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Imagining the Archive: Speculation as a Tool of Archival Reconstruction

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IMAGINING THE ARCHIVE: SPECULATION AS A TOOL OF ARCHIVAL

RECONSTRUCTION

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in
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ABSTRACT

Imagining the Archive: Speculation as a Tool of Archival Reconstruction

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This thesis examines a speculative methodological approach towards restoring silenced

Black voices in the archive. First, I will discuss the reasons why this work is necessary, exploring

the various patterns of muting, distortion, erasure, and disenfranchisement that Black

communities experience within the United States in both physical and written forms. The use of

speculation specifically addresses the dehumanization that has followed the Black experience in

the United States from the earliest violent incarnation of slavery, and creating the foundation of

this kind of silencing allows us to understand why speculation, as opposed to other

methodological models for archive restoration, is best suited to recovering Black voices.

Building upon this foundation, this thesis then moves to a close examination of two

examples of speculative restoration. The first, *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century*, written

by Nazera Wright, works alongside literature and publications from the United States in the

nineteenth century that used Black girls as the subjects of stories of morality. Wright challenges

her audience to take these stories about Black girls and imagine the perspectives not of the often

male or White authors, but of the girls themselves. The second piece I examine, *The Anarchy of*

Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Matter, is a speculative history of Esther Brown, a black woman arrested in the early twentieth century, whose life was recorded mainly through mentions in police and hospital reports. Wright brings Esther to life, creating the life she might have had and giving her back the agency of having her life's story focus on her. Both of these authors demonstrate ways in which speculation, even if employed to differing degrees, can restore the emotional truth of Black lives throughout history, when their voices have been silenced in the archive.

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Introduction

Saidiya Hartman opens *The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner* with the name of the subject of her piece, Esther Brown, and this represents the cornerstone of the structure of her methodology. Built on research and reconstruction, Hartman attempts to construct the speculative daily life of Esther Brown and her rebellion against state sanctioned violence perpetuated in the visceral shadow of nominally dissolved slavery. Nazera Wright works to a similar end in *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century*, in which she seeks to use existing pieces of journalism and literature of the nineteenth century in order to understand how the tropes of Black girlhood came to be, and in what ways they obfuscate those girls' humanity. Both of these works serve to illuminate a perspective that does not exist in its entirety as the archive stands now. In doing so, these pieces elucidate a powerful tool in the arsenal of those attempting to recover the voices that have been lost or excised from the record of history: imagination. Employing speculation as a means of cultivating the sparse accounts of the lives of those disenfranchised by power structures within society presents a way of highlighting and attempting to restore humanity to those dehumanized under the pressure of a violent society and the shadow of the origins of Blackness in America as a product of slavery. While Hartman and Wright focus specifically on the voices of Black girls and women, their methodology is a framework that can be transposed to serve other Black voices, and used as a means of reconstructing silences within the archive created by violence and dehumanization.

Starting with contemporary examples of the lives of Black individuals being reduced to consumable stories creates a foundation for understanding how Black voices have been excluded from the archive throughout history, and the specific ways in which the imaginative tool of

speculation can be effectively utilized to reimagine the lived experiences of those who were not able to speak for themselves. Understanding why this restorative work is necessary creates the path that the restoration must take, and allows us to understand efficacy of speculation as a tool of restoring Black voices to the archive.

Meaning-Making Through Representation

In *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction*, André M. Carrington explores the relationship between popular culture, speculative fiction, and race. He argues that the interaction between genre and the consumer of fictional works establishes the concept of identity, noting that "we have refracted ideas of Blackness through the meaning-making conventions of the genre" (Carrington 2). Carrington positions his investigation as a way to understand the experiences of Black fans in spaces that do not strive to include them, sparked by his own experiences in the world of fandom culture: the groups that arise in response to certain popular media in order to discuss and celebrate that media. Genre, in Carrington's work, is something that is alive. It is a meeting point between the external forces that guide the creation of media (primarily economic concerns), the subject of the media, and the fans inspired by, who inspire in turn, that media's creation. He writes that, "Genre is not a property intrinsic to a text, for my purposes, but a condition *and a product of* interpretation" (Carrington 7). It is this exchange between consumer and media that creates meaning and identity, and it is this exchange that impacts the understanding and discourse of race in the sector of popular culture: "Literary and paraliterary texts function as historical evidence and fodder for argumentation, and along with other mediations, they posit ideas through which we comprehend our place in the world" (Carrington 8). It is through media that one understands their identity as a person unto

themselves, as a figure within a comprehensible narrative, and as a participant in the culture that narrative produces. Speculative fiction makes bare the process of meaning-making that is already inherent in the way we consume media.

Carrington examines science fiction and fantasy works in relation to the Black characters that they may, or may not, contain, as well as the fandom surrounding those pieces. However, of particular interest in the world of speculation is his final chapter, on ways that Black fans have created fan-spaces in which they celebrate the media they consume, despite how that media does not necessarily represent them either on screen or on page. Specifically, Carrington reflects on his work maintaining an internet archive called *Remember Us*, a site that "collected fan fiction, artwork, and video that portray characters of color from popular media (television, film, comics and graphic novels, and print fiction) in primary and pivotal roles" (Carrington 204). The mere existence of *Remember Us* speaks volumes to the interaction between subject and the representation of that subject. It was a space created by Black fans seeking to reimagine the media they already found a connection with, such as the *Harry Potter* series and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* television show, as something more representative of their own culture and experiences. Both of these pieces of media, along with many others, are largely populated by White characters and actors, giving much of the weight of story, plot, and emotion to non-Black members of any given ensemble. By creating new pieces of fiction and visual art that recenter Black characters into positions of attention, these fans are bringing to light the truth that even in monumentally popular fiction, they must produce their own work in order to feel properly represented by this media. This act of meaning-making, as Carrington has called it, shows how powerful media can be, and how much it can affect one's development of a sense of self and

identity, to the point that the urge to recontextualize one's identity as Black in the landscape of a resonant story is born. Furthermore, Carrington's project is in and of itself an archive. Collecting these pieces of fan interpretation in one place allows for not just one representation of a Black fan's experiences, but shows the range of individual experiences in how Black fans interact with media and establish identity within that interaction.

This, of course, is nothing close to a new phenomenon. The fan cultures surrounding fiction in literature and television is the newest iteration of a long history of narrative serving as a tool of identity. It is something that spans history, and Lisa Lowe explores a much earlier incarnation of this in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Her work takes her to the crucible of race, labor, and movement in the early nineteenth century, and she examines the power and effect of narrative. Lowe dedicates a chapter to exploring autobiography specifically in the wake of the British Empire dissolving its slave trade. Much of her work builds on the exploration of how changing language shaped the practice of "freedom" during a time of political and economic turbulence, when the British Empire was attempting to find ways to replace a workforce that was no longer enslaved. This need shifted the definition of "freedom" as it was employed in practice. Rather than a linear movement from slavery to freedom, Lowe writes that "In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the narrative of freedom overcoming slavery was canonized in British and European political and economic spheres, in discourses of citizenship, free labor, and free trade" (Lowe 46). Freedom, here, is not something intrinsic unto itself; as Lowe points out, the very definition of freedom was taken over and canonized by imperial powers rather than allowed to exist in the form truest to what it was meant to be. By taking control of the narrative, the empire was able to maintain control of what freedom, in the realm of wage labor, truly

entailed, and sculpt it to fit their needs. This is "freedom" in name only, and proves how powerful narrative can be as something to be manipulated and used. The spirit of this controlling of narrative extends to written works, as well. Lowe explores its effects in autobiography, specifically by looking at the paradox presented Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, touted as not only the first autobiography written by a former slave, but "*the* singular narrative demonstrating the overcoming of slavery and fitness for freedom" as cited by "generations of critics" (Lowe 49). However, complications arise when examining the impact of *Interesting Narrative*. It had become a popular work for abolitionists to use as a talking piece in the fight to end slavery, but Lowe points out that it is still only the retelling of a singular experience, and in using this one work as a touchstone for the global experience of slavery, it reduces that experience to a single, linear point in time. She writes, "As the autobiographical subject writes his life, and comes to possess the meaning of slavery as his own "past," the genre does the work of subjugating the history of the collective enslaved within a regulative temporality in which slavery is only legible as a distant origin out of which the free modern subject can emerge" (Lowe 50). Not only does the ubiquitous proliferation of Equiano's story eclipse the voices of others who endured slavery, it creates the belief that slavery itself is a universal experience, that one story can accurately account for the lived reality of those who experienced it. Furthermore, *Interesting Narrative* reinforces the role of Blackness, and freedom from slavery, already embedded in the cultural imagination. Lowe compares Equiano's story and impact against another autobiography of the time, Benjamin Franklin's. Where his story is a contemporary one, and even contains the same overarching theme of the "self made man" that Equiano's does, Franklin's story stands as a testament of his life and accomplishments, "Yet

while Equiano's autobiography also exemplified reason,probity, humility, and thrift, the narrative of the self-taught former slaveis marked, again and again, by the limits to his attainment of freedom" (Lowe 51).

The work Lowe does with examining autobiography lays down the foundation of important threads to follow in the quest to understand where the need for archival restoration arises from. From its earliest incarnation, Black-authored literature has been transformed by non-Black audiences into something both representative of Black experiences as a whole and, simultaneously, obfuscating the reality of those experiences. In the case of Equiano, his life story became a tool of abolitionists, and a reinforcement that of the concept that living as a former slave, a Black former slave, means always entirely tying your achievements, aspirations, and accomplishments into the narrative of earning freedom. For Equiano, even when using his own words, he was denied the chance to curate his own life and present himself as anything other than the image of the hard-working former slave, yearning for the liberal ideal of freedom. Importantly, we cannot say if this image did or did not align with Equiano's desires in self-identification, but because this pattern repeats through to today, we can understand that no matter his specific experience with the reception of his work, it falls into a broader trend of Black works and voices being disenfranchised. From Carrington's work in the realm of current, popular fiction, we can see that across spaces of creation of narrative that the Black experience is inevitably shaped by the White environment in which those spaces are forged. Centuries ago, a precedent was set that Black works belong to a public waiting to use them, rather than to those seeking to convey the truth of their own stories, emotions, and experiences.

