming in the experience of melancholy. After all, losing curiosity about the outside world or losing the ability to love are not necessarily positive conditions. Despite this, many scholars have recently theorized melancholy as a way to productively hold onto the past.[363] Because of the circumstances of racism, the grieving person can never fully exit the state of grief because the grief is ongoing. By continually updating *Citizen*, Rankine creates a text that refuses to let go of the grieved object—the Black people who have been killed by police violence—in a way that replicates the overall feeling of melancholia.

Returning to the earlier discussion of the way that those who have murdered by the police have been memorialized on social media, it becomes clear that the temporality of melancholia is in effect online as well. Although social media seems to be a product of the twenty-first century that only speaks to the needs of the present decades, its temporality—that mimics the condition of melancholia—enables a connection with the past. In a world where we want to believe that racism is a sickness we overcame in the 1960s, social media reminds us that the racism of the past exists in the present and implies that it will extend indefinitely into the future. Like the melancholic subject, it holds onto grief by replaying and rewinding videos, images, and accounts of violence against Black people. It does not move on from this grief and instead ruminates and waits in the condition of melancholia. Of course, the names and faces change. Social media

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362. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244.

363. See David Eng, Heather Love, Dana Luciano, and Dagmawi Woubshet and discussions of melancholy in chapter two of this dissertation.

forgets individual instances of violence, but because cycles of violence repeat, this neglect is not long lasting.[364] Instead, this technology habitually reminds us that racism exists and that its effects are pernicious. It is painful to constantly experience these cycles, but in an era when the white supremacists in the alt-right claim that racism against people of color has receded into the past, social media affirms what we already know. It provides a record and corroborates the fact that racist acts perpetrated against people of color are a part of our present. As Eng and Woubshet posit, the melancholy opens up connections to the past that have the ability to change conditions of the present. *Citizen* also carries this message. By documenting the racism of modern America—a racism that repeats itself again and again—the text pushes back on any who claim that it has receded into the past.

Social media and Rankine's text also provide what some in the Trauma Studies field call a "testimonial space." On social media, not only are we able to view others' trauma, but we are also able to document and seek support for our own. Often, trauma is difficult to process because it circumvents consciousness and instead becomes rooted in the psyche, inaccessible to the conscious mind.[365] As Roger Luckhurst explains: "We have, as it were, nowhere to put it."[366]

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364. I don't mean to imply here that social media perfectly recollects violence against black people since its content is largely governed by the capricious news media. I also don't mean to imply that social media's memorialization of those killed by white violence has uniformly positive effects. Many have argued that black people killed by police are robbed of their individual identity when information about their deaths has been shared on social media platforms because these people have been transformed into symbols. For more information, see Nicole Fleetwood's chapter "'I am Trayvon Martin': The Boy Who Became an Icon" in *On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination*. With these limitations in mind, I hope to illuminate only that social media has the potential to show that racism against people of color is not an artifact of the past.

365. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4

366. Roger Luckhurst, "Mixing Memory and Desire: Psychoanalysis, Psychology, and

Those experiencing trauma often go through stages of internalization and repression before they can digest and speak openly about the traumatic event. For some people who have reached this stage of recovery and are able to communicate about trauma, social media provides a platform to document racial injustices and to seek community. When the trauma is processed and communicated online, it finds a home in this testimonial space. For those like Reynolds, who record traumatic events in-the-moment, the traumatic event is documented perhaps even before the documenter's conscious mind has full access to it. In these cases, social media and Rankine's text, too, insofar as it documents ongoing violence, may provide a home for trauma even when the conscious mind cannot.

We see this rewinding melancholia echoed in the cover image of *Citizen*. On the front of *Citizen*'s all white cover is an image of a hood—the kind of hood that Trayvon Martin wore when George Zimmerman shot him. Although this image is now associated with Martin, the original artwork is over twenty years old. Entitled "In the Hood," it was created in 1993 by David Hammons in reaction to the Rodney King beating. In this piece, because the hood is no longer attached to the hoodie, Hammons calls attention to the realities of living in a Black body and the violence that one may encounter because of this identity. By displaying this art on the cover of *Citizen* in an era when the hoodie has such a loaded signification, the text alludes to the concerning overlap between violence against Black men that extends across generations. The police brutality that Rodney King experienced uncannily mirrors Trayvon Martin's story. This violence reoccurs and refuses to stay in the past.

