



DLR

SLAVERY NOW

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The *Digital Literature Review*

The *Digital Literature Review* is a journal showcasing undergraduate student work in literature and cultural studies. The journal is produced by undergraduate students at Ball State University who are involved in the *Digital Literature Review* immersive learning project. Our goal is to provide a forum where undergraduate students can showcase their research projects and disseminate their valuable contributions to ongoing academic conversations.

The *Digital Literature Review* is published annually in the spring. The deadline for submissions is in early January. We welcome original articles relating to each year's theme. Articles should range from 3000-5000 words; every article is reviewed by undergraduate students on the journal's editorial team. Notification of initial decision is in February. All authors receive constructive feedback concerning submissions.

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Introduction: Slavery Now

Slavery occupies a complex and paradoxical space within inseparable discussions of cultural consciousness, historical memory, and academic study. The incredible horror of slavery, as well as its position within national identity, history, and culture, creates multiple fundamental needs: to represent its violence, to understand its place in history and identity, to bear witness to its trauma and to the continuing impact of this trauma on contemporary life, and to pursue paths of intervention, healing, and commemoration. In essence, this study is characterized by a singular drive to make meaning out of the horror, historical significance, and traumatic memory of slavery.

As a result, slavery as a subject of study has been approached from a nearly unprecedented range of disciplines, methodologies, and critical perspectives, including anthropology, sociology, history, archaeology, trauma studies, African-American studies, feminist and womanist theory, and comparative slavery studies. The result of this multidisciplinary research has been significant in its collective impact, generating a body of work on slavery that remains critically necessary to our understanding. Interestingly, what reverberates throughout this vastly productive project of research and theory devoted to the study of slavery is a persistent and resistant sense of incomprehensibility. What is often articulated within these diverse approaches is the way the horror, trauma, and memory of slavery fundamentally exceeds representation. It would seem there is, as these scholars often attest, something inherently unspeakable about slavery, something in its essence and its extreme violence that is outside knowability. In this way, the study of slavery is paradoxically bound up both in a singular drive to represent and make meaning out of slavery, and in a persistent sense that something of the essence of slavery fundamentally resists this project.

This second issue of the *Digital Literature Review*, which takes on the theme of “Slavery Now,” aims to contribute to these complex discourses surrounding slavery as a subject of study. Devoted to the examination of historical and contemporary slave systems and their representations, this edition speaks to both the study of slavery and the paradoxical project of its representation. In the articles and film analyses collected here, the authors featured in this edition theorize historical and contemporary forms of slavery from a range of critical perspectives, as well as explore representations of slavery in art, literature, film, and within other sites of cultural memory and commemoration. Throughout the issue, several questions are of critical importance to this work. If something of the trauma and violence of slavery resists articulation, if something of the essence of slavery is unknowable and cannot be spoken, how do we bear witness to it and understand its representation? In addition, how can the study of historical and contemporary representations of slavery alongside and in conversation with one another deepen our understanding of its historical and modern forms? In a similar vein, how can an understanding of slave systems, including their dynamics of power and violence, allow us to theorize other forms of violence and oppression? Finally, out of this work, how can we construct paths of healing, intervention, and justice on behalf of victims, both in the past and in the present?

The articles in this issue each draw upon one or more of these critical questions, engaging them in direct as well as circumventing ways. Several articles in this edition consider the ways that modern entertainment, particularly television and film, often utilize the depiction of slavery

as an object for spectacle and consumption. Because of the gravity of the topic, any use of slavery in entertainment must be met with a critical eye. In “Children in Chains: On the Productive and Exploitative Tendencies of Representation in *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*,” author Kathryn Hampshire analyzes the use of the child slave as subject matter in the popular television show, exploring the depiction of child slavery in terms of both exploitative spectacle and its potential for raising awareness about the realities of modern trafficking. Similarly, the co-authors of the film analyses included in this edition explore the critical conversations surrounding recent films about slavery and discuss the implications of recreating scenes of slavery on film. In “Reviewing the Critical Conversations About *Django Unchained*,” co-authors Daniel Brout, Mercadies Brown, and Alex Selvey explore the politics of humor in representations of slavery, as well as the trope of the white savior. In “A Critical Introduction to *12 Years a Slave*,” co-authors Kathryn Hampshire, Bryce Longenberger, Ramona Simmons, and Esther Wolfe analyze the film’s representations of violence and slave suffering, as well as its explorations of the politics of suicide and the intersections of race and gender in the experiences of slave women.

In addition to discussing depictions of slavery in television and film, several authors examine representations of slavery in sites of commemoration and memorialization. These articles analyze the relationship between sites of public memory and complex histories of colonialism, racism, and white supremacy, and raise challenging questions about the ways in which practices of reenactment and exhibition are implicated in the replication of these structures of power and violence. In “Speaking the Lacuna: The Archaeology of Plantation Slavery as Testimony,” author Esther Wolfe examines plantation archaeology as a form of bearing witness to the historical trauma of slavery. Analyzing the rhetoric of forensic and archaeological methodology used in the archaeological excavation of plantation sites, the author explores the ways in which the material testimony of plantation archaeology embodies a “lacuna” of witnessing, and may replicate historical dynamics of violence. In “The Human Zoo: A Critique of Brett Bailey’s *Exhibit B*,” author Mercadies Brown investigates whether or not Brett Bailey’s controversial art exhibit provides a critique of racism and colonialism, and discusses the problematic exposition of Bailey’s modern and public recreations of slavery.

Articles featured in this edition also explore the ways in which an understanding of comparative slave systems can be applied to contemporary systems of slavery and the representations of slavery in contemporary popular culture. In “The Desensitization to Violence and the Perpetuation of Oppression and Slavery in Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* Trilogy,” author Bryce Longenberger utilizes the historical context of Roman slavery and gladiator fighting to analyze the representation of slavery in the popular book series. By reading a modern representation of slavery against a specific historical context, the author illustrates how this dialogue can also enrich our understanding of contemporary systems of human trafficking and the socioeconomic variables that make certain groups vulnerable to victimization. In “The Opposing Viewpoints of Slavery in Nineteenth-Century American Poetry: An Anthology,” author Madison Yeary compiles a collection of poems representing both pro-slavery and abolitionist sentiment and debate generated during the 19th century. Through this collection, the author recreates a cultural debate and deeply conflicted sense of American national identity that continues to impact our contemporary context.

Authors in this edition also think toward paths of intervention and resistance that pursue

justice and healing for victims of slavery. In “The Power of Language in and Following Moments of Trauma: An Analysis of *A Stolen Life*,” author Morgan Aprill analyzes the use of language in the contemporary slave narrative of Jaycee Dugard, exploring how Dugard’s use of language allows her to communicate the trauma of slavery to readers and call them to prevent similar crimes from happening in the future. In “Hidden Slave Narratives: The Power of Empathy in Children’s Literature,” author Elisabeth Wilkes examines hidden narratives of slavery in children’s literature and explores how these slave narratives can be used to teach young people to combat apathy surrounding human trafficking.

The work of this edition also extends beyond the articles themselves to include the images selected for the journal’s publication. In Daniel Brount’s cover photo, flowers rest against a row of bars. In visual culture, images of slavery often portray the suffering and subjugated slave body, or replace the slave body entirely with instruments of torture meant as signs to signify the tortured slave body. The image of flowers set against a row of bars displaces this objectification and fetishism often imbedded in the visual archive of slavery, replacing images of subjugation and instruments of torture with an image of profound loss as well as hope. In Isabel Vazquez’s back cover photo, the viewer’s gaze is directed through a dark tunnel, with a mouth that opens onto bright water and light. The image of the tunnel evokes the nature of trauma and the memory of slavery, with parts of the image remaining always out of frame. However, the image of the tunnel also contains movement toward physical and emotional liberation, a passage from darkness into light that implies material freedom as well as resolution and understanding. In this way, the image of the tunnel evokes the trauma of slavery, as well as the promise of liberation and a process of healing.

In our second edition of the *Digital Literature Review*, we hope to build upon and deepen the work we began in our inaugural issue last year. With the theme “Slavery Now,” the *Digital Literature Review* seeks to contribute to the current discourse surrounding slavery and theorize methods of intervention, justice, and healing for victims of slavery both past and present. It is also our hope that this edition will engage with our audience in a way that inspires readers to take on a similar project of investigating slavery in order to work against trafficking and victimization in our contemporary world. Fundamentally, this edition aims to do the deeply necessary and potentially transformative work of attempting to understand systems of violence and to actively imagine different futures free from systems of violence and oppression. Inherent to and imbedded within the study of slavery is a process of world-building and a praxis of liberation.

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Reviewing the Critical Conversation about *Django Unchained*

– Daniel Brount, Mercadies Brown, and Alex Selvey, *Ball State University*

Much of the critique surrounding the recent film *Django Unchained* (2012) has been divisive, to say the least. In this essay, we review the critical conversation about this film and explore the parameters of these discussions. By reviewing these critical dialogues about the film, we can examine whether *Django Unchained* successfully and accurately depicted antebellum slavery in the United States, or if the director, Quentin Tarantino, even intended for the film to do this. By reviewing this critical discussion, we provide the reader with an understanding of *Django Unchained* and its social, political, and artistic contexts.

Depicting the system of slavery in America is a difficult venture. Doing so requires filmmakers to balance addressing the violence, brutality, and oppression surrounding slavery, but also keeping in mind the sensitivities of the audience. When *Django Unchained* premiered in 2012, it was clear that this film was not like slavery films of the past. The film, set in the late 1850s in the Southern U.S., shows a slave who is rescued and trained by a bounty hunter to work for his and his wife's freedom. *Django Unchained* has the characteristics of a traditional Tarantino film, and it explores the spaghetti western style with elements of drama and comedy during the protagonist's journey. As is typical of a Tarantino production, the movie was met with controversy: critics and audiences lined up on two sides of the film, with some deriding what they considered a flippant depiction of slavery and with others praising a bold portrayal of a violent system.