It is precisely this that creates a point of entry into archival restoration. Both the archive

and the desire to restore what has been excised are vast concepts, and the task of this work is shaped by the specific way certain voices have been removed. We have seen the way narrative can be usurped as a tool to shape the perception of either its subjects or its authors, and how speculation offers a space to those disenfranchised voices that does not exist in the current discourse or archive. However, the worlds of fiction and autobiography allow for authors or even researchers more flexibility in projecting their own experiences into spaces that should, but do not, welcome them. Moving from the realm of engaging with fiction to reconstituting history necessitates a change in procedure and source material. If speculation is the process of taking what exists and building from that, then at this juncture, the first major hurdle is finding that which exists, something that is often intrinsically tied to the voices of the community that one is seeking to reconstruct. Jose Muñoz explores this phenomenon in his restoration of queer voices and experiences in *Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts*, creating the premise that it is an essentially queer experience to have the records of those experiences exist as "ephemera." Muñoz writes, "This has everything to do with the fact that leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack. Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility" (Muñoz 6). There is a specific relationship that exists between evidence and experience. Muñoz is speaking here to the fact that those within the queer community have been forced by the threat of danger to leave little trace of their existence. Ephemera becomes an appropriate descriptor because that is the nature of the queer fingerprint: moments within the

history of this community are meant to last for as long as they are occurring for fear of attack. In trying to explore moments in queer history, Muñoz acknowledges that the subject of his research has indelibly changed the nature and methodology of that research.

These examples are, on one level, specific to the communities and events that these authors have chosen to focus on. However, despite the disparate natures of fanfiction, nineteenth century autobiography, and queer theory, they all speak to the power of narrative, and the way that across time, individuals seek to understand themselves and the world through the written word. Furthermore, narrative itself can be a tool of repression and silence. These silences shape the way the broader world understands the experiences and history of historically oppressed communities. Without an archive to preserve the voices of marginalized peoples, the power to shape their stories lies in the hands of those with the means of creating archives. When those people are not members of these marginalized communities, the records they keep and pass down through generations provide a manipulated, filtered, and even biased view and understanding of the lives they are, or are not, recording.

The Removal of the Individual from the Black Experience

The restoration of voices to the archive must, then, be shaped by the subject of that research. Turning to the experiences of Blackness, the first step in examining the structure of speculative restoration is to look at the forms the records of Blackness have taken. Nicole Fleetwood gives us language to work with in *On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination*, which, though it is primarily concerned with the current state of Blackness in the United States, is built on the concept of the icon, "a notable public person who represents a set of attributes, traits, or talents valued by a given society" (Fleetwood 7). In this way, icons are not

people in the way of human multidimensionality; they serve as a fixture of the public imagination. They are inherently consumable, a theme that follows the Black experience in the United States. Iconicity itself is not singularly experienced by the Black community; rather, Fleetwood uses iconicity to explore the image of Blackness in the United States from the middle of the twentieth century to the present day. She explores a few different archetypes of Blackness: the politician, the athlete, and the celebrity, writing, "The racial icon is both an exceptional and a common figure. She or he is exceptional as a symbol of overcoming racial inequality and perceived inferiority; she or he is common, given the American public's familiarity and investment in exhausted notions of race, nation, and (under)achievement. Whether a self-conscious and deliberate construction or a product of circumstance, the racial icon—as image, political figure, celebrity, or sports hero—conveys the weight of history and the power of the present moment, in which her or his presence marks the historical moment" (Fleetwood 10). Black iconicity only develops because of the narrative of Blackness, the way that it has become a fixture of discourse and imagination. Rising to a position of fame and notoriety implies that the opposite must exist far more commonly within Black communities. Great achievement is measured by what Fleetwood calls the perceived "underachievement" of Black Americans. Racial iconicity is indicative of the way that Blackness has become a construct of the public imagination.

This is something that Fleetwood shows by examining the way Black icons come to be, a particularly salient process in the case of the Black celebrity. In beginning her exploration of Diana Ross' rise to fame, Fleetwood writes, "Moreover, it is an investment made not only by the aspiring celebrity and entertainment industries hoping to capitalize but also by a willing public

that ultimately judges whether one has reached this vaunted status. The celebrity icon's image is

devoured and regurgitated by rabid fans, casual onlookers, and media producers. Envied and

desired by many, she is the object of fantasy" (Fleetwood 55). In these lines, Fleetwood

establishes the pattern of public engagement and external force and acceptance. The choice to

become a celebrity, in at least the twentieth century, is certainly a choice made by the individual.

But the path into that stardom is one constructed by those with a stake in a celebrity's success,

and the public that affords them the attention, time, and money that is required to reach celebrity

status.

Diana Ross' career lays bare the way that one's image must be carefully cultivated in

order to gain acceptability, specifically concerning the negotiation between race and societal

standards. Fleetwood writes, "The making of Diana Ross as a black celebrity icon in the late

1960s / early 1970s, as she transitioned from being a member of the Supremes, is a fascinating

case study in how the artist and her producers were able to incorporate certain racial markers of

difference into her image and persona while simultaneously cultivating her as an exemplar of

cultural assimilation" (Fleetwood 57). It was not enough to rely on the simple authenticity of

talent, or even the desire for stardom. Rather, Ross' image had to be created by herself and the

producers surrounding her, and it had to take into consideration the conflicts between race and

the ideal of "assimilation," something able to be consumed by a large audience already immersed

in the specific culture of the United States. A culture, as we have seen in Lowe's work, that is

built on the power structure forged in colonialism and catering to the White ideal, and

necessarily differentiates experience based on race. Fleetwood emphasizes this point when she

states, "*To stand apart* and *to stand for* are the jobs of the racial icon" (Fleetwood 10). Racial

icons, Black icons, are not people unto themselves; they are not even celebrities unto themselves. They must, simultaneously, act as ambassadors of their race while reinforcing the image of American prosperity and celebrity culture. Evidence of this is seen in how Ross, who began her career as a singer, developed into a touchstone through which we can "trace important developments in black politics and visibility and in the mainstream incorporation of aspects of black culture into American entertainment industries" (Fleetwood 58).

This is most visible in Ross' rise to fame at Motown. As an industry, Motown was incredibly exacting in how its stars looked and behaved. Fleetwood quotes Mary Wilson, a former member of the group The Supremes, the group that Ross rose to fame within, saying that Motown was modeled after the "charm schools" of movie studios in 1930s and 1940s, and that in a decade of rebellion, Motown came across as "archaic" (Fleetwood 62). During her time at Motown, Ross' name was changed from Diane to Diana to appear more sophisticated and adult, and she, along with many other singers, was coached to perform in a certain style that appealed to a "mainstream acceptability" no matter if the style was in opposition to a singers' preferences, in order to prevent creating an image of "black excess" (Fleetwood 62). The tightrope that Motown performers were made to walk on is a perfect distillation of Fleetwood's concept of *standing apart* and *standing for*. The repackaging of Blackness as something palatable to broad, non-Black audiences meant not denying the racial element of Motown's performers and music, but also purposefully separating performers from any hint of superiority, boldness, or unpleasantness; in Fleetwood's words, "[Motown] manufactured black music and black appearance as endlessly pleasurable and accessible to multiple audiences in the United States and beyond" (Fleetwood 61). Wilson called Motown's practices archaic, and there is plenty of truth in

her statement. These ways of controlling image were far from new in their day, and predated

charm schools. Changing one's behavior to suit a specifically White audience, even changing

one's name, has its roots deeply planted in the American landscape. This thread, of Blackness

being filtered through White experience and desires, is one that has been woven through

centuries of history.

While the study of the Black celebrity can illuminate many conditions of what it means to

be Black in the public eye, we must then be able to transpose these conditions outside of the

realm of stardom, both in contemporary and historical study, which is something that Fleetwood

takes time to do. While Fleetwood spend much of her attention on the iconicity of Black political

leaders, celebrities, and athletes, she opens her piece not with the examination of seemingly

exceptional individuals, but with the story of Trayvon Martin. Martin gained national attention

posthumously; it was the story of his murder, and the acquittal of his murderer, that became

famous. Martin was murdered at the age of seventeen in 2012 because, as his non-Black

murderer claimed, he looked suspicious. Rather than stopping after calling the police, Martin's

murderer "took the law into his own hands" and proceeded to fatally shoot him (Fleetwood 14).

At its surface, this case already shows the work of image-based assumption influencing action.

Martin, an unarmed teenage boy, was murdered on his way home at night under the assumption

that he was engaging in some suspicious activity. Moreover, his murderer's acquittal in the face

of the plainly available facts in the case, stands as testament to how powerful image can be. The

archetype of Black criminality is so deeply embedded in the national imagination that even

readily available evidence proving Martin's innocence was enough to neither prevent his death

nor convict the man that killed him. From the beginning, Trayvon Martin the individual was

eclipsed by a history of criminalizing the identity of Black people.

This does not end with Martin's death, though, and the events that occurred in response to his murder perpetuate the precedence of the icon over the person, even when they work in support of Martin and the epidemic of violence against members of the Black community. Of particular importance is the attention Fleetwood pays to Martin's social media presence. She notes that the most widely circulated image of Martin is a photograph he'd taken of himself and posted online, commonly known as a "selfie." She writes, "Although it often appears fleeting and can be erased in an instant by digital technology, the selfie is nonetheless part of the storied genre of portraiture. Like other portraits, the selfie is a deliberate representation of a public persona, a mode of self-conscious "sitting" in front of a photographic lens. Whether playful, sensuous, earnest, or aspirational, the selfie suggests a desire for recognition; it is a request for acknowledgment, an appeal to be a subject of value" (Fleetwood 16). The selfie encapsulates the importance of starting the work of archival restoration in the present; by virtue of self-populated social media sites, we have access to a living archive. The modernity of Trayvon's life and the events surrounding his death provide accessible insight into how one's voice is transformed from a tool of self-possession to one of reduction.

Fleetwood suggests that selfies are a mode of self-curated expression, something that extends to one's social media presence. With control over the images taken and posted, the owner of any social media account is expressing the truth of their experience; even though they do not document every moment of their life, and even if they purposefully stage or alter the images they upload, *because* they make the active choice in what content to feature, they are in control of the image they choose to display. Martin's social media presence was his own, until, in the wake of

his death, it suddenly was not. The trial and subsequent protests seeking justice for his seemingly

racially-motivated murder were colored from the outset by image. Martin's murderer claimed

that Martin's way of dressing, an oversized grey hoodie, was what marked him as suspicious.