Later, the text includes a picture of one of Nick Cave's *Soundsuits*. Cave's *Soundsuits* are

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Trauma Theory," in *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Patricia Waugh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 499.

full body costumes that cover and protect the wearer. Cave created his first suit in 1994 in reaction to the Rodney King beating—an event that clearly is at the heart of this text although it occurred decades before its release. The suits are made from recycled and cast-off material and vary drastically in style. The one that Rankine includes in *Citizen* is covered in realistic-looking flowers. These suits are relevant to the concept of rewind because of their sonic quality. Although the meaning of neither rewind nor *Soundsuits* is directly tied to sound, they both have strong connections to the auditory. Although today's digital rewind is silent, it is difficult to forget the sound that a VCR makes when it is rewinding a videotape. Additionally, video media that is being rewound almost always includes an auditory component—whether this is a television or the noise from a video playing on Facebook. Although *Soundsuits* include no clear audio aspect, Cave calls the suits "soundsuits" because from the first moment he put the suit on "there was sound."[367] When the suits are worn, they jangle in a way that does make noise, but when an individual wears the suit Cave finds that they are protected from the noise of racial epithets and aggressive behavior. He paradoxically explains that "Just standing there can be a statement, you can fill up an entire room by projecting."[368]

By creating a disruption while making little noise with his *Soundsuits*, Cave's work makes an ironic comment about the way that sound is regulated. The field of Sound Studies—which pushes back on the emphasis that our culture places on the visual[369]—argues that the right

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367. Nick Cave, *Meet Me at the Center of the Earth*, in Peter Erikson, "Nick Cave: *Meet Me at the Center of the Earth*," *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art* 31 (2012): 149.

368. Nick Cave, interview by Irina Leyva-Pérez, *Art Districts Florida*, October-November 2010. http://artdistricts.com/nick-cave-meet-me-at-the-center-of-the-earth.

369. Joeri Bruyninckx and Alexandra Supper, "Sonic Skills in Cultural Contexts: Theories, Practices and Materialities of Listening," *Sound Studies* 2, no. 1 (2016): 4.

to create noise is contingent on privilege. Those in power create laws like noise ordinances and give out permits for protest. Individuals who do not conduct themselves according to the state's conception of proper behavior are susceptible to being cited for disrupting the peace or disorderly conduct.[370] Despite the title of his artwork, Cave's suits are mostly silent, and yet they make a loud intrusion into any space that they enter. In this way, then, Cave's work reworks our conventional understanding of silence. In this case, they do not signify complicity with the system or an attempt to work within its strictures. Instead, Cave uses silence to reclaim and take up space, pushing back on the noise in the culture that would hope to encourage him to recede into the past.

Cave employs disidentification—a concept that José Muñoz theorized in his first book and that was discussed previously in chapter three of this dissertation in relation to the destruction-from-within that occurs in the prison system—in order to recycle cultural texts for his own purpose. This is explicated by Jack Halberstam in their article "Wildness, Loss, Death." According to Muñoz, "Disidentification for the minority subject is a mode of recycling or re-forming an object that has already been invested with powerful energy."[371] Disidentification is primarily a process of recycling, but it is not as simple as recycling. Instead, the artist takes cultural forms and remakes them in his or her own image in a way that makes space for an identity that is outside of the mainstream. In Halberstam's formulation, Cave allows the "wild or the space of utopia to appear through the resignification of the primitive and the animalistic in

370. Michael C. Heller, "Between Silence and Pain: Loudness and the Affective Encounter," *Sound Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 46.

371. Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, 39.

relation to the black body."[372] To describe Halberstam's conclusion in terms of its temporality, Cave rewinds. He takes items discarded in the past and uses them to make armor against racial profiling that is supposedly antiquated in order to remake his present.[373] In doing so, he posits a new future, one where these *Soundsuits* are not necessary to protect the wearer from racism.