Django Unchained follows Django, a slave, after he meets Dr. King Schultz, a German bounty hunter who needs Django's help identifying the wanted men Schultz is after. The duo strike a deal in which Django will aid Schultz in his search, and in which Schultz promises to liberate Django from his slavery after the bounty has been collected. Schultz begins training Django to be a bounty hunter, and this begins the pair's journey. Django tells Schultz that he wants freedom for his wife Broomhilda as well, from whom he was separated after they attempted to run away. This leads the partners on a journey that ends when they find her at Calvin Candie's plantation.

Critics have focused considerably on the fact that Tarantino is white. Numerous critics have claimed that the film would have been more accurate had a black director created it. In addition,

ABSTRACT:

Django Unchained takes place in the Antebellum South and follows a freed slave on his vengeful journey to free his wife. This essay reviews the critical discussion surrounding *Django Unchained* in order to examine the film's validity both historically and artistically.

KEY WORDS:

Django Unchained, slavery, film, criticism, Quentin Tarantino, representation, historical accuracy, Antebellum South

people like prominent filmmaker Spike Lee have repeatedly criticized the film for its portrayal of slavery, calling it irresponsible and disrespectful (Zakarin). However, in *Django Unchained*, most of the black characters are portrayed more positively than the white characters. By the end of the movie, almost every central white character dies, leaving the black characters to tell the end of the story. In their article, “Broomhilda Unchained: Tarantino’s Wagner,” Adrian Daub and Elisabeth Bronfen point out this twist in traditional storytelling. It is made clear primarily through their perspective on Schultz’s death toward the end of the film: “King Schultz almost seems aware that he repeats a gesture familiar from classic Hollywood, in which all non-white characters conveniently disappear in order to let white folks tend to their narrative business at the end of the story. He does not make his decision for ethical reasons; it is narrative that forces his hand” (Daub and Bronfen). By flipping this traditional Hollywood structure on its head, the film avoids reserving negative portrayals for black characters. Instead, it gives the black characters the platform to complete their story.

Django Unchained also makes bold choices in its portrayal of race. In many ways, the film critiques white characters with the portrayal of slave owners as incredibly stupid and/or relentlessly cruel. Many white characters act unintelligently in the film, and others are simply blinded by their racism. Furthermore, Tarantino includes instances such as the comedic proto-Ku Klux Klan scene. A mob of white characters plot to kill Django and Schultz, and these are gestures resembling those of the Ku Klux Klan. The scene focuses on how their attempt comedically falls apart. This is one of the main instances of comedy in the film, for the Klan members spend most of the time arguing about their masks and how the eyeholes were not cut well enough for them to see. Some have argued that this comedic portrayal comes at a cost, making slave owners look like a punch line and ignoring the violence of their actions. In *Ebony*’s article, “The Price of *Django*,” writer Blair Kelley says, “The men and women who owned slaves were not bizarre cartoon villains or the bumbling proto-Klansmen depicted in *Django Unchained*. They were educated. They attended churches. And, they used their education and religion to try to justify the horror that the majority of their wealth was not in land or livestock, but their ownership of other human beings.” According to Kelley, this portrayal of some of these white characters diminishes their cruel role into nearly insignificant comedic caricatures. The film devalues their intelligence and manipulation, instead portraying stupidity as the cause of their cruelty.

The film not only tests the waters of racial tension with its depiction of white characters, but also with its characterization of black slaves. The film portrays their characters in significantly various ways, and the different races are portrayed on many different levels. Black characters range from slaves that work the field, to prominent house slaves, to folk heroes. For example, Samuel L. Jackson’s character is a slave who holds dominion over other slaves, often violently. The film addresses slave-on-slave violence, not only through Mandingo fighting, but also by the inclusion of discussions surrounding black slavers. One cannot talk about a film like *Django Unchained* and not talk about race, but it is worth noting that the depictions of race vary widely.

In analyzing *Django Unchained*, it is important to look for connections to other film genres, as well as to other Tarantino films. Django’s namesake is from the 1966 spaghetti western, *Django*. Tarantino borrows more than just a name from the genre, placing the main characters in a typical spaghetti western world that “is a place of chaos, devastation, racism, and destructive self-interest” (Ebiri). *Django Unchained* also matches Tarantino’s typical themes of revenge and redemption, such as in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Kill Bill* (2003), along with the need for violence to act out that revenge. *Django Unchained* also mirrors the excessive use of the n-word in films like *Pulp Fiction*, and debates stand on either side as to whether or not the usage was appropriate.

Django Unchained also has elements of Blaxploitation films, such the 1975 film *Mandingo*. As the name implies, the film explores the concept of Mandingo fighting also present in *Django Unchained*. The 1975 film influenced the creation of *Django Unchained*, with both containing frequent scenes of brutal violence, especially with the focus on Mandingo fighting. While most scholars believe that Mandingo fighting did not historically exist in American slavery, it has a place in critical discussion of slave films due to its appearance in these two widely debated films (Harris).

Mandingo fighting was not the only element of *Django Unchained* that is unconfirmed historically. While some claim it was “profoundly ahistorical,” the film was not meant to be a historical document (Kelley). It explores fictional characters in familiar situations and does not claim to be completely accurate. Some uses of comedy, such as in the Ku Klux Klan episode, emphasize this point. These instances of comedy give the film a clearly entertainment-based purpose. The film takes place in a historical setting, but that does not mean it has to adhere to historical accuracy in every way.

Since its release in 2012, *Django Unchained* has been rated and reviewed by numerous critics. In his generally scathing review of the film, Harvey Blume, author of “*Django Unchained* – History Dumbed Down,” writes, “History seems to dumb Tarantino down, dull his imagination. The revenge, unfortunately, is on history, which in the process gets painfully dumbed down.” Like Blume, Blair L.M. Kelley suggests that the historical inaccuracies make the film painful. Opposing Tarantino’s portrayal of slavery in “The Price of *Django*,” Kelley argues that:

In his review, historian Jelani Cobb wondered if the [n-word] was used more frequently in the film than the words ‘he’ and ‘she.’ Ironically in the effort to defend the language, Tarantino has clung tightly to claims of historical accuracy. [Tarantino] asserted, ‘I don’t think anybody is... saying that we used the word more excessively than it was used in 1858 in Mississippi. And if that’s not the case then they can shut up’... I wished that Tarantino sought the same kind of accuracy in his larger depictions of the institution of chattel slavery.

Kelley goes on to mention that slave owners often used their education and religion as a way to justify slave-owning, and he wishes that topics like these would have been as heavily addressed as others in Tarantino’s film.

Though some suggest that Tarantino’s film does lack in accuracy, other critics defend the film, which never claimed to be historically accurate. In her article, “Why Tarantino is Better than Spielberg at Portraying Slavery,” Ann Hornaday gives credit to *Django* for being able to “demonstrate how a history once grievously distorted by cinematic language can be improbably well-served by its most florid, outlandish vernacular.” Those siding with Hornaday agree that the lack of accuracy was a small sacrifice to pay to reach the dialogue that was started by Tarantino’s decision to portray slavery in such a harsh and violent light.

Whether critics support Tarantino’s style or not, the film did get people talking. In Glenda Carpio’s piece, “‘I Like the Way You Die, Boy’: Fantasy’s Role in *Django Unchained*,” the author explains that *Django* is not meant to be understood as a historically accurate work. Carpio points out that Tarantino is “more concerned about movies than anything else” and that his works of fantasy should not be expected to go hand-in-hand with historical accuracy – after all, Hitler was killed by Nazi hunters in Tarantino’s portrayal of World War II. Without prior knowledge of Tarantino’s other films, viewers could be shocked by the director’s portrayal of slavery, but those familiar with Tarantino’s stylistic approach could better understand the cinematic value that *Django* holds.

When it comes to addressing the overdramatic scenes of violence and gore in *Django*, the audience must remember that this is a style skillfully practiced by Tarantino, and it must be examined

with that in mind. Like those who dote on the historical inaccuracy of this film, others point out the unrealistic portrayals of slavery, and the overall unnecessary gore and violence that Tarantino flaunts throughout the film. David Denby, the author of “*Django Unchained*: Put-On, Revenge, and the Aesthetics of Trash,” feels that Tarantino’s film was nothing more than a “big put-on” and claims that an audience should expect nothing else from this director. Denby ends his relentlessly harsh article by saying, “*Django Unchained* isn’t a guilty pleasure; it’s a squalid pleasure.” Though some consider *Django* to be nothing more than a violent, poorly-made gore-fest, there are critics on the other side of the spectrum. Candace Allen finds humor in Tarantino’s references to spaghetti-westerns and calls the whole film “an entertaining hoot.” Allen’s article, “*Django Unchained*: Is Its Portrayal of Slavery Too Flippant?” boasts her belief that Jamie Foxx’s character portrays a film hero for the ages.