Fleetwood explains the associations connected with this article of clothing, saying, "The hoodie

is an article of clothing identified with a generation of urban black young men and, for

Zimmerman and many others, is a marker of black criminality. This article of clothing is steeped

in the history of racialized style in the United States" (Fleetwood 18). She traces the hoodie's

origin in hip-hop and "athletic wear starting in late 1980s and 1990s" (Fleetwood 18), which has

created connotative connections between the appearance of the hoodie and images of urban

Black youth. This fixture of public imagination may have been the cause of Martin's murder at

age seventeen, but it also become a rallying cry for those fighting against racially-motivated

violence. Fleetwood moves on to speak about how one particular selfie of Martin's became a

focused image of the anti-violence protests staged in Martin's name. Of particular interest,

however, is how that image was adapted over time, moving from a cutout of Martin's selfie to the

iconography of the hoodie alone, painted in silhouette with no figure wearing it. So powerful was

the image of the hoodie itself that it became a signal for those supporting these protests.

Fleetwood writes that, "The protests took place on multiple platforms. At rallies small and large

across the country, groups showed up in hoodies with signs declaring, "I am Trayvon Martin" or

"We are Trayvon Martin." Selfies were posted on personal pages of social media networks with

members hooded, somber, and staring into the camera" (Fleetwood 20). This tactic, of course,

works for organizing large groups of people in supporting a movement for justice. It is a way to

solidify the desperate cry for an end to the wanton murdering of Black youths in a single,

recognizable symbol, consolidating voice, power, and energy.

However, it serves another purpose, even if this one arises incidentally. By taking Martin out of his metaphorical hoodie and leaving space for anyone to inhabit it, it also removes him from his own story. Trayvon Martin, the person, is subsumed by Trayvon Martin, the face of a movement. It also allows for empathy to bloom where it might have been originally been denied a chance to grow across barriers of culture, race, and the judgement that comes with those barriers. Fleetwood writes, "In this light, many non-blacks are able to recognize a young black male as a sympathetic character—as one with whom they form a deeply emotional and performative attachment, a type of claiming" (Fleetwood 21). It is only in removing Martin from the iconography of his hoodie do non-Blacks form an emotional, sympathetic bond with his memory and his story. This is a phenomenon examined at length by Kyla Schuller in *The Biopolitics of Feeling*. She explores the relationship between impressibility and sympathy, and how emotion and, subsequently, worth, in nineteenth century America arise from the perception of one's physical vulnerability, the "body's interaction with its environment," which was necessarily affected by one's race and sex (Schuller, Introduction). Though her work is focused on America's nineteenth century, the evolution of that relationship between the physical and the emotional can clearly be seen in how Martin's removal from the conversation surrounding his death in everything but name alone allowed for external audiences to consume the fight that his death provoked. Looking back at the notion of a self-curated social media account, we can see that Martin, like every individual, had his own sense of self and identity. Yet in death, he was removed from the story of his individual life, with its nuance and personal truths. His image was claimed in the name of accomplishing something beyond the scope of his life, no matter how full

– if short – that life was. In placing themselves in Martin's story, and his hoodie, those using his image failed to understand the flaw in their cry of "I Am Trayvon Martin": they were not Trayvon Martin. As Fleetwood remarks, "*They are not the dead son of Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin*. They are alive and their future outcomes are yet to be determined" (Fleetwood 23). Trayvon Martin was not always an icon, the memory of his final moments. He was, initially, a person: multidimensional and self-possessed. What was kept alive after his passing was not the truth that he meant to convey of his life by his online presence, it was the image of what he represented for those championing justice.

The stories of Trayvon Martin and Diana Ross, early American autobiographies, and the negotiation of Black fans in fictional spaces all serve as a blueprint in seeing where and why archival restoration is such important undertaking. All of these instances are merely iterations of the phenomenon of reduction that occurs throughout history. The more recent entries, such as Ross' and Martin's lives, allow us to see the subsuming of the individual for the sake of creating a story beyond the boundaries of their lives, because access still exists to their unmediated voices, whether by interview or by internet archival record. However, the source material of the experiences of Blackness becomes far sparser than what is available in a world where individuals can curate and preserve their own voices without an intermediating force. Jose Muñoz proposed that the queer experience is one of ephemera. In his work, he encountered a censorship of his subjects both forced and personally chosen We see from these examples that the Black experience is censored by different means; it is transformed, often for the benefit of non-Black audiences. Whether they are consumers of performance, activists seeking justice, or merely observers, non-Black audiences shape the records left of Black lives and experiences. The reason

that speculation is so vital and necessary as a form of archive restoration of these specific voices

is because it addresses the particular ways that the voices of Black people have been silenced.

Speculation is form of creating narrative and, within that narrative, creating life. That creating of

life is a crucial undertaking because Black history in the United States is one of violence,

subjugation to White power, and becoming part of a narrative not serving to speak the truth of

their lives, but for the benefit of non-Black audiences. If we are to restore their voices, it must

come from a place of recognizing the importance of their humanity.

Rehumanizing to Illuminate Emotional Truth

As we have seen, the reduction of Black individuals and lives into stories and images

means turning accounts of their lives into something appealing and acceptable to broad, often

non-Black audiences. What we lose, beyond the material truths of their histories, are the truths of

their experiences as people, what they felt and how they wanted to live and be remembered. In

the absence of concrete accounts of experiences of marginalized groups as written by their own

hand, scholars and readers seeking to understand what has been removed or unrecorded are

tasked with not only interpreting what remains, but using those remains to construct an image of

what could, reasonably, occupy that space. Exploring these voids necessarily creates the question

of how one constructs, even speculatively, subjective experiences. It is the subjective nature of

establishing humanity, though, that yields a way to explore those unrecorded histories. Emotion,

in particular, can be a guiding force in conceptualizing silenced experiences. In *Marxism and*

Literature, Raymond Williams speaks on the task of understanding things that appear ephemeral,

such as relationships, emotions, and social life, and creates the framework for understanding

them in his theory of the structure of feeling. He writes, "We have indeed to find other terms for

the undeniable experience of the present," and then, a few lines further, "If the social is the fixed

and explicit – the known relationships, institutions, formations, positions – all that is present and

moving, all that escapes or seems to escape from the fixed and the explicit and the known, is

grasped and defined as the personal: this, here, now, alive, active, 'subjective'" (Williams 128).

What remains fixed and readable, any known and documented quantity, allows for one to

understand the subjective for its absence in that documentation. Williams uses art as a way to

demonstrate this, saying, "The point is especially relevant to works of art. Which really are, in

one sense, explicit and finished forms – actual objects in the visual arts, objectified conventions

and notations (semantic figures) in literature. But it is not only that, to complete their inherent

process, we have to make them present, in specifically active 'readings'" (Williams 129). When

an artist produces work of any kind, what we can access is the often physical, or otherwise

knowable, finished product. However, that art is not only a creation and statement unto itself; it

is a record of the process that shaped it. By interpreting that process through "active reading," we

resurrect a moment in history and bring it into the present. It is no longer something that

happened. Rather, it is now something that has more to say because it has been given life in the

active investigation of how that piece came to be. This is particularly important when we move

to understanding silenced voices; allowing what is available regarding these voices to exist

unexamined means perpetuating their silence and reinforcing their experiences as something that

has passed. Yet, this same concept also creates the possibility of bringing these voices to light

and life through the study of what is missing from the accounts that remain. Muñoz highlights

this process in work in *Ephemera as Evidence*, noting that race scholarship suffers a similar lack

of "historical grounding" (Muñoz 7). Transposing parts of his methodology proves useful in

exploring what is left unsaid and unwritten in the archive, namely the eponymous "ephemera" that can be found throughout what does exist as historical record. He goes on to say that what he intends to challenge is the supremacy of the archive itself, the deference to its monolithic precedence as a means of accessing and validating history, and it is in this tradition that speculation can be utilized as a tool for taking the gaps, absences, and silences within the archive and, if not restoring the precise, articulated truth of events, then restoring the emotion and multidimensionality that are excised in reduction, and calling attention to that reduction's existence at all.

A unifying thread between the works by Muñoz and Williams, which diverge at the specificity of their subjects and critical grounding, is the acknowledgement of humanness as a necessary backbone of scholarly work. Humanity is not only important as a valid subject of study; it is similarly rewarding as a methodological framework for conducting that study. Muñoz writes, "The presentation of this sort of anecdotal and ephemeral evidence grants entrance and access to those who have been locked out of official histories and, for that matter, "material reality"" (Muñoz 9). In the particular arena of Black girlhood and womanhood of the nineteenth century, approaching from a lens of humanity and personhood is both the substance and means of archival restoration. Violence is an intrinsic facet of the absences in the archive, both in the content of those accounts and that system of power that excluded those accounts, and speaking on violence without the conversation of flesh, life, and humanity rends any discussion of violence moot. The Black community in particular is shaped by a legacy of the loss of agency and the suffering of abuse as they were disenfranchised from their own "captive bodies" within slavery, as Hortense J. Spillers writes in *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe*, stating how Black slave

bodies were sites of rule from an external authority and valuable for their flesh rather than for

their lives (Spillers 68). While the examples might diverge in nature or severity, echoes of this

are visible in the current examples of the reduction of Black lives and voices, in what we have

seen of Diana Ross and Trayvon Martin. Their images and stories were specifically crafted to

suit the needs of others, whether those others were audiences waiting to consume the art they

produced or ostensible allies looking to champion a cause using the fodder of a lost life. This

consumability shapes the way Blackness is captured on the page in the archive, by way of pain

being forcibly divorced from its impact on any individual's emotional life. Pain is a uniquely

human experience; following the threads at the edges of what remains means seeing the

humanity woven into what is being recreated. Alexander G. Weheliye speaks at length about the

necessity of the study of the flesh, writing in *Habeas Viscus*, "The flesh, rather than displacing

bare life or civil death, excavates the social (after)life of these categories: it represents racializing

assemblages of subjection that can never annihilate the lines of flight, freedom dreams, practices

of liberation, and possibilities of other worlds" (Weheliye 2). Alluding to Giorgio Agamben's

exploration of bare life in his piece *Homo Sacer*, Weheliye complicates the stringent way of

classifying life as causing and caused by politics, a means of access to a political sphere, by

proposing the concept of the social afterlife. Agamben asserts that, "At once excluding bare life

from and capturing it within the political order, the state of exception actually constituted, in its

very separateness, the hidden foundation on which the entire political system rested" (Agamben

12). The state, a sponsor of what Muñoz calls the official record, is dependent on life and its

ability to include or exclude that life from the agency of decision making and community

politics. Weheliye's proposal, that there is a social afterlife that will realize itself regardless of

that dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion, speaks to the fact that bare or not, life holds intrinsic qualities that do not exist in a vacuum. Even if these worlds of feeling and desire and liberation are silenced, they always exist, and can bloom even in the destruction of the life that held them. There are things that do not die when the voices that speak on them have been muted, and it is worthwhile to give form to what remains, the dreams and practices and movements that create new worlds unto themselves.