In addition to including visual evidence of rewind, *Citizen* also dwells on the way that film allows us to replay the past. This is evident in the narrator's account of matches unfairly officiated against Serena Williams. The narrator explains that during the 2004 US Open, Mariana Alves—the tennis chair umpire—made five incorrect calls against Williams. As Rankine describes it, "Commentators, spectators, television viewers, line judges, everyone could see the balls were good, everyone, apparently, except Alves."[374] The narrator notes that this match was one impetus behind the development of Hawk-Eye technology.[375] The Hawk-Eye is a computer system that is now used to determine where exactly a ball lands on the tennis court.[376] It uses

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372. Jack Halberstam, "Wildness, Loss, Death," *Social Text* 32, no. 4 (2014): 143.

373. See D. Scott Miller, "Afrosurreal Manifesto: Black is the New black—a 21st-Century Manifesto," *Black Camera* 5, no. 1 (2013): 113-117.

Miller thinks about Cave's relationship to temporalities in his essay "Afrosurreal Manifesto Black is the New black—a 21st-Century Manifesto." He claims that Cave is an Afrosurrealist. According to Scott, Afrosurrealists are particularly characterized—in opposition to Afrofuturists—as artists who focus on the present and rework the past in bizarre ways that are in accordance with their own lived realities.

374. Rankine, *Citizen*, Kindle edition, LOC 153.

375. Ibid., LOC 153.

376. See Carolyn Guertin, "Handholding, Remixing, and the Instant Replay: New Narratives in a Postnarrative World," in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, edited by Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman, 233-249. (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

Guertin, discussing the cultural relevance of the instant replay, argues that "seeing again" is inherent to the concept of new media, which often allows users to watch or view content as many

technology to predict where the tennis ball is going to go and then creates a digital memory of all of the shots. And so, the replay or the rewind—temporal movement outside of the linear that coincides with technology—can be used in order to mitigate individual racism. Of course, the Hawk-Eye is not a perfect solution. It cannot tame or alleviate racial prejudice and even cannot always ensure that a match will be called in an unbiased way. This is evident, for example, in Williams's 2009 US Open semifinal match. During this match, line judge called a foot fault that "no one else [was] able to locate despite the numerous replays."[377] Unfortunately, the Hawk-Eye cameras do not observe the players' feet, only the ball. Rewind cannot always successfully instate racial justice; the technology of rewind by itself is not enough.

By the end of *Citizen*, however, we do encounter a form of rewind that more consistently is able to push back against injustice. *Citizen* is accompanied by situation videos that Rankine made in conjunction with John Lucas. These videos resonate with scenes from *Citizen* itself. "Situation Video One" shows a slowed down clip of from the 2006 football World Cup. In it, France's Zinedine head-butted Italian midfielder Marco Materazzi. The text notes that lip readers believe that in the moment before the head-butt, Materazzi called Zinedine a "Big Algerian shit, dirty terrorist, nigger."[378] Over the slow-motion clip of the head-butt, Rankine reads pages 122-128 from *Citizen*; the text serves as the script to the video. In the audio that accompanies the video, Rankine creates a counter-narrative. Although the viewer sees an act of violence, the narrator gives context to this violence and makes the viewer aware of the history and cultural context that surrounds this action. This context is primarily communicated via quotations from

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times as they would like at whatever time is most convenient to them.

377. Rankine, *Citizen*, Kindle edition, LOC 170.

378. Ibid., LOC 567.

important Black thinkers—James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, and Frederick Douglass. In quoting Baldwin, the text gives a possible explanation for Zinedine's actions: "'And there is no (Black) who has not felt…simple, naked, and unanswerable hatred; who has not wanted to smash any white face he may encounter.'"[379] In slowing down and replaying Zinedine's actions, the video gives viewers a chance to slow down and to think about why he might have assaulted Materazzi. The video rewrites narratives that have cast Zinedine as irrational and out-of-control. Instead, the viewer is given the opportunity to empathize with Zinedine and comes to realize why Materazzi's comments might have "touched the deepest part of [him]."[380] By allowing us to replay the past, this video documents not only the racism in the moment, but also the context surrounding it, informing the present of these atrocities and making room for new creation. With this video and with *Citizen* itself, Rankine's work creates beauty and spaces of reflection in moments of extreme abjection.