Much conversation also surrounds the arguments about the film’s connection to Blaxploitation films and spaghetti-westerns. People have often disagreed on what genre *Django* more accurately represents. Focusing on this argument, DeWayne Wickham claims that the film is more of a Blaxploitation film than a spaghetti-western. In his article, “‘*Django Unchained*’ really about Blaxploitation,” Wickham addresses why *Django* should be seen as a portrayal of Blaxploitation: “The lack of opportunities for black directors to produce films concerning slavery only increases the controversy surrounding *Django* ... It is this dearth for opportunities for black directors to do such a major project, as much as Tarantino’s treatment of the slavery subject, that fans the flames of the debate over *Django Unchained*.” While those like Wickham agree that *Django* deals with subject matter unfit to be tackled by a white director, Chris Vognar praises the work. Vognar, author of “He Can’t Say that, Can He?: Black, White, and Shades of Gray in the Films of Tarantino,” writes: “Tarantino has taken more liberties with racial epithets and black idioms, and written more complicated and fully developed black characters, than any white filmmaker before or since” (24). Vognar concludes his piece stating that Tarantino is being an artist, provoking the audience, and making us ask ourselves tough questions about issues that often get sidelined. Similar to Vognar, Glenda Carpio points out that “pop culture” works like those of Tarantino are able to more easily access sensitive topics than other cultural forms.

Django Unchained was wrought with criticism and controversy since it first was announced. Some labeled *Django* as a glorified story of wish-fulfillment and revenge with clear distinctions between good and evil. However, these descriptions used to criticize *Django* are ones that are the hallmark of stories of heroes. *Django Unchained* is not, nor does it pretend to be, historically accurate. Instead, *Django* represents a modern-day folk story of a hero that America wishes could have existed. Almost all depictions of American slavery show African-Americans being denigrated and subjugated. These stories are ones that should be told, as they have their place in modern cinema. *Django Unchained* takes a new approach to this topic and sacrifices historical accuracy for empowerment.

For *Django Unchained* to be understood, it must be seen as a hero’s journey. This classic trope has existed long before the advent of cinema, let alone *Django*. The film has almost all tropes associated with this motif. The hero begins in the ordinary world – a victim of slavery’s oppression. He meets his mentor who trains him (in this case, with a pistol). As stated by Kerry Washington, a star in the film, the villains *Django* faced in the film are “some really ugly demons. ... We had to be willing to show the ugly stuff so that the hero’s journey meant something” (qtd. in Weiner). Tarantino pulled no punches depicting the villains (slave owners) as violent, racist, and cruel. This moved the story and made the rise of *Django* that more powerful.

Just as the hero’s journey is not a story unique to the works of Tarantino, neither are folk leg-

ends of slaves avenging their plight at the hands of their masters. In his article about how *Django Unchained* is a continuation of the “bad black man” folk hero, Scott Reynolds Nelson writes:

Such stories go back to immediately after the Civil War and are partly meditations about slavery and slavery’s end. In many of these chants and stories, the bad man was insulted, then cursed at, until he finally shot down white men in saloons and back alleys for failing to treat him with respect. The bad man invariably died at the end of the story. ... Immediately after the Civil War, African-American men built these powerful, folkloric characters in a world where slavery had ended but attacks against black men and women had intensified. The stories of quiet, unpredictable, and violent men who were fearless and died at the end could be simultaneously cautionary tales about the dangers of challenging white authority and covert stories about the thrill of resistance.

These symbols of black power manifested themselves in legends and songs, later appearing in Blaxploitation films. These folk heroes were an inspiration to those who had suffered at the hands of the institution of slavery. Instead of proliferating the narrative of the oppressed slave – which is one that is accurate and worthy of telling – Tarantino takes a page from these folk stories that served to inspire those who were victims of slavery.

The love interest of Django is his wife, Broomhilda. As the viewer comes to learn, her name comes from a German folk tale of a hero who rescues the damsel in distress. This is a not-so-subtle way of showing the heroic nature of Django. On his quest to rescue Broomhilda, Django takes the path of altruism, one frequently treaded by the hero. Django wasn’t without flaws, turning a blind eye to travesties around him, but only doing so to maintain his disguise and save his wife. True to the nature of the hero, Django inspired those around him. His mentor, Schultz, was a cynical man who, although he claimed to despise slavery, did nothing to end it until his first encounter with Django. However, by the end Schultz “discovered in himself desires that were greater than material reward. Django’s burning desire to rescue his wife [Broomhilda] from slavery, at all costs, gave Schultz hope in something greater than himself. This is what unchained Schultz from a survival of the fittest mentality and allowed him to start living by his deeper principles” (Khoshaba). Heroes inspire us to be greater than who we are, and on his quest, Django spurred that change in his mentor.

In most stories of heroes, the hero is measured by their villain. Their contrast displays a hero’s true nature. This is no different in *Django*. Villains in *Django* are depicted on the evil side of a clearly-defined division of right and wrong. The scene depicting the proto-Klan mob attempts to “counter the racist polemic of D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*. Hence the scene of buffoonish Ku Klux Klansmen complaining their hoods don’t fit right; they can’t see through the eyeholes. [...] Tarantino wants to mock its portrayal in the hugely influential D. W. Griffith movie, which treated Klansmen as heroic, the only force between the South and black savagery” (Blume). Instead of applauding their machismo and bravado, they are instead depicted as stupid and ignorant. Additionally, the main villain in the film, Calvin Candie, is a vicious slave owner who pits slaves against one another to fight for his amusement. Not only is he depicted as cruel, but there is a strong implication of an incestuous nature in his relationship to his sister. Once again, the villains are painted as a stark contrast to Django’s altruistic nature.

The elements listed previously are commonplace in the movies of heroes, but are new to films depicting slavery. In telling the story of the hero, not only is Django unchained, but so is the display of violence. The film graphically depicts scenes of whipping, slaves being eaten by dogs, slaves fighting to the death, and explosive gunshot wounds. Some have claimed that these depictions of violence cheapen the reality of slavery and that Tarantino is capitalizing on the harsh lives

of slaves to make an action movie. Others have claimed that the use of comedy in the story is an insult to slaves and those who have ancestors who were enslaved.

However, the use of comedy, action, and blood all serve a larger purpose. *Django Unchained* doesn't fit into the existing genres of films depicting slavery. By extension, it reaches audiences that would otherwise not be reached by films such as *12 Years a Slave*. According to Bob Cesca, "Tarantino has duped a lot of movie-goers into seeing a film about the monstrous, cancerous true nature of American slavery, and I'd wager that a considerable number of people who saw *Django Unchained* probably didn't see Spielberg's *Amistad* or *The Color Purple* or any other historical drama about slavery, many of which were sanitized for mass appeal." Instead of sanitizing the movie to reach a larger audience, Tarantino took the risk on making a film that pushes the envelope and reaches audiences that wouldn't typically find themselves in a theater for a movie about slavery.

The graphic nature of the film is one that attracts some of the most criticism. However, this violence serves a larger purpose: to display the horrific past that America tends to ignore or water-down. As Cesca said,

Even if Tarantino exaggerated the horror of slavery and even if it were only half as awful as he portrayed it, shame on the United States and shame on the framers for not eradicating it from the very start when they had the chance. Maintaining the institution only pandered to a mentally ill demographic of lazy, cheap, sadistic white aristocrats [who] were mentally deranged serial killers hiding under the threat of secession. And they were allowed to get away with it because no one dared undermine the southern economy.

Tarantino shone a light on a part of American history that isn't talked about. The film is bloody, violent, and cruel, but so was slavery. African Americans were violently dehumanized and exploited for generations, and a movie that brazenly depicts violence is necessary in telling that story.

For all the criticism facing *Django*, no one can say that it didn't start a dialogue. By reaching audiences that don't typically watch slavery movies and by depicting the violence in such a graphic nature, it has spurred discussion amongst critics, academics, and viewers alike. In an interview, Tarantino explained how he wanted to depart from the cut-and-dry slavery movies he had seen in order to make a film that grabbed the audience's attention:

There hasn't been that many slave narratives in the last, you know, 40 years of cinema. ... And for the most part, most of these TV movies or specials that come out are kind of what I call - they're historical movies; like, history with a capital H. Basically, this happened, then this happened, then that happened, then this happened. And that can be fine, well enough, but for the most part I think they keep you at arm's length dramatically because also there is this kind of level of good taste that they're trying to deal with about the history of the subject. And frankly oftentimes they just feel like dusty textbooks just barely dramatized. ... I wanted to tell the story as a genre movie, as an exciting adventure." (Tarantino)

Many critics see the value in this approach, as we can see in Hornaday's argument that, in order to "capture the perversity of a system of kidnapped human beings who were routinely bought, sold, raped, maimed and murdered, it takes genre filmmaking at its most graphic and hyperbolic. How else can movies make proper symbolic sense of America's bloodiest, most shameful chapter?"

Django Unchained may not be a shining example of tastefulness in cinema, but it departs from this for good reason. By showing imagery that is violent and grotesque, it works to accurately depict a time in American history that was also violent and grotesque.

Django Unchained is certainly one of the most bold, distinct movies about American slavery that has ever been produced. A lot of the points raised against *Django Unchained* have some validity to them, but it is important to remember this movie was made with entirely different aims than most movies depicting slavery. The choices that Tarantino made in regards to this film were not ones any other filmmaker would have likely ever made. He didn't make historical accuracy and political correctness the primary focus on the film. Claiming that it should defeats the true purposes of the movie, to tell a story and to start a dialogue. By making a slave movie so different than the ones before it, Tarantino crafted a film that hits audiences differently, opens new avenues of discussion, brazenly depicts the violence of American slavery, and allows for moviegoers to see a film about an empowered slave character that retakes what is rightfully his. Not every film about slavery should be like *Django Unchained*, and there certainly will never be another film quite like it.

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A Critical Introduction to *12 Years a Slave*

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In 2013, director Steve McQueen released *12 Years a Slave*, his film adaptation of Solomon Northup's 19th century slave narrative of the same name. However, in spite of overwhelming public response and widespread critical acclaim, currently the film has received very little attention within academia, and has yet to be made a significant subject of critical scholarship and discussion. In response, this collection addresses what the authors view as a critical lack of contextualization of the film within a larger body of theory and critical analysis.