What causes this reduction of life and voice is the process of dehumanization. Dehumanization has been a facet of Black life from the earliest conceptions of slavery in the United States, and it is not an incidental association. Spillers and Weheliye both write about the effects of commodification on Black lives and bodies. In *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson explores the connection between power, capital, and dehumanization as they are expressed in the American climate of slavery. He makes the point that "Human beings have always found naked force or coercion a rather messy, if not downright ugly, business, however necessary," and that this force, or power, must be "immediately interpreted in socially and cognitively acceptable terms." Power, he says, has been historically handled in either the extreme of openness, humanizing it "by the use of various social strategies such as Active kinship, clientship, and asymmetric gift exchanges," or by the other extreme of "concealment, in which coercion is almost completely hidden or thoroughly denied" (Patterson, Introduction). These two ways of dealing with power seem, ostensibly, diametrically opposed. Humanization and concealment appear to be vastly different methods of understanding and using power. However, if we look back to our modern examples of Black reduction, we see some form of this pattern woven through both Trayvon Martin's posthumous memorialization and Diana Ross' early career.

Martin's name and story were certainly not concealed, nor was leniency granted to his murderer in the court of public opinion, particularly after the court of the American legal system him did grant him that mercy. On the other hand, and though this story works with physically lower stakes, Ross' early days with Motown saw a balancing act between the face and image she showed the public, and the way that image was carefully and undeniably cultivated behind the scenes by Motown producers, until Ross herself was more figurehead than artisan at her craft. What these seemingly disparate displays of power show that that power is still, no matter what, taken from the hands of the subjects themselves. In Martin's case, millions surged to demonstrate in person and online and did so by creating ties and bonds with him, by stating that *we are Trayvon Martin*. They did this while echoing the symbology of his life, but physically and cognitively removing the actual *Trayvon Martin* from images of his hoodie, so that they may occupy it themselves. This active kinship created an imbalance between subject and speaker of that subject. It removed Martin from the unfolding of his own story in the way that Ross' grooming and presentation removed her from her early work. Whether by overrepresentation of the generosity of those in power, or a denial that that power exists, agency is still stripped away from Black subjects.

The repetition of this pattern of putting the onus of life and agency in the hands of those with power over Black subjects creates an association that links Black subjects with inhuman positions to occupy, ones that best serve the material, social, and cognitive interests of a non-Black power structure. We see this iterated in the ties between the perception of Blackness and criminality, an assumption that cost Trayvon Martin his life. Lisa Cacho calls this process "criminalization" in *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the*

Unprotected, drawing a distinction between the definition of criminalization as being perceived to be committing criminal acts, and criminalization as state of being, always, criminalized. She writes, "To be stereotyped as a criminal is to be misrecognized as someone who committed a crime, but to be criminalized is to be prevented from being law-abiding" (Cacho 4). We see the roots of this prevention throughout the foundation of slavery, and the concept of Blackness, in the United States. The criminalization that Cacho speaks to is the latest iteration of the *othering* that follows Blackness, as Cacho calls it, being "ineligible for personhood" (Cacho 6). The archive is rife with examples of this inability to access personhood for Black people. Take, for example, the scene that C. Riley Snorton uses to open his book *Black on Both Sides*. Snorton looks at a conference given by James Marion Sims in 1857, on the use of silver sutures in surgery. Snorton points out that Sims' experimentation was conducted on three named "chattel women," Anarcha, Betsey, and Lucy, as well as a number of "unnamed captives" (Snorton, ch. 1). Immediately, there is a visible connection between Black bodies and the physical violation of being used as test subjects, presumably without giving consent as evidenced by their status as captives of chattel slavery. Indeed, Snorton opens this chapter by referencing Spillers' words on "atomizing the captive body," placing his work directly in conversation with Spillers' argument of the dehumanizing process of Black bodies being reduced to sites of production, profit, and violence. This is particularly relevant in the case of Sims, who performed gynecological surgery on Black slaves who, as L. Lewis Wall points out in *The medical ethics of Dr J Marion Sims*, could not consent and were not given anesthesia, which was already available at the time of these procedures (Wall). Sims certainly gained much from his use of Black bodies in his medical experimentation, given the position of prominence and power that Snorton indicates in capturing

this single scene, and the mention of Sims' "international acclaim" (Snorton, ch. 1). This is an important demonstration of the power that Sims holds at the expense of Black lives, but of equal importance to note is the setting of this scene itself. It occurs in front of an audience, an audience to which Sims relates not the stories of these women that he experimented upon, but of his findings. He physically spoke of and for these women, showing a very literal interpretation of stealing the voices of Black women. These women are a tool for Sims to utilize in achieving his ends, and a footnote when his accomplishments have been met. Most remain unnamed, consigned to remaining a fixture only of Sims' story, because theirs did not leave enough evidence to know them as the people that they were. On every level, these women were excluded from their own lives and the chance to tell their own stories.

If denial of personhood, humanity itself, is the way that Black voices have been cut from the archive, then that is what must be the site and means of archival restoration. When the evidence itself is either gone or remodeled and filtered through White experience or desires, the task becomes reconstructing what reasonably could have been one's response to being the subject of fear, commodification, and pain, what it felt to live these experiences. A salient place to see reconstruction at work is the transportation of slaves across the Atlantic, a site that Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley tackles in *Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic*. Hers is a work dedicated to not only the study of race, but the study of queer experiences – or lack thereof. She opens her piece by stating, "And water, ocean water is the first thing in the unstable confluence of race, nationality, sexuality, and gender I want to imagine here. This wateriness is metaphor, and history too" (Tinsley 191). From the beginning, Tinsley establishes that the space she is working in, while built on recorded history, is one constructed through imagination, through her scholarly

and human desire to both know and feel. This piece is born from Tinsley's unraveling of

tangential research: "I began to learn *this* black Atlantic when I was studying relationships

between women in Suriname and delved into the etymology of the word *mati*. This is the word

Creole women use for their female lovers: figuratively *mi mati* is "my girl," but literally it means

mate, as in *shipmate* — she who survived the Middle Passage with me. Sedimented layers of

experience lodge in this small word" (Tinsley 192). Tinsley unpacking of the word *mati* is

indicative of the kind of path the methodology of restoration must take. Her use of "sedimented"

as a means of describing the way she discovered this truth is a cornerstone of how life can be

given back to experiences that might otherwise remain buried. The connection between girl,

mate, and shipmate speaks to so much more than the history that these women lived through.

Turning the word for those with whom you shared traumatic, physical space into something that

means a relationship and indicates love and closeness is an act of turning pain into something

else. By exhuming the etymology of *mati*, Tinsley uncovered the emotional truth of the women

who used this word. No longer were they merely figures that counted in describing the scope of

the slave trade; in giving life back to this language, Tinsley restored a concept of how these

women coped with surviving the Middle Passage, and the way they chose to interact with each

other in love. Furthermore, Tinsley illuminates a viscerally human act of resistance in this

declaration of love, saying, "In so doing, they resisted the commodification of their bought and

sold bodies by *feeling* and *feeling for* their co-occupants on these ships" (Tinsley 192). Spillers

has established the important fact that during and following trans-Atlantic slavery, Black bodies

and lives were subject to use for the benefit of those who could profit off of them. They were not

only unfree in their living conditions, but in living itself, which is reflected in how deeply the

stories of their emotional responses are. Tinsley demonstrates that her discovery came from the pursuit of deconstructing language and following its etymology. It is not something readily available for those accessing an archive to read and discover. Taking one small word and building from it a history, giving that history a heart, shows a kind of self-possession and agency that records of slavery lack. Even if it did not mitigate the violence of that passage across the Atlantic, nor the horrors of an enslaved existence, Tinsley's work takes the narrative of slavery away from the buyers and gives it to the bought. These women, in continuing to choose to act on their human emotions and to forge relationships among themselves in the bowels of these slave ships, rebelled against the notion that they were worth only what someone else was willing to pay. And Tinsley, too, rebels against the notion that a slave narrative cannot be given back to slaves. Centuries after the span of their lives, these women have been given back agency stolen from them by the exclusion of their voices from the archive.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs takes this imaginative space even further in her poetry anthology *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity*. Her work is as important as is the way she arrived at that work. From her initial notes, Gumbs describes being deeply affected by attending talks hosted by Hortense Spillers, and upon examining the impact of Hortense's research, Gumbs realized why she was so drawn to it. She writes, "What kept me coming back to her essays over and over again was not only what she said (though what she says about race, gender, capitalism, and literature is enough to come back to forever); it was also *how* she said it. Again and again, there were phrases in her work that did far more than make her point. They made worlds. They invited affect. They brought to mind nameless women in unknown places who were laughing and looking sideways at each other and a world that couldn't understand them" (Gumbs 1). Even

before she begins the bulk of her work, Gumbs makes a point that clarifies the necessity of speculation. Though the women mention by Gumbs and written about by Spillers are unknown, even though they reside in unknown places, even though they may not have names or descriptions or anything concrete left that might allow us to trace them back to their identity, they are still given life. There is still a truth in understanding that no matter how little we have left of these women, we can give them a posthumous platform to inhabit what their stories and lives could have been, and we can, in turn, learn what those experiences likely would have been. Gumbs' assertion that the *how* of Spillers' writing was as important as the *what* speaks to the importance of emotion in restoring these seemingly lost histories, and indicates that even if we cannot ever exhume the specific details of these women's lives, we can still bring some of their truths up to see the light. Even Gumbs' dedication, "To Black women, who make and break narrative" restores power and agency to women that have, for so long, remained fixtures of others' stories. This restoration occurs on every page of *Spill*, every chapter dedicated to an experience of Black womanhood, most in slavery or captivity, written with emphasis on the internal life of those women. Gumbs crafts what their thoughts could have been, how they may have reacted to sorrow, pain, violence. How they understood themselves and their bodies. Her first chapter, an introspective look at a woman who had lost her child, relates the visceral, deeply human reaction to something that might have otherwise remained a statistic, asterisk, or footnote in history, or might have been otherwise molded into a voyeuristic tragedy by a non-Black author for a non-Black audience. "she did not cry. she did not touch. it was too much. the texture of her loss," (Gumbs 7) Gumbs writes, conveying in short, staccato sentences almost mimicking the way one's breath catches in their throat or their heart beats faster at the bearing witness of