By identifying methods of rewind that occur in these intersections of cultural events and technology, Rankine shows us that holding onto the past is one way of confronting the short-term memory of the current era. When white supremacists argue that racism has receded into the past, they are forgetting both the history of slavery in the United States and also the current state of racism in this country. Ironically, despite the of-the-second nature of the technology discussed in this chapter—like social media—these media forms have the ability to rewind the past in a way that mimics the temporality of melancholy and speaks back to these incorrect understandings of history. By rewinding to the past in these ways, *Citizen* presents new possibilities that have the

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379. James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: *Beacon Press*, 1955), 38, quoted in Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf, 2014), Kindle edition, LOC 580.

380. Zinedine Zidane, quoted in Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf, 2014), Kindle edition, LOC 607.

ability to counteract the racism that the book describes.

Conclusion

Reading *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* and *Citizen* together, it is clear that technology can be utilized to reframe and revise dominant narratives. Although the media environment of the twenty-first century can feel like a deluge of abjection and violence, rewinding, revising, and dwelling in despair can engender action and empathy. It is true that waiting and replay are passive responses to the media deluge, but it is also true that these responses can morph into important gestures of resistance. Rewinding forces the past into the present. It reminds us that our ability to effect change in the future is predicated on our knowledge of the past and gives us hope that this change is possible even in the face of everyday violence and aggression.

Conclusion

> You are standing on a train platform. The fear of missing the train, a slavery to time. There is so much you have never said to your companion and so little time to articulate. The years have accreted around the simple words, and there would have been ample time to speak them had not the years intervened and secreted them. The conductor paces up and down the platform and wonders why you do not speak. You are a blight on his platform and timetable. Speak, find the words. The train is warming towards departure. You cannot find the words, the words will not allow you to find them in time for your departure. Nothing is allowed to pass between you and your companion. It is late. A seat awaits. That the words are simple and true is only half the battle. The train is leaving. The train is always leaving, and you have not found your words.[381]

This meditation about waiting for a train comes at a climax in the 2021 Amazon Prime series, *The Underground Railroad*, during a dream sequence that feels more like real life than nighttime vision. In this dream—which occurs during the eighth episode of the series, "Indiana Autumn"—Cora enters a railway station that is fully realized and bustling with people. It is in some ways an aberration from her life in a mostly historically accurate antebellum south. In adapting the novel to this new format, Barry Jenkins—the creator and director—reimagined Whitehead's literary text in a dynamic way by utilizing the affordances of sound, visual components, and potent storytelling. The series and the novel diverge significantly at times. This is only to be expected given the realities of the two genres, but occasionally, it seems as though Jenkins reinvented the text in ways that go beyond simple adaptation. This dream sequence is a prime example of this re-conception. The creators of this series have chosen to include this scene even though it was not a part of the original source material, and it underscores the way that the narrative grapples with waiting, futility, and the fungibility of reality and imagination.

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381. *The Underground Railroad*, season 1, episode 8, "Indiana Autumn," directed by Barry Jenkins, Amazon Prime video, 1:06:44, aired May 14, 2021, https://www.amazon.com/The-Underground-Railroad/dp/B08XC2DV8N.

Importantly, Cora does not use the station to travel to any particular location. She is not productive; she is not future oriented. She waits in the station, hoping to move from one place to another. At the beginning of the scene, we see Cora walking to the place where the station is located, digging, and then descending into the tunnel. She enters a station that is full of people in every direction. They are talking to each other, looking at the schedule of times, and generally milling about. Cora rides in an elevator and is transported to a sterile building where she encounters yet more wandering interlocutors. At many points throughout the series, Jenkins presents the viewer with a visual scene where a group of people are standing and looking at the camera. They are immobile and just stare without conveying anything in particular. We see this scene repeated for a moment when Cora makes eye contact with a boy. He just looks at the camera and waits in a moment of delay.

This dream sequence feels momentous because Cora is taken by a stationmaster, Ms. Reva, who asks her if she has "told her story"[382]—this emphasis on narrative is later related in the quotation above that comes at the end of the scene. Ms. Reva looks through her documentation and says that she has not found a "Cora Randall" in her books. Ms. Reva says that to move Cora forward they are "required to confirm [her] testimony."[383] Cora protests that she "can't just stay here" because she does not know anyone.[384] Ms. Reva explains in response that Cora can find friends, seemingly implying that the station would become her new community. Being productive and access to physical movement forward are foreclosed unless Cora can determine what her story is and then have it entered into an official record.