Interpreting McQueen's film within analytic frameworks including comparative slavery studies, trauma studies, feminist theory, film theory, and the rhetoric of visual cultures, the authors create a wide range of analyses that address several critical questions. In the article "Violent Instability: Images of the Violence of Slavery in *12 Years a Slave* and Visual Cultures," author Esther Wolfe examines the inherent ambiguity of McQueen's realist style, contextualizing this ambiguity within a larger critical discussion of the instability of images of slavery in visual culture and its relation to the paradox of bearing witness to atrocity. Deepening this conversation on images of the violence of slavery, author Kathryn Hampshire, in "On Cinematography and Discomfort in *12 Years a*

ABSTRACT:

In this critical anthology of essays, the authors examine Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* from a variety of analytic frameworks, including feminist theory, trauma studies, film theory, and deconstruction. The authors explore critical questions concerning the politics of representing trauma and violence, the politics of slave suicide, and the intersections of race and gender in the experiences of slave women.

KEY WORDS:

12 Years a Slave, Steve McQueen, slavery, violence, visual culture, cinematography, mistresses, suicide

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Slave,” analyzes McQueen’s film in the context of its cinematography, examining the political power of discomfort brought about by the lingering cinematic gaze. The last two articles in this collection focus this discussion of violence further by unpacking specific dynamics of slave experiences. In “Scoured Souls: The Imbalance between Mistresses and Female Slaves,” author Ramona Simmons interprets the film within the context of gender power and feminist analysis, examining the relative positions of female slave and plantation wife within interconnected systems of slavery and patriarchal oppressions. Finally, specifying this context of gender violence, in “The Inability of Committing Suicide: An Analysis of Steve McQueen’s *12 Years a Slave*,” author Bryce Longenberger examines the nature of suicide within slave systems, exploring interpretations of suicide as resistance and degradation from the position of Patsey. In presenting this collection, the authors hope to break important analytic ground, contributing to the current body of critical work while opening up space for continued study. It is also the hope of the authors that analysis of McQueen’s film will bring to bear the ways in which the issues raised in this collection continue to be present and relevant in our contemporary world—in the forms of modern slave systems and interconnected legacies of racist violence and oppression.

“Violent Instability”: Images of the Violence of Slavery in *12 Years a Slave* and Visual Culture

– Esther Wolfe

Of the critical conversations surrounding Steve McQueen’s *12 Years a Slave*, perhaps the most pervasive revolves around the film’s realism, specifically its realistic portrayal of the violence and trauma of slavery and the image of the tortured slave body. Using his trademark realist cinematographic style, McQueen creates prolonged, unflinching images of slave torture and suffering, lingering on graphic scenes of brutality, including whipping, hanging, beatings, and rape. Realist cinematography, by attempting to replicate and recreate the real, can be seen as an attempt to create a pure representation of experience, to bypass instability and get outside interpretation. However, realist images also contain an imbedded ambiguity at the very site of their realism. In replicating and recreating the real, realist images are framed constantly by what they *are not*; they are defined continuously and simultaneously by what is *not there* and could not be represented. Realism, it would appear, cannot get around this fundamental split. In this way, by representing the real, by recreating experience in order to capture meaning, what is instead represented is the very politics of “seeing” itself.

The paradoxical ambiguity of realism has specific implications with regards to McQueen’s realist images, and to the visual representation of slavery. What does it mean, then, to portray slavery “realistically,” and how can we locate this representation? By confronting the viewer with the image of the tortured slave body, by attempting to recreate the violence and trauma of slavery, McQueen’s images occupy a fundamental split. Framed constantly by what is not there, by what can never be represented, McQueen’s images perform the politics of “seeing,” the instability of representation, and the impossibility of recreating the historical trauma and lived experience of slavery.

This inherent ambiguity, the instability and impossibility of McQueen’s images paradoxically imbedded at the very site of realism, is performed and in a sense “played out” by the critical response to the film. Response to the film’s realist images of slave suffering and torture, of the violence and trauma of slavery, has elicited a competing discourse. Although the film’s depiction of the violence and trauma of slavery has prompted widespread and important dialogue, individual critical conversations have been largely devoted to an implicit project of resolving these images, of framing and containing them by arguing for and against what they are believed to engage. As a result, little has been done to examine the politics and implications of this ambiguity itself, and what it might perform. In fact, in the very act of attempting to resolve the ambiguity of McQueen’s images, this competing discourse strangely repeats and performs the very paradox of realism itself. By attempting to capture meaning and exclude other interpretations, these discourses must constantly frame and define themselves based on what is inherently not there, against the very ambiguity they mean to exclude. In this way, the discourse surrounding McQueen’s realist images of the trauma and violence of slavery perform a fundamental split that continuously reflects and implicates the images themselves.

This analysis contextualizes the paradoxical instability of McQueen’s realist images of the trauma and violence of slavery and the discourse that surrounds them within a larger lineage of the history and politics imbedded in the depiction of slavery within visual culture. Taking the

ambiguity of McQueen's realist depiction as its own political site, where the audience is confronted simultaneously with the violence of slavery as well as with the inherent impossibility of its representation, this analysis probes the ways in which McQueen's realist images actively resist and exceed the historical frame, getting at fundamental questions of trauma and representation in relation to the violence and collective memory of slavery.

Much theoretical work has been devoted to the visual representation of the transatlantic slave trade, particularly to images of the tortured slave body. Several questions are of critical concern to theorists who study these representations, among them, how can we orient and understand depictions of slavery in visual culture? How do we "read" images of slavery? What implications do these readings have on whether the memory of slavery can ever be excavated and represented? These difficult questions have prompted a range of critical interpretations of images of slavery in visual culture, a discourse that is directly engaged by the critical response to McQueen's film.

In one framing of this discourse, scholars of comparative slavery and visual culture have argued that graphic depictions of slave torture and abuse challenge and interrogate persuasive, insidious histories of the romanticization of slavery via the production and consumption of images, particularly the image of the "happy slave" and the "good master." Part of the "Western myths devoted to the memory of slavery," these romanticized images are indicative of a profound inability within European and North American cultural consciousness to cope with the memory of slavery and its place within the national imaginary, instead subjecting it to further management and containment through appropriation and erasure. As a result, argues Natalie Zemon Davis, non-romanticized depictions of slavery in visual culture, particularly images of the suffering, tortured slave body, "can bring to life a person on the boundaries of historical possibility" (136). In this vein, graphic images of slavery can be read as an important form of resistance and counter-speech to violent modes of erasure through romanticized cultural and visual production.

This reading of images of the tortured slave body as resistant and confronting is echoed in Kendra James's review of McQueen's *12 Years a Slave*, published in the online blog *Racialicious*. In her review, James argues that the film's depiction of violence, particularly its depictions of slave tortures such as rape, beatings, lynching and whipping, is "necessary" in order to confront the viewer with the reality of slavery; to facilitate a "looking at the truth of our own past." According to James, the images of violence and slave torture in McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* "do not assuage the viewer's sense of comfort. Bluntly, this was not made taking the sensibilities of a white American audience into consideration." In this way, by reading McQueen's images as a political departure from palatability that confronts viewers with the reality of slavery, James's review implicitly engages a larger discourse on images of slavery in visual culture, in which images of slave torture are interpreted as a form of political resistance to romanticization and erasure.

This critical framing is further expanded by scholars who work the intersections of trauma studies and image culture. Exploring the relationship between trauma and visual media, scholars have argued that the inherent nature of film itself creates a particularly effective medium for representing the individual, lived experience and transhistorical trauma of slavery. According to trauma studies scholars, film becomes an effective means of representation because the medium performs and mimics the metaphysical experience of trauma. According to Fryd, "video is an appropriate medium ... for it easily conveys fragmentary images and narratives, fantasy,

and unspeakable acts” (148). The inherent estrangement and strangeness of film as media, the dissociation between subject and image, its imbedded discontinuity and nonlinearity, embodies “the trauma victim’s sense of disruption in lived experience and psychic coherence” (Fryd, 148). In this way, graphic images of slavery can be read as performing both the act of witnessing and the experience of trauma via the medium of film itself.

This interpretation is also echoed within James’s *Racialicious* review of McQueen’s *12 Years a Slave*. In her review, James notes that the film’s cinematographic aspects often collapse and displace linear temporality, mimicking the disorientation and discontinuity of the trauma of slave life. As James notes, at any point in the film “This could be 12 months, 12 weeks or 12 years and we wouldn’t have known; I even lost track of how long I’d been in the theater.” James goes on to say that, “There’s no clear changing of the seasons; no transition from spring to summer to fall.” Rather, “Time is marked by the passing of violence rather than the passing of the seasons, and it blurs and stretches and bunches together in places.” Here, James directly engages a larger discourse on depictions of slavery, in which the medium of film itself mimics the trauma of slavery, its confusion and dissociation.