unimaginable tragedy, that there was nothing bearable in this loss. Gumbs does not breeze through the pain as a point on a timeline or even as a wrong committed over the course of history; this is not about the scope of history. This is about the woman, "she," who may not have a name that survived but can still be validated as the center of her own story. And she can also be allowed to explore and reclaim her own body in this space of speculation, as Gumbs moves on to write, "where was she weak? she looked at her body and saw only pores, only wet spaces, vessel, opening. she was whole. was she. born or made. was she possible? she looked at her fingertips for a seam. pinched her skin in case it was all a dream. was she real? the new female being, first of her kind, couldn't believe herself" (Gumbs 13). Through Gumbs' speculation, this woman is the one examining her body. There is no mention of how capable her body is working or producing; there are no other eyes or hands present. This is not an evaluation of her worth. Rather, it is a rumination on her very existence: what it means to be whole, to be real, and to be female. Existential considerations on the state of one's humanity is a radical rebellion when speaking on Black women during and after American slavery. In a world that commodifies the bodies of these women, rejecting that power structure is a way of exploring the experiences that *must* have happened, given the intrinsic humanity of every person, regardless of the record that exists.

The Methodology of Speculation

Speculation is a powerful tool in both understanding the feelings and lived truths of those who have been denied space in archive, as well as giving those individuals a chance to become the agents of their own stories. Moving from the broader, more emotion-based worlds that Tinsley and Gumbs have created, we can take from their examples to work more closely with

archival material. Nazera Wright models a methodology of balancing archival work and speculation in *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century*, using a mixture of well known and lesser known texts as a starting point for examining the complex environments and inner lives of Black girls in the nineteenth century. The subject of her study is emblematic of the power of her methodology; in her introduction, Wright speaks on the place that Black girlhood occupies in literature, particularly within American literature of this specific period. She writes, "Whatever stage they chose for their writing, the Black girls they wrote about appeared to carry stories of warning and hope, concern and optimism, struggles and success" (Wright, Introduction) and sets herself the task of discovering the reasons why the tropes surrounding Black girls and girlhood exist as they do. From the outset, Wright is focusing her attention on the intersection of thought and fact. The image of carrying a story speaks volumes to how, in the absence of their own voices recorded in the archive, Black girls have become vessels of projected ideals. It is not their voices that are heard; they amplify the sentiments and attitudes of those who surround them and write their stories. Those of whom Muñoz would say owned the "rigor" of recording history and recording specific stories to survive the passage of time (Muñoz 7). The sources Wright references span a continuum ranging from the seemingly non-fictional press to the more saliently creative realm of literature, but she approaches her reading of these pieces in a similar way: as vehicles that create stories in a "literary genealogy" (Wright, Introduction). Wright examines the sponsors of this writing, from the authors to the publishers to the mediums, tracking what voices most prominently shaped every produced work, what ideology was woven into the fabric of those works, and how it was meant to shape the consciousness of its intended audience.

Opening with a look at the earliest Black presses, Wright establishes the landscape in

which writing occurred as one still struggling with national identity in the wake of achieving

sovereignty. "The Black press emerged in the second half of the 1820s, when the nation was still

largely perceived as a new republic that had thrown off an oppressor" (Wright, ch. 1). The

question of self perception was intrinsically tied with the drive to create and maintain an identity,

both for individuals, particularly along the axis of how one functioned within a particular

community. A governing public sentiment was the support of the national identity, the

prioritization of the larger society over the benefit of the individual. This can be explained by

Williams' exploration of the idea of determinism, the setting of limits. Black society was not

immune to the idea of limitation. Williams quotes philosopher Friedrich Engels, stating, "We

make our history ourselves, but, in the first place, under very definite assumptions and

conditions" (Williams 85). Here we see a dissonance between the innate drive for agency against

the backdrop of the assumptions and conditions that inform experience. Even free Black

communities in northern half of the United States felt the conditions of their recent history of

violence, and the continued slavery to the south. This knowledge of limitation creates, as

Williams defines, "pressure" (Williams 87). The conditions of the past and the present created a

need to forge a communal identity in order to attempt to integrate with society at large. This

leads to placing greater priority on the production of symbols of compliance and order over

individual human lives. The Black press, such as *Freedom's Journal*, embraced this practice.

Wright notes that, disenfranchised by a White-dominated society and facing difficulty finding

work and fulfillment against systemic barriers to entry in the workforce and the public forum,

Black men had to create their own kind of masculinity and manhood in light of how they were

denied the more traditional paths towards the kind of manhood that White men evinced (Wright,

ch. 1). The same held true for Black women, who found themselves contending with the same

issues of being denied access to the kinds of acceptable womanhood found in White society. The

struggles of daily life were both created by and exacerbated by the more abstract quest for an

identity denied by circumstance. Here, Wright establishes the power of suggestion and

perception, the power of imagination in the form of narrative, at work in the content of her study,

namely in how those in the Black community actively shaped their community's image by

creating an ideology. Particularly, those who shaped that image were specifically "elite Black

males" (Wright, ch. 1), those who controlled the press. A gap appears in the archive here; even in

a Black-owned press, the images of Black women and children were created and proliferated by

Black men with enough power and means to do so. It is their biases and values that have been

preserved in print and, thus, accessible to readers almost two hundred years later. This is

particularly salient considering the juxtaposition of what could have been a vehicle for

broadcasting the voices of an oppressed community, against the fact that even in a Black-owned

paper, those voices were tailored by those with the power to project rules for the kinds of

morality, compliance, and domesticity expected from members of the Black community.

Utilizing the relationship between agency and image is a model for finding what voices are

not present in the narratives that exist. Wright connects the writing featured in *Freedom's Journal*

to the origins she is exhuming of the tropes of Black girlhood. She argues that "Black male

editors wrote and reprinted articles that assigned roles to Black girls that suited their framework

of adopting the values and mores of the white middle class as a route to greater participation in

civic life" (Wright, ch. 1). This is a clear and purposeful curating of voice and experience with

the intention of "mobilizing and uniting" Black communities (Wright, ch. 1). Intentionality is a

crucial facet of the process of usurping the voices of others; it creates a distinction between those with and without agency, and highlights that the power to affect others by creating and broadcasting an archive lies with those who silence all voices and perspectives but their own. What readers are left with are highly mediated accounts, shaped by specific intentions and experiences and excising others. Wright complicates the acceptance of these accounts by offering different perspectives, taking the stories apart and exposing different facets to the light. In her exploration of reprinting articles between Black and White owned presses, Wright features an excerpt from an account of a young slave girl who, after not hearing a request from a White guest, was subjected to a lashing carried out by her lover, another young slave. In examining this article, Wright attempts to give voice and agency back to the girl, arguing that her story of bravery in defending herself from the violence of the White man was instead made into a lament of the emasculation of the young Black man; her suffering became fodder for his story to spark empathy and compassion on the behalf of Black readers, or a cautionary tale against rebelliousness to White readers. In neither reprinting is the girl made the centerpiece of her own story, which is something Wright attempts to correct, saying, "It was the black girl, rather than the young male slave, who fought back against her aggressor in an act that displayed her courage and unwillingness to be a victim, yet the account did not celebrate her bravery" (Wright 31). This is an explicit point of departure between the archive that exists, here the article in question, and the experiences excluded from that archive, namely the attempt of the girl to reclaim agency against violence and oppression.

This act of mining an archived publication for the implicit perspectives that it contains but does not feature is a bridge between what exists and what can be imagined in the spaces between

the lines. Following in this logic, this methodology can be transposed to reexamine more nuanced work, produced by voices closer to their subject matter and more concerned with authentic experiences, such as the literature written by Black women. Though they are, still, removed from their subjects by time when writing on Black girls and girlhood, "African American women writers drew upon their own experiences and presented black girls who faced situations their real life counterparts might encounter" (Wright 60). This strikes closer to the kind of authenticity that attenuates the larger the gap between writer and subject. Still, the perspectives of these writers can be enhanced by the kind of work that Wright employs in the more performative press articles. The tracing of why these particular stories have been encoded with the plots and messages they have illuminates the context of everything that has sponsored the authors' perspectives. Wright speaks both on stories featuring young Black girls authored by Black and White authors, and placing these in conversation allows one to see not only where they differ, but where they work together as well. These disparate texts, at odds in their authenticity given the gap between the authors' firsthand knowledge of Black girlhood, can be read together to imagine what the response might be from a Black girl herself in regards to the representation of her experience. Of Black-authored texts, Wright explains that a unifying theme is the way Black girls are "prematurely knowing" in the face of the violence and hardship they experience (Wright, ch. 2). Of White-authored texts, Wright highlights the sentimentality, the way the violence experienced by Black girls is meant to evoke sympathy in readers, and that none of these stories feature girls at leisure or play (Wright, ch. 2). The unspoken overlap, here, is that in neither perspective are these girls treated in the model of childhood one might expect, and both place an emphasis on the body, sometimes in excruciating detail, as a site of pain and

punishment, but not as something inhabited by an emotional, nuanced, individual. Looking back at Spillers' assertion that, "We lose any hint or suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features" (Spillers 68). These stories take Black girls and deconstruct them to parts of a whole, with flesh that stands for ideas and not intrinsically a home of and product of that human personality. Black girls are survivors and morality tales; they are lessons more than they are people.