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382. Ibid.

383. Ibid.

384. Ibid.

At the end of the sequence, after Cora has briefly left the station, she returns to it and finds that bells are chiming. Although it seems like people are moving about and we hear the sounds of motion, we never see people going on the locomotives themselves. The visual motif of people standing and staring continues again and, in fact, we see dozens of people at the station stopped. They are again looking at the camera, but their line of vision extends to Cora—they are gawking at her. We hear a voice-over of the narrator intoning the words from the quotation at the beginning of this section.

What is so interesting about the narrator's intonation is that it makes the logic of the station clear. Moving forward is not possible without a story. Although Cora certainly has a tale to tell, it does not seem as though she wants to give it to the stationmaster. The narrator says that "you"—who we can infer is Cora—"cannot find the words, the words will not allow you to find them in time for your departure."[385] Even though Cora has reached a place that seems as though it would be ideal to help her travel to new destinations, the logic of the Underground Railroad works to keep her in stasis. Ironically, she goes to a train station and only finds waiting. Indeed, this dream sequence makes the workings of the Underground Railroad that exists in the reality of the series apparent—even though Cora moves from one state and location to the next, she never is truly moving forward. As I discuss earlier in this dissertation, although we see Cora meet travelers going west, we never see her escape to freedom, and neither the novel nor the series convinces the reader or viewer that this ending is fully possible for Cora.

This waiting a component of the central tenants of this dissertation. As I have argued, I conceive of waiting as a moment in the present in which the past overlaps with the future. When one waits, one cannot move forward with one's day. Instead, the mind wanders to the past or

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385. Ibid.

imagines the future—and the present is consumed by this contemplation. Because of this, waiting is different from the way in which queer time has typically been imagined. In thinking of how queer time is the time of waiting, I answer Tom Boestroff's call for a queer temporal schema that lies outside of linear time, one that is rooted in the present and overlaps with the past and future—a kind of interarticulated temporality that fully exceeds linearity. Because waiting is fundamentally tied to the present, it is different past-centric theories of Heather Love, Dana Luciano, and Elizabeth Freeman, the anti-futurism of Lee Edelman and the recuperations of the queer future advanced by Jack Halberstam, José Muñoz, and Nicole Seymour. Waiting focuses our attention on a temporality that has not been considered at length by queer theory—one that emphasizes the quotidian moments that comprise protest and living out of time with normativity in the everyday and present delays of mundanity. Furthermore, following Erica Edwards and Kevin Quashie, waiting foregrounds passive forms of resistance that are not in accordance with Black charismatic leadership or more active forms of protest.

In the series version of *The Underground Railroad*, Cora finds this resistance through *not* telling her story. Although Cora certainly has a tale and it seems as though she can recall the events of her life, she does not readily turn this story over to the institutionalized forces of the railroad station. From what we can tell, her narrative is not recorded in their ledgers. She does not sell it for passage onto the next location. While it seems possible that Cora could use her story to facilitate her movement, it appears as though she is not in any rush to leave the station and instead, she waits in the interstitial space of this locale. Cora's story will not be pried from her through this bureaucratic force. She resists the logics of the station and instead operates according to her own internal sense of what should be done.

And so, we see the thesis of this dissertation repeated in a new way in this adaptation of Whitehead's novel. Although waiting is just a normal part of everyday life, and is experienced by all types of people, I contend that waiting is experienced in an outsized way by those who do not fit neatly into white and straight modes of being—in particular by Black, queer, and Black and queer people because waiting is a punishment doled out by racist heteropatriarchal societal structures. By examining this retelling of American history, we are reminded more strongly than ever that Black people have been waiting for the promise of democracy to be fulfilled since the inception of the American experiment. And yet, at the same time, waiting is a temporal experience that can be mobilized for the cause of social justice and resistance because it is anti-productive and failure oriented. It is fundamentally antithetical to normative structures.