These particular framings of the relationship between slavery and visual culture have also been strongly challenged within contemporary discourse. In *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography*, Marcus Wood argues that the rhetorical framing of images of slave punishment and suffering reveals a pornographic impulse bound up in the act of sympathetic viewing. According to Wood, sympathetic images of slave torture and abuse “treat the slave body... as punishment object or fetish in directly exploitative and eroticized ways which are blatantly pornographic” (93). In these images, argues Wood, the slave body is rhetorically commodified and objectified for sympathetic consumption by a voyeuristic white audience. In viewing these images of slave punishment, the white audience is invited to “fantasize his/her own fictions of torture” (93), to imagine themselves in both the position of torturer and tortured. In this way, the image of the punished slave body is rhetorically commodified as fetish object for the erotic pleasure of sympathetic white fantasy. According to Wood, this “auto-erotics of sympathy” incorporates both a possessive and competitive action on behalf of the viewer. The image of the tortured slave in sympathetic fantasy creates a perverse comparative ground in which the audience is “vying to see who can suffer more, the victim in her tortured state, or the sympathetic voyeur in his ability to think himself into her pain” (131). The rhetorical competition imbedded in the sympathetic viewing of the image of the tortured slave also creates a form of possession and exertion over the slave body that disturbingly mimics the dynamics of slavery—the viewer can “can come back to and ‘enjoy’ the suffering of the fantasy slave at any time, and in any way he likes. This act of imaginative possession exists in troubled relation to the manner in which a real slave owner can use the slave’s body at any time, in any way” (16). The commodification and objectification of the image of the punished slave body via sympathetic framing, the competition and possession imbedded in sympathetic fantasy, suggests that these images “are not about black slave lives and black slave suffering, but about white fantasies of black slave lives and black slave suffering” (21). As a result, Wood’s analysis radically interrogates a reading of images of slave suffering as resistant to histories of romanticization, instead framing them as their own form of romanticization and erasure.

Wood’s interrogation of the rhetorical objectification, commodification, and fetishization of the image of the tortured slave body is echoed in several reviews of McQueen’s *12 Years a Slave*. In a review titled “Where are the Serious Movies About Non-Suffering Black People?,” author

Roxanne Gay argues that Hollywood has a particular fetish for depicting the torture and subjugation of the enslaved black body, and that this fetish, rather than depicting the reality of slavery, often works to specifically limit and erase representation. According to Gay, “Hollywood has very specific notions about how they want to see black people on the silver screen . . . all too often, critical acclaim for black films is built upon the altar of black suffering or subjugation.” Here, echoing Wood, Gay identifies the ways in which the tortured black body is fetishized and romanticized through sympathetic consumption, as well as how the cultural investment in these images controls and contains narratives of black experience and life. In this way, Gay engages in a larger discourse interrogating the rhetorical performance of images of the tortured slave body, ultimately reading the ways in which these images implicitly engage and reaffirm the structures of power they claim to challenge and subvert.

The ambiguity of McQueen’s images of slavery, particularly the image of the tortured slave body, is reflected in the ambiguity of discourse surrounding images of slavery in visual culture. This ambiguity is indicative of what Marcus Wood calls “the violent instability of the slavery archive,” its seemingly endless capacity for appropriation and refraction (*Slavery, Empathy and Pornography*, 7). Wood, along with many trauma studies scholars, also questions to what degree the lived experience and transhistorical memory of slavery may be inaccessible and unreachable. For Wood, “the images reproduced mimic the experience . . . yet for each slave the experience was unrepeatable, irreducible, and irreproducible, all human suffering exists beyond the vulgarity of the simulacrum” (7). In this way, according to Wood, the images of slavery call us “to be witness to the unrepresentable.”

In *Remnants of Aushwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, author Giorgio Agamben argues that testimony and bearing witness to atrocity occupies a particular hinge: “On the one hand, what happened . . . appears to the survivors as the only true thing and, as such, absolutely unforgettable; on the other hand, this truth is to the same degree unimaginable, that is, irreducible to the real events that constitute it.” (12). This hinge of the unimaginable and the incomprehensible, the unforgettable and the inarticulateable, is indicative of a “lacuna” specifically imbedded in the nature of testimony itself. However, the paradoxical ambiguity that makes up the lacuna of testimony is not something to be resolved; it is not through a process of resolving the lacuna of witnessing that one locates the nature of testimony. Rather, the author argues that the lacuna of witnessing points to the very structure of testimony; that inherent to and imbedded in the nature of testimony is the simultaneous impossibility of bearing witness.

This analysis of testimony has specific implications with regard to the instability and ambiguity of McQueen’s images of the violence of slavery, the discourse on images of slavery in visual culture, and the very nature of representation itself. Rather than view the instability of images of slavery in McQueen’s *12 Years a Slave*, and within the larger body of visual culture, as something to be deciphered and resolved in order to locate the memory of slavery and its representation, it is possible that something like the memory of slavery lies in this paradox and inherent impossibility of “realism” itself. If the memory of slavery is irrecoverable, if trauma is defined by what is not there and cannot be represented, then perhaps imbedded within the paradox of the real, framed and defined always by what is not real and not there, is something close to the meaning and memory of slavery and its violence.

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On Cinematography and Discomfort in *12 Years a Slave*

–Kathryn Hampshire

Slavery is violent by its very nature. From the physical brutality to the psychological damage enslavement inflicts, a discussion of violence is vital for any conversation surrounding the subject of this institution. In *12 Years a Slave*, the director, cinematographer, and actors present viewers with a disturbing and uncomfortable final product in what cultural historian Dr. Thomas Doherty says “has already been called the most searing depiction of slavery ever projected on the American screen” (5). By lingering on scenes a bit longer (sometimes a lot longer) and providing stark contrasts that highlight the horrors of the narrative, the film forces audience members to confront their own discomfort about the subject head on.

“[R]elentless cinematic intensity” is prevalent from the very beginning when the camera pushes its way through leaves in the field “closing in like vegetative shackles he [Solomon] cannot hack away” (Doherty 5). This scene creates a claustrophobic feeling which sets viewers up for the discomfort to follow. Several times, director Steve McQueen utilizes his actors’ faces to further the themes of distress and pain. According to scholar Deborah E. McDowell, “In giving so much visual and sonic space to the mournful and melancholic—forn looks, grieving eyes, audible sobs—McQueen allows us to consider slavery’s devastating hold on the emotional lives of the enslaved” (379), a concept which I find most evident in a scene toward the end of the film.

This nearly silent (minus a storm brewing in the distance) extended shot of Solomon’s angst-ridden face includes a full 14 seconds of direct eye contact. This scene has not received much attention thus far, but I propose that it is one of the most powerful in the film. According to director of photography and camera operator Sean Bobbitt in an interview with *TIME LightBox*, this is exactly what he was going for in what he attests is his favorite scene: “His face isn’t moving, and yet we see the whole of his life written in his eyes, the compassion and the horror and the dignity all welled up inside him,” he said, “and then he does that little glance into the camera, it was like a physical blow to the chest. It’s so simple and powerful, and for me that’s what cinematography should be” (qtd. in Moakley). Extended eye contact can be uncomfortable enough in person since, as Dr. Gwyneth Doherty-Sneddon points out, “Looking at faces is quite mentally demanding [especially] when we are trying to concentrate and process something else that’s mentally demanding” (qtd. in BBC). From a film with so much difficult material for viewers to process already, these moments are all the more disconcerting. Solomon forces the audience to acknowledge his tortured, hollow eyes, empty yet full of pain—so telling of slavery’s inherent nature—in such an uncomfortable, unsanitized, and unashamed way as to show slavery for what it is.

Two scenes in particular receive the most attention within critical conversations about the film: the hanging of Northup and the whipping of Patsey. The incredible violence and inhumanity depicted in these moments certainly render them memorable, but the more subtle aspects of the cinematography are what truly make them stand out from the rest of the film.

With the hanging scene, Bobbitt was not about to let the audience off easy. In an interview with the *Hollywood Reporter*, he said, “Each of the [hanging scene] shots is held for a long period of time, specifically to make the audience as uncomfortable as possible and to force them to reflect on what was happening to Solomon and how terrifying that must have been”

(qtd. in Giardina). Capping off at 1:26 of uncut footage, the film forces the audience to watch as Northup balances on his toes in the mud to prevent his suffocating in the noose. With little action on screen except for a few slaves going about their business in the background and hardly any noise but the sickly squishing of sludge beneath his toes, this scene is purposefully brutal to watch.

When the camera finally breaks from this angle, viewers get a moment of respite. The film's next two minutes of Northup's struggling to stay alive represent the hours he had to wait for his own relief (which, notably, must come at the hands of his master) by showing the daylight changing and other slaves going about their daily activities in the background. "What was very important is that the audience gets a sense of the passage of time, and sense the length of the shots, that feeling of the duration of the day," said Bobbitt (qtd. in Moakley). It is important here to reference how this theme of relief without resolution continues through to the end of the film when Solomon is finally rescued from slavery. In that moment, though relieved for his salvation, the audience also experiences unfulfilled yearning for a happy ending to Patsey's story too as she only fades further into the background, a lingering message of slavery's still unresolved legacy in both history and modern times alike.

The suffering Solomon faces in his hanging contrasts with the anguish he is forced to inflict on a fellow slave in the other highly-discussed scene: Patsey's whipping. Continuous shooting was important to the crew to depict this extreme inhumanity. Bobbitt said to the *Hollywood Reporter*:

[T]hat was always going to be one continuous shot.... The audience is given no relief. Once you put a cut in, then subconsciously everyone is aware that they are watching a film, and it lets them off the hook.... Particularly for a scene like that, with the complexity of the emotions and the violence going on, it really acts to heighten the drama and the performance of the actors. (qtd. in Giardina)

In this continuous shot totaling a whopping 6:21, the camera includes "multiple perspectives of victim, perpetrator, unwilling participant, and enthusiastic onlooker" (Doherty 7). This observation is certainly important; thus, I wish to delve further into its implications. The cinematography avoids jump cuts between perspectives since these leaps tend to give viewers the sense of "jumping" into individual characters' heads for certain moments of a narrative. Instead, the film opts for an omniscient, authentic, and continuous shot which shows the events and the various people involved blatantly as they are.