Of course, not all works were meant for non-Black audiences, nor are they all removed by time. Even in the literature meant to be read by Black girls and women, they do no feature as subjects of those stories nor as authors. We have seen this at work with *Freedom's Journal*, and it emerges again in conduct books not just for White audiences, but for Black audiences. Wright spends time examining conduct books written by Black authors for Black communities, focusing in particular on *Floyd's Flowers*, written by Silas X. Floyd. The publication of these and other conduct books was based on the desire to "gain a sense of personal worth and dignity in a racist society" (Wright, ch. 5). Floyd, among other authors, made the claim that certain behaviors associated with the "lower class," particularly when exhibited by girls, cast a negative impression over Blackness as a race altogether. Furthermore, these books "emphasized the role of the black elite as instructors of the black reading public" (Wright, ch. 5). There are a few moving parts here that create a rigid set of boundaries within Black communities in the early twentieth century. Placing the burden of systemic racism on the actions of girls alienates them from their own personhood. Rather than having the freedom to act on their own desires and for themselves, even after technical, legislated emancipation, these girls were treated as representatives or ambassadors for their entire race. This creates a pressure for young girls to

carry the weight of the violence they may have received under the perception that if their "positive" actions might be enough to quell that violence, then their "negative" actions might be enough to sustain that violence. Furthermore, the circulation of these texts reinforces a power structure within the Black communities themselves, elevating "elite" members, those with education and means, as shepherds, guides, or gatekeepers. It consolidates power within these communities to those who already had power, relative to poorer or less educated Black individuals. While there is no denying that the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries were rife with racism, it is still important to note that even within their own communities and among those that shared their race and cultural heritage, Black girls were still routinely disenfranchised and used by those with more power. Their lives were still subject to scrutiny and they were still made to conform to the standards set by those with influence over their lives. Those whose names, inevitably, were made part of the archive precisely because they made these girls the subject of their work.

Much of this code of conduct was centered around puberty, and the transition from girlhood to womanhood. Wright quotes *Don't! A Book for Girls* in what author Robert Charles O'Hara dictates as improper behavior for young Black ladies, including, "idleness, flirting, dancing, vindictiveness, backbiting, gossiping, and slangy speech," and Wright goes on to note, "This text is an early example of advice for black girls that paid particular attention to the changes in behavior that should follow puberty, including how to sit, talk, and walk" (Wright, ch. 5). Focusing attention on the apparent problems that arise in the transition to womanhood calls womanhood itself into the spotlight. Not only are Black girls subjected to scrutiny for their race, they are similarly held accountable as representatives of their gender as well. Their experiences

are intrinsically shaped by the intersection of Blackness and womanhood, with both of these

sources of identity being used not to allow these girls to understand themselves as people, but to

herd them into formations of specific, allowable behavior under the threat of the violence that

followed Blackness in the United States. If we employ speculation here, we can reverse each of

these terms to understand what Black girls might act like should they be allowed the freedom to

live as people unto themselves. Idleness, for example, might mean a lack of engaging in activity,

whether that be work or school or whatever responsibility they were accountable for. However, it

could also merely mean moments of rest, or even activities taken up in the name of leisure,

activities that rebel against the idea of productivity. Flirting and dancing, too, cover a wide range

of social behaviors from the chaste to the physical to the fun. Even descriptors carrying negative

connotations, such as vindictiveness, backbiting, and gossiping, might indicate anything from

heated, malicious fights to impulsive reactions in the midst of an argument, or simply moments

of bonding and talking about the news concerning peers and friends. From these *don'ts*, we come

up with a myriad of *dos*: where one girl may take more time off of work or school, another might

make herself even busier by taking time to engage in meaning-making, but unprofitable and

uncommodifiable, leisure activities. Where one girl might spend an evening daydreaming,

another might be dancing with her friends. Where one girl might lash out in hurt over a slight or

a broken heart, another might seek revenge, and still another might fight until she reaches some

new understanding or compromise. Even a small engagement with speculation unearths the

diverse array of *what could have beens*, all reasonable assumptions given the fact that for

everything that is not allowed, there is a behavior that inspires this ban. Moreover, what we learn

is that each of these forbidden actions leads to an eventuality of these girls and young women

acting for themselves. Idleness, flirting, dancing, vindictiveness, backbiting, gossiping, and even slangy speech are all born from the desire to act in one's own self-interest. They are honest expressions of human emotion, and whether they contain the possibility of making mistakes or enemies along the way, they speak to an undeniable desire to act upon one's humanity.

Both the press and the works of fiction highlight the efficacy and necessity of the human-focused methodology of imagination. There is not only an absence of childhood and humanity in these stories and articles, there is an absence of challenging that or illuminating that in these stories as well. While the physical and mental violence remains rightfully accounted for in both perspectives, it is still couched in the specific motivation of conveying a message through its representation. Whether that was to teach the resilience necessary to survive, or to provide a tale of tragedy and the impression of moral scaffolding for children to follow by sacrificing the lives of Black girls on the page, the utility of Black girls eclipses their personhood. These stories divorce the violence against the flesh from what gives that flesh life, what Weheliye might argue ignores the "ontological totality of the human" (Weheliye 4). Even in the absence of agency when facing systemic violence, there exist other nuances of humanity that emerge when liberty and freedom have been distorted, obfuscated, or otherwise denied. The resilient survivor, the brutalized tragedy, and the victim are all facets of experiences of Black girlhood in the nineteenth century, but isolating them with intention of projecting an image of universality or totality in their existence means necessarily transforming the subject from person to object without an emotional inner life, and sometimes without even a name. It follows that the necessary next step in understanding who it truly is that lives between the lines of these pieces, that personhood must be reconstructed from what we do have, by bridging the distance with the framework of

imagination.

The power of imagination as a tool of archival restoration is pushed towards bolder potential in the hands of Saidiya Hartman. Where Wright creates a foundation of questioning perspective and bias in order to examine where certain tropes originate, Hartman proposes synthesizing what is known to create something entirely new. In this case, the speculative history of Esther Brown, created from piecing together police and psychiatric records of young Black women living in the emergent ghetto after the decline of the plantation. In *Anarchy*, Hartman references evidence of incidents that have occurred in order to reconstruct the life of someone who could have lived through those incidents, Esther Brown. Esther Brown, of whom Hartman says has created nothing to be added to the catalog of history, "did not write a political tract on the refusal to be governed, or draft a plan for mutual aid or outline a memoir of her sexual adventures" (Hartman 465). In Hartman's work we have moved beyond the construction of methodological foundation and delicate, careful exploration of silenced or warped voices and into a kind of construction of what could have been, might have been. The precedent Hartman sets is to open her piece with a name. This decision reverses the pattern of story subsuming person, and instead places immediate, singular focus on the who, silencing the questions of why and how before they are even asked. What we are reading is about and centered on not girlhood, womanhood, race, though they all work in an assemblage of parts to shape the experience of our focal point character; we are, first and foremost, reading about Esther Brown. It is her name that takes precedence, even when Hartman mentions authors and activists that Esther has not read or encountered. Their names, names like Emma Goldman, come later, and only in passing, if they are mentioned at all and not alluded to through their works or their music. Within the first few

pages, Hartman shows motion through the established canon of scholarly work by specifically

referencing where they do not cross paths with Esther, how she does not read Marx's *Grundrisse*

the correct way, or touched anything penned by Wells (Hartman 466). Hartman uses her first

pages to paint an image of a young woman who does not contribute in acceptable ways to

liberation and rights movement for the African American community, who does not enjoy

working, who does see herself as the champion of a cause beyond that of surviving, or possibly

thriving, in her everyday life.

What we have, instead, are Esther's feelings. "Esther Brown hated to work," Hartman

writes. Every chore is tiring, and her employer is "too cross" (Hartman 467). As we get to know

Esther, we learn her likes and dislikes before we learn anything about her labor or production or

what she symbolizes in society. In two sentences that are breezed through, Hartman mentions

Esther's enjoyment of partying and the disappointing marriage she ended. These are stated

without emphasis, placing Esther as the actor with agency and not lingering on these events as a

site of tragedy, merely mentioning that the marriage was "disappointing" and "short lived" and

lead to her moving out, taking lovers "bound by need and want, and not the law" (Hartman 467).

If Spillers attests that the "atomization" of the Black body is a way to keep it captive and divorce

it from the person to whom that body belongs (Spillers 68), then Hartman answers this by

making the visceral details of Esther's body private only to Esther. She intimates at difficulties,

the men with "easy hands" and failed relationships (Hartman 467), but the details of these facets

of her experience are not made visible to readers as a matter of course. While Wright shows us

that in the archive that exists, the difficulty, struggles, and violence would have been the focal

point, likely while sacrificing the story of the subject herself, Hartman uses imagination as a way

not only to build a speculative memoir absent of this explicit degradation, but also literally leaves

the choice of how to interpret Esther's life in the care of her readers' imaginations. This is

particularly important having seen the way that gender so sharply influences limitations on Black

life. Spillers and Weheliye speak about the Black body itself being a site of commodity and

repurposed for others' gain. Snorton showed the specific way the female form served as a place

of experimentation, on display to him and then, secondhand, to his audience. Wright has

demonstrated that the Black and feminine work together to force Black girls and women to serve

as representatives of their race and gender, to become subjects of scrutiny, derision, and violence

precisely because of the intersection of these axes of identity. Hartman joins the conversation by

purposefully withholding the gruesome, the visceral, even what could have been the pleasurable.

All pain and all delight, every moment of Esther's life, is purely *Esther's*.

    The structure of Hartman's methodology is intrinsically tied with the story that she chose to

tell. Examining the kind of life Esther leads is crucial in understanding how Hartman models the

restoration of voice, story, and agency. "Esther Brown did not write a political tract on the refusal

to be governed, or draft a plan for mutual aid or outline a memoir of her sexual adventures" is

how Hartman opens her piece (465). Before anything else, her readers know only two things

about Esther Brown: her name, and that she has not written anything political or personal.

Hartman explicitly spends the majority of her introduction, the better part of three pages,

demonstrating Esther's aversion to work. "Esther Brown hated to work, the conditions of work

as much as the very idea of work. Her reasons for quitting said as much. Housework: *Wages too*

small. Laundry work: *Too hard*. Ran away. General Housework: *Tired of work*" (Hartman 467).

Esther is clearly positioned on one end of the spectrum of need versus want; when listing her

reasons for disliking her positions of employment, she succinctly and definitively sums them up

as unenjoyable or otherwise intolerable. It cannot be ascertained that she has suffered violence,

terror, or trauma. Rather, the injustices she finds speak to the fact that she expects better; if she

claims that the wages are too low, she is asserting her right to ones that are higher for the work

required. If the laundry work is too hard, it means that she desires something easier.

Dissatisfaction is a reaction that is born from the sense that the opposite should hold true, that

satisfaction should be a choice made available. To further highlight this nuanced, human

perspective, Esther does mention the kind of tragedy her story could have been made into,

saying, "Housework: *Man too cross*. Live-in-service: I might as well be a slave" (Hartman 467).