Because I trace waiting from the antebellum era to the contemporary era in this dissertation, I contend that American history is static and anti-progressive. American Abolition, Civil Rights, Black Power, and our own modern era of #BlackLivesMatter may slowly whittle away at American racism but can never irradicate it. My chapters that focus on enslavement, protest, and imprisonment are drawn from the way that African American life is told by historians—ongoing experiences that are simultaneously an element of the past and the present. This enmeshment of temporal periods is important to the way that I conceive of waiting—as an experience in the present that combines the past and future. And so, the anachronistic and enmeshed temporalities of my chapters are an intentional expression of the waiting that I theorize.

The first chapter of this dissertation enacts this kind of temporal enmeshment insofar as I focus on three neo-slave narratives: *Beloved*, *Kindred*, and *The Underground Railroad*—texts that were written in the modern era but concentrate on the past. Sethe, Dana, and Cora produce

new futures through their own bodies, and they reimagine the seemingly heteronormative state of pregnancy in the image of these new futures. Amid this waiting, we can see how these women carve out resistance through self-authorship and production of the self. In the novel version of *The Underground Railroad*, Cora produces herself through the fertile workings of the railroad itself. She produces a story, too. Like in the series adaptation, Cora resists and protest the normative forces of the plantation to carve out a new reality.

So many of the characters I consider in this dissertation could be considered protesters. This is in part because they all struggle against chronormativity and the pressures of society that would encourage them to hue to a typical life course. But, the individuals in the two texts I focus on in my second chapter particularly embody this spirit of protest, in particular because they are drawn from two protest movements: AIDS activism and Black Power. Although *Paris is Burning* and *Sula* were born from movements that rise to the level of historical importance, the moments of waiting I consider are imbricated in everyday life—being "extra"—a form of protest created by Black and queer communities. Implicitly, this chapter shows that protest movements are often enmeshed with everyday protest that is quieter and at a smaller scale. The chapter begins in a contemporary context—an Instagram post by Nikita Dragun. I use her post to show how the “extra” is deployed to signal a break with the conventional—one that is particularly valued in the new economy of taste created by social media. Echoing this sentiment decades earlier, the queens in *Paris is Burning* live in extra time by imagining futures that will never come to fruition because of the AIDS epidemic. Moving backwards in time again, I read *Sula* to think about the queer potentiality of death arguing that Sula lives in extra time. By pairing these disparate texts, I show continuity across decades in American history and the way that the extra resounds in moments of waiting from at least the 1970s to the present day.

Moving from the time of protest to the time of imprisonment, I explore the delay and deferral in the carceral system in my third chapter. Again, this chapter spans decades: the introduction considers the role of imprisonment in the movement for Civil Rights by examining the experiences of Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Eldridge Cleaver in prison. These considerations are juxtaposed against readings of more contemporary novels: *Upstate* and *Sing, Unburied, Sing* later in the chapter. I study how these novels use epistolary time and the time of concurrent sentences to show how these temporal conditions work to undermine the forces of the carceral system. In *Upstate,* Natasha and Antonio fail to communicate because of their limited ability to correspond across the walls of the prison. This malfunction is read through the lens of queer failure, and I show how this allows them to exit chronormativity. *Sing, Unburied, Sing,* uses the metaphor of concurrency—derived from the prison system itself—to show how new modes of familial relation can be achieved. In both texts, I argue that the characters use queer temporal schemas to undermine the carceral system.

In the last chapter of this dissertation, I turn to two books of prose poetry by Claudia Rankine—*Don't Let Me Be Lonely* and *Citizen*. This chapter considers the contemporary context of media landscapes, which include television and social media. Here, I argue that sites like Facebook can positively contribute to individual and collective processing of racial trauma and Black death. Characters in the texts featured in this chapter rewind—they stay in states of abjection—and the texts themselves also formally include features that encourage this temporal mode.

Because my last chapter centers rewind, the structure of this dissertation encourages readers to return to the beginning after they come to its end—to stay in waiting and to linger in the pain across its chapters. To read my project in this way is a small way of experiencing

waiting, and although this dissertation is not preoccupied with the act of reading itself, we can see how this too fits within the framework outlined here. Reading—and especially reading outside of a capitalistic context—is a way of exiting from the relentless march of productivity. Works like this dissertation, which emphasize Black death and violence against Black and queer people, are not quite pleasure reads. They invite reflection and contemplation through their pessimistic perspective. So far, this dissertation has not quite requested action, and perhaps "action" is too active for a project that values failure and lingering in place. Beyond the academy, I can see how my work has implications for pedagogy, resistance building, and community organizing in so far as it contributes to discourses that highlight the connections between Black identity and queer identity, the way that social identity affects one's experience of time, the power of passivity, and the role of the past in the present. Ultimately, however, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to sketch these futures.