One significant element of this scene has gone generally unnoticed, but I wish to draw attention to it here. It is only after following the soap—the small, pure, innocent cause of so much violence, wretchedness, and suffering—fall gently to the ground from Patsey's hands that the camera finally breaks. But, instead of offering a moment of relief to the audience, it does the opposite: the screen goes straight to a shocking shot of Patsey's lacerated back, "the most extreme and horrid of the many images of bodily harm in *12 Years a Slave*" (Doherty 7). By doing so, I propose that the film demonstrates how even something—or someone—innocent, clean of any stain of guilt, can be twisted and warped through the violence of slavery.

The break between the scenes also shows how, in the life of a slave, there are no moments of relief; even when one expects a reprieve, she may only face further suffering. By imposing this feeling of hopelessness and apprehension on the audience, these scenes force viewers to experience and confront their discomfort with the violence of slavery. By making the audience uncomfortable instead of opting for a more sanitized version of the story, this film draws attention to the twisted nature of slavery through these unrelenting depictions of depravity.

In addition to these scenes of violence, I would also like to emphasize how this film's cinematography provides stark contrasts which make the audience view these events in a different light than they may have without these contrasts. First, we will examine Solomon's transition from loving to loathing his one source of solace—his violin. At 6:30, viewers receive close-up footage of him taking care of his beloved instrument, which directly contrasts a scene nearly two hours later when he destroys one. The camera zooms in on the violin like the previous scene, only now depicting pain instead of care. Whereas in the beginning Solomon carefully tunes his instrument, now he tightens each string until it snaps, then breaks the neck in half. I find the fact that the latter of the two scenes follows Patsey's whipping to be significant: it shows how this act has forced him over the edge to the point where something which once brought him solace is now symbolic of suffering.

Several times, setting itself provides contrast. Toward the beginning, the camera focuses on patriotic symbols. When Solomon is beaten and held in a cell, the camera pans from the barred window up to a picturesque view of the Capitol Building and other easily-recognizable D.C. landmarks. Harvard professor John Stauffer points out how, later in the film, one can see the Washington Monument through a spinning paddle-wheel of the ship taking Solomon south which "zooms toward us, filling the screen, suggesting the closed society in which it heads" (318). In addition to his observation, I would like to elaborate by saying that these juxtapositions of the institution of slavery with contemporary symbols of patriotism serve an additional purpose: they force the audience to the uncomfortable acknowledgement of the horrors in the country's history and their reverberations into the present.

Setting the rest of the film in Louisiana gave the crew the opportunity to present visuals as "an ironic compensation during all the human misery" since "all would be beautiful were not the impenetrable landscape a natural penitentiary" (Doherty 7). I find a prime example of Doherty's point at 33:00, when the camera shows silhouettes of nature and then pans to a line-up of slaves. Later, when Solomon is whipping the overseer Tibbeats, the wide camera angle shows the violence of the act juxtaposed with the calm of the scenery.

In my critical analysis, I also observe how the use of dark versus light conveys disparity by allowing viewers to experience despair along with Solomon. When he first finds himself a captive, the scene sharply breaks from the brightness of his last meal as a free man to the pitch blackness of his cell. His flashbacks to the night before are increasingly darker as they progress, symbolizing his descent into a living hell. At the night's close, the men blow out a candle as they also blow the life and hope from his existence for the 12 years to follow. Later, when a fellow laborer betrays Solomon's trust, light from a lantern goes away, leaving him in the pitch black with only his despair. He throws his letter into the fire, and viewers watch as the embers slowly fade away, creating a growing sense of hopelessness as Solomon's hope dies along with them.

Cinematographic temporality also aids in this depiction of contrasts while also contributing to our discussion of discomfort. By using combinations of long takes and close-ups, Bobbitt creates a sense of "slow-as-molasses meteorology" (Doherty 7). Even when the camera does move unencumbered, the freedom it depicts is contrary to the subjects it captures. According to Doherty, in order "[t]o evoke Solomon's stranded and locked-up condition, McQueen keeps his camera horizontal and close to the ground, taking his time to look straight at a vista or a face, with a minimum of non-diegetic music" (7). Indeed, along with emphasizing Solomon's lack of freedom, the film also demonstrates how his relativity in regards to time is completely dependent on his master. According to McDowell, "At every level of *12 Years a Slave*, McQueen

meditates on time and measures progress in painfully incremental steps and stages. . . . For Solomon, as for the viewer, time passes all too slowly” (376). Whether it be progress on Solomon’s difficult road to freedom or his daily labors at the hands of his abusers, the painstakingly slow pace forces viewers to look at suffering far longer than they would wish.

Through these cinematographic strategies of temporality and disparity, we can come to a further appreciation for what this film accomplishes in terms of its depiction of slavery. Along with adding emphasis to their respective moments, these techniques also aid in the overall depiction of this brutal institution’s violent nature. *12 Years a Slave* presents audiences with such difficult viewing material that is free of sanitization. By doing so, it puts the audience members in a situation where they must either turn their eyes from the violence before them (as we so often do) or face that brutality and what it means that we are so disconcerted by it. However much we might want slavery to be the straightforward, sanitized problem of the past that so many films make it out to be, *12 Years a Slave* forces us to face the fact that this peculiar institution still has reverberations into the present.

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Scoured Souls: The Imbalance between Mistresses and Female Slaves

– Ramona Simmons

In examining slavery, the focus on the cycle of abuse tends to remain on the interaction between female slaves and their male masters. Any relationships existing between the mistress and female slaves were often overlooked, or downplayed as being friendly or even familial. As shown in popular slavery films like *Django Unchained*, and even mildly in *12 Years a Slave*, female slaves were often depicted as being workers within the home who fulfilled many of the roles a traditional homemaker would, from cooking to cleaning. In contrast, because the domestic tasks were well-taken care of, mistresses developed relationships with these slave women in a quasi-friendly nature, as displayed in works like *Gone with the Wind*. In the duration of the Margaret Mitchel novel-based film, the bond between Scarlett O’Hara and Mammy is portrayed as more of a maternal disposition where the slave acted as a nanny for a young woman until she grew older. *12 Years a Slave* shatters this serene portrait by deploying characters such as Mistress Epps and Patsey, showing the darker side of the mistress-female slave interactions as being one of hatred and jealousy. To fully understand this shift in presentation of women in slavery, it is important to understand the false mutual oppression of both women in slavery. Often, it seems that both sets of women were subjected to dominance by the slave master, leading to both groups being viewed as victims. Although this is true, we less often examine how this can lead to the mistress’s abuse of the female slave to empower herself. Lastly, it is equally important to expose the clash between the women’s roles in slavery that transformed into a relation of violence from a mistress towards a slave.

Upon looking at slavery witnessed in *12 Years a Slave*, it could be argued that mistresses and female slaves were found in the same predicament in their oppression within patriarchy. Master Epps belittles Patsey, a female slave that is highlighted as his favorite for the amount of work she can accomplish in comparison to the other slaves. This earns her the title of “Queen of the Fields,” which in turn captures the plantation mistress’ attention. Outraged by the energy Master Epps places in praising and eyeing Patsey, Mistress Epps demands for her husband to end his improved attitude towards and treatment of Patsey. Master Epps refuses, for he thinks of himself as the ruler of the entire plantation, his wife unequal to his status, and blatantly ignores her requests, leaving the audience a glimpse of how mistresses were oppressed by their husbands.

Although the mistress was ranked higher in the social hierarchy, both the mistress and the female slave answered to the male master of the land. Mistresses were viewed as psychological slaves to their husbands through their lack of equality in status. Within her essay Charlotte Arbogast goes into the shared “property” state of both women saying, “The confines of gender for white women in southern society also meant that upon getting married, white women turned into a form of ‘property’ for their new husbands” (Arbogast 1). This reality was showcased in several ways that dominated a mistress’ typical life. She was expected to serve as a child bearer, maiden of the household, devout Christian, and entertainer, everything that comprised the picture of domesticity. Typically, the slaves belonged to the master. As a result, oftentimes there would be a power struggle between a mistress and her husband, as any orders from the husband would override requests by the mistress. An imbalance in slave control between mas-

ter and mistress could thereby be attributed to the gender-specific roles within the community in which slavery occurred. Buhle, Murphy, and Gerhard, American historians and professors at assorted U.S. universities, explain the lack of feminine power due to her domination in the private circles (i.e. household function concerns), whereas her husband was within the public circles (associated with politics and economy) (xx). With his role being the financial provider, this introduces another layer of complexity of reliance that the slaves and mistress both had concerning the master. Without the men to supply money and conduct business, the mistress and slaves were thought to be lost, as the mistress held little social standing; meanwhile the slave held none at all. For example, both women and slaves did not have a voice within politics to interject their own opinions for change, which speaks to the mistress' near-nonexistence and the slaves' nonexistence in the realm of politics. Mistresses themselves were still involved in social networks more so than slaves, as they did have certain rights and were active in engagements with other society members, which were key rights that slaves were deprived of.

When considering the mistreatment of female slaves at the hands of their mistresses, the physical harm is what comes to mind primarily. Even women who did not own slaves themselves sought out slaves as the gateway for them to achieve true housewife status. Within his study, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, Harvard University professor William Johnson develops the idea that if a mistress was to have house slaves, they would clear her of having to perform the physical labor of being a housewife. She would still be credited as being responsible for a successful domestic life without having to endure the physical labors of doing so, fulfilling her time leisurely with her family and hosting acquaintances (79-162). The abuse of power over house slaves was something that seduced many mistresses and led to violence as a possible coercion tactic to encourage obedience.