These are references to abuse and the horror of slavery, and they, too, are couched as

impediments, listed last and in the same tone as the complaints that the work is too hard and the

wages are too low. They take on the same quality of dissatisfaction evinced in what can be called

the more minor grievances Esther holds. Ultimately, the intrinsic quality shared by both the

unfairly low salary and the allusion to slavery are that Esther can and does choose to leave both

behind, and she leaves them because she wants to.

Additionally, more than merely accessing Esther's feelings, we see echoes of the conduct

codes Wright focuses on. Everything that we come to associate with Esther, her dislike of work,

her personal life, her avoidance of the political, speaks to traits of self-possession, and self-

centeredness in the very literal sense of the word. Esther is the center of her world. She reacts to

things from a place of genuine emotion, even if those emotions rebel against the notions of

propriety and production. In fact, in the opening pages of *Anarchy*, Esther embodies the *don'ts* of

the conduct books that Wright spent time focusing on. We see here a desire for idleness, for

flirtation and dancing, for forming bonds and favoring her time, her leisure, and herself over

work. Before Hartman touches on the prison rebellions that inspired her work, she is already

showing that merely living is in and of itself a form of rebellion. This is the type of revolutionary

humanity that Tinsley speaks of, the concept of *feeling* and *feeling-for*. Radically, the person that

Esther seems to *feel-for* most is herself. Hartman speaks of her relationships with her husband

and her family, but they never overshadow Esther herself. Indeed, Esther's thoughts and feelings

about them are all in relation to her experiences in interacting with them. This becomes

important when considering that reduction in the archive and in a person's present means making

them part of someone else's story, whether that be as a subject of a White audience or merely in

the context of their relationships with others. It is through the use of Speculation that Hartman is

able to show how Esther felt about herself, how she saw her life and how she wanted to live that

life. It is the reverse of taking images from a boy's social media account to champion his life

without the presence of his voice or his reality, and it shows just how powerful a tool speculation

becomes when employed for the sake of giving someone back the power torn from their hands.

The agency that Esther expresses subverts the precedents of the literature that has been

recorded in the archive, the works that take, out of necessity or design, instances of torture and

survival and allow them to grow larger than the human life on the page. Esther, who is named

fully and often throughout *Anarchy*, is not owned by her history; she is the one who owns it. She

is the one to understand the pain of her genealogy, let it inform her understanding of the world,

and still claim agency in how she wants to live her life despite, as Williams would say, the

limitations that necessarily shape her perspective and opportunities. Esther's character forms in

the wake of literary ancestors that are more tale than person, and Hartman uses her voice to

project the things they might have wanted for themselves, were they allowed to want on the page. Written under different circumstances, Esther's literary ancestors' nuance, desires, and possible want of satisfaction have been sacrificed for the cause of preparing Black audiences for the hardships they must weather within their violent environment, or the cause of inciting sympathy in audiences primed, already, to see them as separate from human altogether. Martyrs are not afforded the luxury of idleness, no matter how innate idleness is to the human condition. Esther Brown, though, is not a martyr. She does not aspire to the status of role model. She does not weather the injustices and discomforts of her life with silence and grace. Her resistance is personal, "a revolution in a minor key" comprised of a riot of "beautiful noise" (Hartman 467). This kind of what-could-have-been, what-might-have-existed inner life of Black girls and women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries must be constructed from what we know of history, emotion, and the simple humanity of having a life made of wants as well as needs.

Esther manages to prioritize herself in her own life despite the oppressive conditions in which she lives. Hartman does not pretend as if hardship does not exist; what she does not do is allow it to eclipse Esther. Drawing from what is known, what the archive has recorded, Hartman writes, "What the law designated as crime were the forms of life created by young Black women in the city. The modes of intimacy and affiliation being fashioned in the ghetto, the refusal to labor, the forms of gathering and assembly, the practices of subsistence and getting over were under surveillance and targeted by the police as well as the sociologists and the reformers who gathered the information and made the case against them, forging their lives into tragic biographies of poverty, crime, and pathology" (Hartman 470). Readers learn of the conditions

that shape Esther's life after we learn who Esther is, allowing her desires and attitudes to shape

our perception of her before her environment gains the opportunity to create her itself, without

her voice, choices, and dreams. In a meta-textual critique, Hartman goes as far to comment on

the kinds of stories that exist documenting the lives of Black girls and women, stories that

become "tragic biographies" in the hands of scholars who not merely record what they see, but

"forge" the account they commit to the page, creating a record of a human life that lacks the

humanity of that life. In fact, Weheliye cites Ronald Judy, noting that "the systematic study of

Black life, which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century in the United States, is

coterminous with the rise of the human sciences" (Weheliye 20). Black lives have long been

fodder for the clinical eye, the eye that seeks to dissect and define what it means to be human

while Black. Hartman uses the space of imagination to find more than only the tragedy in the

appeal to pathos, or the cold, so-called scientific dehumanization of Black lives. She works to

extrapolate the agency that exists in Esther's commitment to remaining authentic to her inner

life. "Esther Brown was wild and wayward. She longed for another way of living in the world.

She was hungry for enough, for otherwise, for better. She was hungry for beauty. In her case, the

aesthetic wasn't a realm separate and distinct from the daily challenges of survival, rather the

aim was to make an art of subsistence, a lyric of being young, poor, gifted, and Black. Yet, she

did not try to create a poem or song or painting. What she created was Esther Brown" (Hartman

469). Everything that comprises personhood is evident in this declaration of identity. The

systemic difficulties, already well documented in available histories, newspapers, and

biographies, exist in Esther's world. But Hartman creates something else that exists in that

world: Esther Brown. In Hartman's hands, Esther Brown answers the sociological tragedies and

morality tales of Black girlhood and womanhood by wanting beautiful things and easy things, wanting her life to be an act of art, by creating herself.

The apotheosis of Hartman's methodology is evidenced in her examination of Esther's arrest, on false charges of prostitution. Hartman writes, "To be willing or *willful* was the offense to be punished. The only way to counter the presumption of wrongdoing and establish innocence was to give a good account of one's self. Esther failed to do this as did many young women who passed through the court" (Hartman 473). It is, perhaps, unsurprising that one more systemic barrier for Black communities has been their unfair treatment under the law, but Hartman manages to capture precisely why it is so important to acknowledge. It is Esther's willfulness, her desire to purposefully seek fun and satisfy her desires that has put her in the line of fire of the authority of the state. This is a game of perception; she is perceived as morally unjust and, furthermore, unwilling to live in a way that conformed to an image of repentance and innocence, to create a "good account" of what her life is or could be, and therefore is found guilty. Nominally, the verdict is passed for a punishable crime, prostitution, but as she had not engaged in prostitution it is her life, her dislike of work and want of things like idleness and pleasure, that condemn her. "The state was as intent on preventing the dangers and consequences posed by *Negroes assembled in a riotous manner*. Gatherings that were too loud or too unruly or too queer," explains Hartman (475). No matter how willful and self possessed Esther is, no matter how much agency she finds, she is still subject to the systemic limitations that haunt the world in slavery's wake, such as the vagrancy laws meant to perpetuate the restraint and control of the Black community. Esther cannot escape this reality, which Hartman dutifully explains, though she does not allow this to consume Esther's story. Even within the limitations of the law, Esther

remains, in Hartman's care, fully human. "Esther Brown was confronted with a choice that was

no choice at all: volunteer for servitude or be commanded by the law" (Hartman 476). Because

she is human, Esther still longs to find a choice regardless of whether one exists.

That humanity continues to shine through when Hartman introduces the way Esther is seen

by the community around her. Our opinions have already been formed by being introduced to

Esther before we meet the police, the prison authorities, the psychologists examining her in jail,

even her family. "Attitude: She is inclined to be sullen and defiant," Hartman quotes of the notes

taken on her. "Note: Patient is a colored girl with good mentality who has had her own way and

enjoyed much freedom. The influence of her family and her environment have both been bad.

She is the hyperkinetic type which craves continually activity and amusement" (Hartman 478).

Readers understand that the sullenness comes from being robbed of a choice to live her life

authentically, particularly when the crime Esther has committed is not conforming to a mold of

propriety. These notes on her behavior only highlight the ways in which official records reduce

her story to intrinsic stubbornness, flawed personality traits, and the poor influence of her family.

She is made to be less than who she is, and then punished for that reduction. Hartman, though,

does not allow this to be the last thing we know of Esther Brown and all the women jailed for

whatever offenses they have committed. These scenes, in particular, showcase the importance of

naming in this piece. As stated, Hartman opens her work with Esther Brown's name. This

becomes a vital touchstone when Esther is targeted by the law and incarcerated, where it stands

in stark contrast against the other voices that rise to describe Esther. Displayed in the notes is the

way the prison authorities label her, first by her attitude, then by the descriptor of "colored girl"

and even "patient." Esther knows that her morality, or lack thereof, is ascribed to her

relationships to others, whether or not she has a husband or whether her family taught her the values she needs to display in order to lead a successful, ethical life. "Besides, if anyone was to blame for Esther's trouble, her grandmother thought, it was her mother, Rose" (Hartman 477). Esther is seen as a product of those around her; she is derelict because of the failures of her domesticity and her upbringing. She is someone's not-wife, someone's wayward-daughter.