I will end this dissertation with a consideration of another kind of future. I ask: is reconciliation possible? At the end of all this waiting, can democracy fulfill its promise to Black Americans? Can those who have access to the structures of power work to create full equity and justice? Is making amends a viable reality? To answer these questions, I'll conclude by ruminating on Nick Cave and Bob Faust's *Amends* exhibit that was on display at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA) in the summer of 2021. In response to the murder of George Floyd and the events surrounding it described by the conclusion of chapter two of this dissertation, the couple invited Madisonians to think about the way that they have perpetuated racism and encouraged them to make amends for these misdeeds and erroneous views. Those visiting MMoCA were invited to write down what they needed to atone for on a yellow streamer and to attach this streamer to a rope in the center of the exhibition room. According to a video

that played nearby the central rope, their goal was to incite change in individuals "from the inside out" through their acknowledgement of their role in racist structures.

Instructions read: "IDENTIFY the pieces of yourself that have contributed to holding anyone in our society back from genuine equality. WRITE them on a yellow ribbon. Then TIE it to the clothesline as a part of this a community correction. INVITE others to join you in this a community effort to ERRADICATE RACISM." These directions made it clear that this exhibit required a moment of waiting—nonproductivity and thinking. They asked museum goers to take a moment outside of the corporate hustle and bustle to think about and identify the "pieces of [themselves]" that were contributing to a lack of equity.

At the time of writing, the exhibit has been on display for about a month and there has been almost no press or social media mentions. While I was there during July of 2021, very few people were writing on the ribbons—mostly people seemed interested in reading other people's replies. The docent said that about a quarter of people they saw added their responses on a streamer. Many of the confessions I read identified a moment where the author had upheld injustice: "I often hold implicit biases against others" and "I have not acknowledged all that I have been given…that others have not." Some of the notes displayed actively supported white supremacy. For example, one said, "I don't believe I have done anything to hold others back." Others were vague: "Love is the only thing in life," "BE KIND TO OTHERS ☺," and "we are all equal."

When I was at the exhibition, I read the ribbons and took pictures. I watched the video and studied the instructions. I wrote about my own shortcomings on my own yellow ribbon. I waited for a while. I am not sure that I was changed from the inside out. To be fair to Nick Cave and Bob Faust, their *Amends* project extends beyond this exhibition. Later in the fall, MMoCA

will host a series of performances by Black artists. This element of *Amends* is entitled, "Call to Action," which implies that making amends goes beyond recognizing one's deficiencies.

Cave and Faust have lofty goals—they imagine a new and better world in a way that reminds me of the hope described by Muñoz earlier in this dissertation. Ultimately, it is unfair to hang the possibly for restitution and reconciliation on one art project. But, their project's title makes me think about more traditional ways of making amends—of putting something right and altering circumstances so that justice has been restored. In this context, making amends would usually mean not only identifying an issue but rectifying it. For white people, waiting inside the space of a museum is not enough on its own to create the kind of change that would bring the end to racism. If amends are truly to be made, action needs to be taken. While this dissertation has shown that for those who are denied agency because of racism resistance is possible within waiting, that delay can be used as a tactic to limit white supremacy, and that failure itself can bring about positive circumstances that allow escape from chrononormativity, waiting does not have the same meaning across identities, and it cannot always bring about the circumstances that are necessary to create justice.

But waiting is not impotent. This dissertation has shown that for marginalized people, in addition to the distress that waiting can engender, it can also contribute to the accomplishment of progressive goals, creation of new opportunities for world-making, and alternative ways of being in the world. While it is not evident that waiting will eradicate white supremacy, it can be used to resist it. There are many who wait—to return to the passage that began this dissertation, all those who have been "cast out of straight time's rhythm."[386] There is power in this collectivity and

386. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 182.

there is hope in it—hope for the present and hope for a new future outside of chronormativity and racist heteropatriarchy.

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