Despite domination being necessary in order to secure social status, others have shined a light on the emotion aspects of producing such violence. Conflict would arise in that "many incidents involving the cruelty of a mistress also involved a female slave's alleged intimacy with the master" (Reilly 52). Arguably, the free women who committed these infractions against slaves felt threatened by slaves who were supposed to be of a lower social standing than them. The mistresses' real anger stemmed directly from the very system in which they found themselves. Michaela Davis discusses the challenge to their position that the mistresses felt and the inability they had to confront their husbands about the white male supremacy that prevented them from advancing on in the hierarchy (Davis). Thereafter, the mistresses would oppress any slaves that had relations (unwanted or not) with her husband in order to deprive him of one avenue of pleasure he sought out (Davis).

Within the movie, the compliance of Mistress Epps with the slave system is appalling and one that makes the audience root against her. Her use of violence towards Patsey was a theme throughout the movie that was sickening, a derivative of the grotesque animalistic advances of Master Epps on Patsey. As Patsey improves throughout her time at the Epps' plantation, this awards her the attention of Master Epps. While he takes a greater notice of her, Mistress Epps is in the wings, watching exactly how far Master Epps will take his taboo relationship with Patsey. Soon enough, Mistress Epps notices that Master Epps finds attraction in the qualities she does not possess herself, such as extreme physical labor productivity.

A particular scene that draws attention to the attraction Master Epps carelessly displays is one in which he wakes all of the slaves up in the dead of night to make them dance within his home. Solomon plays the violin while his fellow slaves follow suit after an intoxicated Master

Epps and his chosen partner, Patsey. During this parade of lunacy on behalf of Master Epps, Mistress Epps enters the scene to investigate what it is the slaves are performing. This is when her eyes are set on Patsey, with whom Master Epps has taken the liberty to dance. Upon doing so, she disrupts them and comes face-to-face with Patsey. She finds herself torn because she has been beaten out socially by an individual who is supposed to be inferior to her status. Once she realizes this, she confronts Patsey by shattering a glass and raking it down her face. Screaming in agony, a confused Patsey has blood rush profusely from her face and is taken away to be cared for.

The scene illustrated above refers to many reasons why white slave women were active participants in the cruelty against their slaves. If it did not scare obedience into the slave, the purpose was then to find a way to disrupt any relationship between the slave (Patsey) and master (Master Epps). Collectively as females, both sets of women were subjected to mental abuse from a typically controlling and overbearing white male master, admittedly. Despite this similarity in circumstance, female slaves emerged as the individuals suffering the most abuse, becoming sexual objects for masters to prey upon. Alongside, they became victims of the mistress' violence for these unwanted sexual advances from the master. Although the Scarlett O'Hara's and Mammy's of the film industry would have consumers think otherwise, there was a much darker side to the relationship between the two women who held the master's attention, unwanted (by the slave) or yearned for (by the mistress). This dimension of the mistress-female slave relationship is a side often kept within the darkness of the same shadows that conceal the painful truth of being a female of color in the Confederate South.

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The Inability to Commit Suicide: An Analysis of Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave*

– Bryce Longenberger

Suicide is destructive in its very nature. The act of suicide ends the life of a person, which is accomplished intentionally and purposefully by the hand of that very individual. It is not shocking that a system such as slavery, which is inherently violent and degrading in nature, would drive a person to desire and succeed in taking his or her own life. In this essay, I will explore the way in which Steve McQueen utilizes the idea of suicide in his film *12 Years a Slave* to highlight the extent to which slavery can degrade a human being and shape his or her life into a zombie-like state of existence. And it is at this point where he or she does not even possess the capability of taking his or her own life.

Before I examine the role of suicide and slavery in the film itself, I want to outline the history and theories behind suicide and slavery throughout history. The scholarship on this intersection has been scarce throughout the decades since slavery's end. Terry L. Snyder indicates that the nature of self-destruction among slaves has been largely overlooked because, during the time of slavery, it was difficult to determine the number of slaves who committed suicide versus slaves who died of other causes (40). However, some research does exist, and Snyder states that the research that has been done concludes that slaves who committed suicide often acted in defiance of and in resistance to their masters.

One of the earliest pieces of research on suicide as a form of resistance appeared in the 1940's when Raymond and Alice Bauer described the various ways in which slaves resisted their masters, including feigning illness and inflicting pain upon themselves. They noted, however, that in extreme cases, slaves would commit suicide as "an indirect means of retaliation" (418). Although this research is over half a century old, this view has not subsided in recent years. Snyder also states in her 2010 article that "slave suicide often has been rightly perceived as a form of defiance" and that it can indeed be seen as "the ultimate form of resistance" that a slave can perform (42). Suicide here allowed a slave to resist his circumstances and ultimately the master who enslaved him. Surprisingly enough, suicide serves a dual purpose beyond mere resistance. Linda Kay Kneeland explains that slaves would choose suicide as a form of retaliation when they "determined that they were unwilling to exist under the only choices they could perceive, and when they saw only more pain in their future" (9). It seems that despair and surrender were incredibly significant in a slave's decision to end his or her own life. And so, suicide in slavery has been seen to be both a form of resistance to the master's authority *and* an act of escape and release from the pain the slave has endured.

As we now move our attention to an analysis of the film, I would first like to describe the ways in which suicide appears in both Solomon's narrative and the film. In Solomon's narrative, he dwelt on the thought of suicide in multiple places in his novel. The prospect of death was always on his mind, and he was constantly thinking that "death was far less terrible than the living prospect that was before" him (Northup 40). But even more striking than his obsession with death are his thoughts of regret and jealousy for not being dead himself. In his narrative, after Robert is killed on the steamboat heading south to Louisiana, Solomon muses, "There was a feeling of utter desolation in my heart, filling it with a despairing and regretful sense, that

I had not gone down with Robert to the bottom of the sea” (Northup 44). Solomon clearly believed at times in his enslavement that it would be much better, even beneficial, for him to end his life and be done with all of the violence and suffering that life as a slave had to offer him.

For the most part, the theme of suicide is mirrored in McQueen’s film version of *12 Years a Slave*. The most prominent parallel between the book and the film appears again during the ride on the steamboat to Louisiana. The day after Robert is killed while trying to resist a white man who is taking Eliza away in the night, Solomon and another black man are disposing of Robert’s body. After they dump his body overboard, Solomon stares at the body floating away and appears to be mourning the loss of Robert’s life. But Solomon’s companion breaks the silence, turning to Solomon and saying, “[He’s] better off; better than us.” Even though Solomon never expresses suicidal thoughts in the film, here again we see this idea that death is preferable to life. Even though they do not mention suicide, the act hangs as a constant possibility and a chance to join the dead man who is “better off” than the living slave.

The second appearance of suicide in the film is actually a major deviation from Solomon’s narrative, and it is on this deviation that our analysis of the film will rest. This is the scene where Patsey asks Solomon to kill her. In Solomon’s narrative, we see that Patsey never expresses an interest in ending her life. She may have thought about it on countless occasions, but she never expresses the actual desire to end her life, at least according to Solomon. In the film, however, McQueen chose to have Patsey attempt to kill herself even though she never actually follows through. Toward the end of the film, before Patsey is brutally whipped, Patsey approaches Solomon in the dead of night and asks Solomon the following in a pleading voice with great conviction and determination: “All I ask: end my life. Take my body to the margin of the swamp ... take me by the throat, hold me low in the water until I am still and without life.” Solomon immediately becomes appalled by the fact that Patsey has fallen into such despair. When he pleads with her, she claims passionately, “I ain’t got no comfort in this life.” When Solomon still resists her pleas, she begs with him, asking him to “do what I ain’t got the strength to do myself” (McQueen).

Overall, scholars have discussed the issue of suicide in the film quite extensively, just not the reasons why Patsey was unable to end her own life. John Stauffer discusses the film through the framework of survivalism, which he argues plays a huge role in slaves’ lives, until the point where they “perceive living in slavery as worse than death, and it is at this point that they rebel” (319). As we’ve already seen, this rebellion often occurs in the form of suicide. But scholars also stress the fact that this rebellion is still fueled by a desire for release from this life. In analyzing the importance of Patsey in the film and her role in gaining narrative authority, Salamishah Tillet concludes in her paper that the experiences of “Solomon’s fellow slaves are so abject” that they believe “death, by suicide or murder, might be [a] viable alternative” (359). What Tillet and Stauffer are suggesting is the inescapable fact that slaves who commit suicide are reacting to the “abject” circumstances of their lives by choosing to both rebel against their master and release themselves from their miserable lives. As we can clearly see, this matches the research done on suicide and slavery throughout history.

Even though scholars have discussed why slaves might want to commit suicide, they have not touched on the reason why Patsey does *not* commit suicide. If Patsey had committed suicide, it would indeed have allowed her to resist the “rape by her master” and the “odium of Mistress Epps” (Stauffer 320). By committing suicide, she would have been able to resist her master and release herself from a life full of violence. But Patsey does not do this. We must

then ask two major questions: why does Patsey not commit suicide, and why does McQueen add the scene where Patsey expresses a desire to commit suicide when it was not even mentioned in Solomon's narrative? To answer these questions, I believe that McQueen represents Patsey as having endured so much pain in her life that she has resigned herself to merely surviving instead of living. In this zombie-like state, I believe that Patsey is incapable of taking her life with her own two hands. I also believe McQueen added this scene not to comment on what suicide allows a slave to do but rather to comment on a system of oppression that is so degrading that it can cause a person to fall into such a wretched state of existence based solely on surviving instead of living.