However, on the page Hartman always allows Esther to be Esther. We know her before we know how her family sees her, how her community sees her, how the authorities see her. We know that it was not a great tragedy of her life, to dissolve her marriage, because it was not posed as such in her introduction. Above all, we know Esther's name. It is repeatedly constantly, the start of many sections, the way Hartman always identifies her. This is her unique descriptor, and the contrast is most striking when we are made to realize that this is not the descriptor she is given by her contemporaries. Hartman transposes this by naming whomever she can in the prison. "Loretta Michie was the only colored girl quoted in the newspaper article. The prison authorities resented that the inmates had been named at all. It fueled the public hysteria about the abuses and endowed the atrocities with a face and a story" (Hartman 479). The tension between naming and violence is explicitly laid out in this sentence; it was a purposeful attempt on the part of the authorities to quell the release of any of the names of the prisoners in order to better facilitate the violence conducted within the jail. Hartman does not allow this dehumanization to continue to exist, going as far as to call Loretta by her preferred nickname, Mickey, and make a point to reference her by name only in her narration, restoring something to her that the archive attempted to erase entirely. The desire to self identify is a powerful one. Adopting a nickname serves no purpose in making a life for oneself, bettering the community around you, or

contributing to the prosperity of society. It is in an act in the tradition of the *don'ts* in conduct books, or hosting a social media site and populating it with images of oneself. It is an act of self-possession that Hartman encourages. Mickey, though the evidence of her life amounts to a mention in a newspaper article and assorted notes taken during her time in prison, is given the same benefit that Hartman gave to Esther: a name, and time on the page to be a person. Hartman writes, Loretta, or Mickey as some of her friends called her, beat the walls, bellowed, cursed, and screamed. At fourteen years old, before she had her first period, before she had a lover, before she penned lines like "sweetheart in my dreams I'm calling you," Mickey waged a small battle against the prison and the damned police and the matrons and the parole officers and the social workers. She was unwilling to pretend that her keepers were anything else. The cottages were not homes" (Hartman 481). Even here, Hartman describes Mickey first as a person before touching on her behavior as a prisoner. She calls her by her preferred name, and touches on markers of Mickey's femininity without describing them in gratuitous, physical detail. Mickey is afforded the privacy of her life and its inner workings like Esther, and in doing so Hartman proposes the need for that privacy and the dignity and agency it affords the subjects of stories.

This stands in stark contrast to how Mickey was treated in the Rebecca Hall prison. Hartman writes, "Mickey rebelled without knowing the awful things the prison staff said about her in their meetings — she was simple-minded and a liar, she thought too much of herself, "she had been with a good many men." The psychologist, Dr. Spaulding, said she was trying to appear young and innocent, but clearly wasn't. Was it possible that she was just fourteen years old? Miss Cobb decided the matter: "let's just assume she is eighteen"" (Hartman 482). Mickey's image is firmly in the hands of the staff that hold power over her, and they do not allow her the dignity of

privacy and personal life, commenting derisively on her intelligence, her confidence, and even

her sexual history. She is treated as a problem more than a person, with staff going so far as to

not only discuss the image she presents, but then proceeding to change it to suit their own needs

and perceptions. This rings of the need to overcome cognitive dissonance, as Patterson stated,

which arises in the conflict between Mickey's age and the way the staff strove to see her and

punish her as an adult. Hartman, though, does not allow this to define Mickey's story. She allows

Mickey to do that herself, saying, "Staying out all night at a dance with her friends or stealing

$2.00 to buy a new dress so she could perform on stage was sufficient cause to commit her.

Mickey cursed and pummeled the wall with her fist and refused to stop no matter how tired. She

didn't care if they threw her in the Disciplinary Building every single day, she would never stop

fighting them, she would never submit" (Hartman 482). Hartman writes not from an objective

distance, but from within Mickey's own perspective. There is agency in being allowed to do

things out of a desire. In Mickey's case, that desire is protesting her sentence and the conditions

that led to this sentence. Hartman frames this not as an act of stubbornness or defiance, but as a

necessary rebellion, because if we employ speculation to understand Mickey's refusal to submit,

we have to examine the flip side of what submission would be. It would mean bowing to the will

of those who dissected and changed her image, who hold power over her, who subject her to

violence and pain. Considering the conditions of submission, there is no room to wonder why

Mickey chooses never to stop, no matter how tired she grows.

 Moreover, Mickey's story also speaks to the power of voice and image, as well as the

rebellion that is humanity. Hartman explains that Mickey was one of the women to speak out

against the abuse in the prison, stating, "Loretta and several other Black women testified before

the State Prison Commission about how Miss Cobb and Miss Minogue treated them. Perhaps it was because the sixteen-year-old had curly hair, dark brown eyes, and a pretty face that she caught the attention of the reporters and prompted them to record her name" (Hartman 480). This first assumption follows in the tread marks of the same well-worn pattern, that there must have been something consumable about Mickey's message that made presumably non-Black reporters even record her name when they did not afford this to any of the other women speaking out. Young and sweet looking and pretty, Mickey seems to fit the mold of what the conduct books desire in a Black girl's appearance, or at least what would appeal to the pathos of onlookers, juxtaposed against the violence of the prison system. However, Hartman does not stop her speculation here. She goes on to say, "Perhaps it was the graphic account of brutality that made her words more noteworthy than the others. Did she describe more vividly the utter aloneness of the dungeon, how it felt to be cut off from the world and cast out again, and that in the darkness shouting out and hearing the voices of others was your lifeline" (Hartman 480). This description vividly evokes the sheer humanity that arises every time speculation is employed to understand the lives and experiences of Black women. Ironically, Hartman's speculation allows us to see that when Black women are allowed to express their true thoughts, their fears become more universal than any curation or packaging of their image will achieve. *Utter aloneness* is a staggering visual, one that elicits horror at the violation of the intimately human need for connection and hope in a future that is not so utterly alone.

This also calls back to Tinsley's work in speculation, specifically touching on the radical notion of the importance of contact and togetherness in face of a society that seeks to eradicate the knowledge that this need exists, lest it interfere with the commodifying of Black bodies.

Even in the midst of punishment for some crime, as Mickey is still serving a sentence, she might long for relief and human relationships so strongly that she is able to move a separate audience to remember her. This underscores Gumbs' reaction to Hortense Spillers as well, and her emphasis that the way people say things can have just as much, if not more, impact than the words themselves. This is another "sedimented layer" of Hartman's speculation. Not only is Hartman giving Mickey a space to be remembered in her own story; she is also showing Mickey claiming power in this moment through the use of her own voice. Hers is the only name recorded in this article, and Hartman proposes that it rose to this status because of the power that comes with speaking one's truth in a way that is so authentic and so honest that it cannot be denied. In the end, we cannot know for sure. Hartman explains, "The newspaper offered a pared-down description: Loretta Michie testified that she had been "handcuffed to the bars of her cell, with the tips of her toes touching the floor, for so long that she fell when she was released" (Hartman 480). It might have been Mickey's powerful voice, it might have been her face, it might have been sheer convenience, but through speculation we can give Mickey the consideration that her life and her story warrants.

As the story winds to a close, Hartman shows the prisoners' rebellion: making noise. Or, as her title suggests, an "assembly in a riotous manner," a kind of anarchy that is not much of an anarchy at all when you hear what desires these women express, as it represents not chaos but unity. The women of the prison raise their voices, "The chants and cries insisted: We want to be free. The strike begged the question: Why are we locked up here? Why have you stolen our lives? Why do you beat us like dogs? Starve us? Pull our hair from our heads? Gag us? Club us over the head? It isn't right to take our lives. No one deserved to be treated like this" (Hartman

486). In the physical act of raising their voices as loud as they can, the women of the prison attempt to regain a sense of their own self worth, create better lives and conditions for themselves, and assert that they, too, deserve the same rights as those who are not specifically targeted by the power structures meant to suppress Black freedom. Hartman retroactively fosters this attempt and these desires by making these women and their rebellion the last, lingering note of her piece. Limited by society and reduced by history, these women do not stop inhabiting themselves and their dreams; they don't abandon hope for what tomorrow might bring. "The refrains were redolent with all the lovely plans about what they would do once they were free. These sounds traveled through the night air" (Hartman 486).

This is the power of an archive developed by way of imagination. Both Wright and Hartman understand that there is something missing in what the official record has to offer in terms of communicating the experiences and lives of Black women and girls. They address the tropes that dominate the existing stories of Black girls and women across most mediums of written word, across journalism and fiction and treatises on etiquette, without ignoring that not only do the recorded tragedies exist, but so too do the records that strip any inner life, agency, and personality from the subjects of those stories. Hartman clearly expresses the balance that needs to be struck, "*Mere survival* was an achievement in a context so brutal. How could one enhance life or speak of its potentialities when confined in the ghetto, when daily subjected to racist assault and insult, and conscripted to servitude? *How can I live?*—It was a question Esther reckoned with every day" (Hartman 470). Even under the weight of scrutiny, terror, and a history of violence, all things that she is aware of, Esther still asks how she can live beyond merely surviving. This was a question not afforded to the girls in the stories that Wright studied, the

Black girls who spent their girlhoods becoming wise and resilient enough to, hopefully, live

through their circumstances. While these lessons served an important, specific purpose in

providing a model of inspiration for other Black girls of the nineteenth century seeking to

survive similar circumstances, they do so at the cost of depicting the true humanity that existed.

Humanity like Esther's, with its concerns over the body and heart, marked by desires for

enjoyable things and a knowledge that there is something unjust in living, and being depicted, as

a being that can only strive to survive.

Conclusion

Reduction and dehumanization are facets of the Black experience from the earliest slave

ships crossing the atlantic to the advent of social media. The pattern of being removed from one's

own life, experiences, and story, and subsequently being silenced and repackaged by others'

hands, follows Blackness in the United States. The history of members of the Black community

is one of violence, pain, and trauma, and even those moments are filtered by external

perspectives and made palatable and accessible to non-Black audiences while eclipsing the

humanity of the subjects from whom these stories are taken. Often, records of these hardships are

the only imprint left of Black lives within the archive, in stories spun by those outside the

communities that experienced them, or even by the perpetrators of that violence.

However, the history of Blackness is also one of hope, resistance, community, desire,

levity, dreams, and capturing agency whenever it is possible. It is inherently and undeniably

human, something that falls through the cracks that appear in the archive by circumstance and by

design. Employing speculation as a means of restoring the fullness of the lives of the members of

the Black community might not restore the specific things that these individuals thought and felt.

But it challenges us, as readers and scholars and people, to remember that those thoughts and feelings did exist. It asks us to read beyond lines in a paper, notes from a prison, chart topping numbers, or token appearances by characters of color in popular media, and demand to allow these lost voices space in the archive. Wright and Hartman demonstrate not just the power of speculation, but the need for it. Wright's commitment to asking what other perspectives might be concluded from the writing available, and Hartman's speculation crafted from knowledge of the Black condition in America and what it feels like to be human, and a woman, demonstrate the power of taking what is known and asking, *but what could have been?* Dreams and wants just like Esther's must have existed in the Black girls and women that were, as Muñoz says, locked out of official histories. They must have existed within every Black person in America, from the days of slavery to the days of Motown, of Instagram. Understanding that these individuals were, in fact, human and always have been is a necessary facet of comprehending the things that do remain enshrined in the archive, the while violence was a genuine facet of Black life, that it has become the entirety of their stories and obfuscated the agency and humanity of those who experienced that violence. Speculation is a way to bridge the gap between what has been saved on the record and what else should have been.

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