The idea of survivalism is introduced in John Stauffer's article where he defines the life of a slave as existing in a "state of war" between life and death itself, which results from the "extreme power imbalance between master and slave" (317). He focuses his attention on Solomon Northup; he states that Solomon is forcibly kept alive so that he may labor for his master, but then he is simultaneously subjected to extreme violence and brutality that threatens him with death. In this way, Stauffer argues that Solomon, and slaves in general, constantly dangle between life and death, touching both at the same time yet never staying on a definitive side. Because of this, many slaves resort to merely surviving instead of living or dying. In the film, when Solomon is whisked away to be enslaved in the south, a fellow slave tells him that he must be quiet about his identity in order to survive. Solomon retorts in disbelief and rage, saying, "I don't want to survive; I want to *live*." But after Solomon has been subjected to the demoralizing violence of slavery, Eliza asks Solomon how he can bear the loss of his children so well. Solomon screams back at her in desperation: "I survive!" Solomon has been exposed to such extreme forms of violence and degradation that he is no longer fully able or willing to live or die; he has instead been forced to resign himself to a structuralized state of survival and mere existence. We can see here that the oppression slaves are subjected to renders them into a system that places them into a structure that resembles that of mindless zombies, people who are neither truly dead nor alive but merely existing and unable to change the circumstances of their own lives.

In the film, Patsey's life is very much centered on survivalism—between death and truly being alive—as well. When Master Epps discovers that she left the plantation for a bar of soap, Patsey cries, "I stink so much I make myself gag ... and for that I will be clean. That is all I ask" (McQueen). This desire to be clean, to merely cease the stench that is emanating from her body, is clearly a desire grounded in a person who is merely trying to survive life, to get through a single day at a time. We also see the ways in which Patsey is unable to help herself. After her brutal beating towards the end of the film, her lacerated back is being cleaned, and she looks up at Solomon and a tear slides down her face (McQueen). She is silently asking Solomon why he did not end her life; she is asking him why he did not do what she did not have the power or strength to do herself. Because Patsey has been subjected to more violence and brutality than any human being can conceivably live through, she is enduring the violence because she can do nothing to stop it herself.

The fact still remains that McQueen could have had Patsey end her own life; it would have been a deviation from the book and would have altered the effect of the film dramatically. If McQueen had wanted to comment on the atrocities of slavery by having Patsey actually end her life, he could have done so. Instead, McQueen chose to insert this instance of not being able to commit suicide. I believe McQueen intentionally included a scene where Patsey expresses a desire to commit suicide because he wanted to introduce the idea of a system of

oppression that alters the human condition in a way where suicide becomes impossible. By including this scene, McQueen stresses the dehumanization of slaves like Patsey who have been rendered into zombies who can merely exist and survive.

At the end of the film, Solomon is taken back to his family in the North. He has been given back his life and can live out the remainder of his life with his family away from the constant presence of the whip. But as the carriage carrying Solomon from Epps's plantation continues moving toward us on the screen, the background becomes fuzzy, and we see Patsey fall to the ground in a miserable heap. In this hazy backdrop, which blurs not only the scenery but Patsey herself, McQueen reminds us once again of the extremity of violence that is inherent in slavery. As the movie ends, we cannot forget Patsey and her zombie-like state. Despite Solomon's relatively happy ending, Patsey will always haunt us and remind us of the degrading essence of slavery and its power to make some humans into beings that can merely exist, beings who may desire to live or die but are nevertheless powerless to change their fate either way.

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The Opposing Viewpoints of Slavery in Nineteenth-Century American Poetry: An Anthology

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ABSTRACT:

This anthology delves into a critical time period in American history, illustrates various arguments for and against slavery in the nineteenth century, and showcases some of the most powerful and insightful poems of the era.

KEY WORDS:

Freedom, Slavery,
Abolition, Master,
Faith

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INTRODUCTION

On April 12, 1861, America entered what would become the deadliest war in its recorded history. Fought only on American soil, the Civil War nearly split the once “United” States and caused approximately six hundred twenty-five thousand casualties. Due to such political and environmental polarities between the quickly industrializing North and the slave owning agricultural South, tensions quickly rose. In 1860, just after the election of abolitionist president Abraham Lincoln, the rebel states began their secession. As the war continued and more lives were lost, an exponential increase of cultural figures, such as writers and professors, immersed themselves in politics and avidly supported their side, resulting in the rise of influential literature. Long after the abolishment of slavery and the end of the war on April 9, 1865, books and poems were still published on the opinions prompting the bloodshed. The contradictory attitudes between the loyal North and rebel South, specifically concerning the issue of slavery, ineludibly manifested themselves through nineteenth-century American poetry.

This anthology contains six annotated poems exemplifying specific differences between the Northern and Southern stance on slavery. Arranged according to their respective views regarding the political policy of slavery, the first three pieces include only antislavery poems written by northern abolitionists. These poems particularly reflect the role played by religion and spiritualism in the abolitionist stance against slavery. In contrast, the latter half of the anthology’s poems demonstrates the South’s overpowering ego and sense of entitlement, which resulted in their full support for the use of slaves.

The first poem in this anthology – “The Witnesses” – was written by Fireside Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1842. This piece depicts the inhumanity of the pre-war slave trade by divulging the harsh reality of slavery’s oppression, which resulted in the loss of so many lives.

Another Fireside Poet, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. in 1861, wrote the anthology’s next poem, titled “The Flower of Liberty”. This poem epitomizes the symbolic patriotism of the American Flag, which the Northern Soldiers used for motivation to keep fighting for their cause in such a violent and austere civil war.

“The last two anti-slavery poems in this anthology that symbolize the Northern cause were both written by John Pierpont in 1839: the first is titled “The Fugitive Slave’s Apostrophe To The North Star” and the second “The Slaveholder’s Address To The North Star.” The first is written from the point of view of a runaway slave and depicts his journey strictly at night, guided by the light of the North Star on the Underground Railroad. Pierpont wrote the second from the point of view of a harsh and ignorant slave owner. In this poem, a slave owner mocks the same North Star followed so desperately by the fugitive slave. Opening with the lines “Star of the North, thou art not bigger // Than is the diamond in my ring;” Pierpont flawlessly exemplifies the arrogance held by many southern slave owners. The people south of the Dixie-line defended their use of slaves by claiming that African-Americans were nothing more than mere savages who bettered their lives when becoming slaves because it gave them a purpose for living. In the anthology, then, Pierpont’s second poem acts as a bridge into the second section, which represents actual pro-slavery poetry.”

Southern historian and pro-slavery advocate William Gilmore Simms wrote “Billows,” the first poem included in the set of pro-slavery pieces, in 1832. This piece claims with the same unashamed pride as the others that the masters of slaves in the South deserved their slaves just because of the color of their skin.

The anthology’s sixth and final poem, titled “Yes, Lone Were My Bosom,” was published in 1853 by the same author as the preceding poem – William Gilmore Simms. Yet again written from the viewpoint of a Southern slaveholder, this poem egotistically expresses Simms’s rationale of and justification for slavery as a positive practice.

As clearly seen in the poetry of the time, there were dramatic differences between the nature and politics of a young, split America. The loyalist North supported the abolition of slavery, while the rebel South fought till its death in an attempt to keep it. Just four short years, from 1861-1865, caused both the history and literature of the United States to be changed indefinitely.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1807-1882)

Merely three years after his birth in Portland, Maine on February 7, 1807, legendary poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow began his formal education comparatively and notably young. Nevertheless, because of his early start, Longfellow enrolled at Bowdoin College by the impressive age of fifteen and subsequently taught modern languages at Harvard. Distinguished by his understanding that “what a writer asks of his reader is not so much to *like* as to *listen*” (Wagenknecht, *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*), Longfellow’s poetry revolutionized American culture and thrust him into one of the five figurehead positions of the renowned Fireside Poets. Acclaimed pieces such as “Paul Revere’s Ride” and “Songs of Hiawatha” inspired writers and composers alike; his poetry flourished and could be heard everywhere from parlors to civic ceremonies, and anywhere in between. However, among his life’s praise and prestige came no shortage of undeserved anguish and despair. In his poem “Resignation,” Longfellow recounts the feelings and ideals that held him together through those “severe afflictions” caused by the death of his daughter Fanny in 1848. Shortly after Fanny’s death, Longfellow’s wife, Frances, was sealing an envelope with hot wax when her dress caught fire. Although Longfellow himself eventually snuffed it out, severe burns had already covered her body and resulted in her death on the morning of July 10, 1861. During his courtship of Frances, however, Longfellow publicly solidified himself as an abolitionist when his collection, *Poems on Slavery*, was published in 1842. His poem, “The Witnesses,” found in this collection, describes the undeniable and horrific consequences of the American slave trade.

“The Witnesses”

In Ocean’s wide domains,
 Half buried in the sands,
 Lie skeletons in chains,
 With shackled feet and hands.

Beyond the fall of dews,
 Deeper than plummet lies,
 Float ships, with all their crews,
 No more to sink nor rise.

There the black Slave-ship swims,
 Freighted with human forms,
 Whose fettered, fleshless limbs
 Are not the sport of storms.

These are the bones of the Slaves;
 They gleam from the abyss;
 They cry, from yawning waves,

“We are the Witnesses!”

Within Earth’s wide domains
 Are markets for men’s lives;
 Their necks are galled with chains,
 Their wrists are cramped with gyves.¹

Dead bodies, that the kite
 In deserts make its prey;
 Murders, that with affright
 Scare school-boys from their play!

All evil thoughts and deeds;
 Anger, and lust, and pride;
 The foulest, rankest weeds,
 That choke Life’s groaning tide!

These are the woes of the Slaves;
 They glare from the abyss;
 They cry, from unknown graves,
 “We are the Witnesses!”

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES SR. (1809-1894)

Famous for substantially more than coining the term “anesthesia,” Fireside Poet Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. was also an American professor, physician, writer, and justice for the American Supreme Court. He was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts on August 29, 1809, where he remained until 1830. While living in Cambridge, Holmes attended Harvard College, where he graduated with a degree in classical languages and literature. Shortly following graduation, Holmes decided to continue his Harvard education and enrolled at Dane Law School in the fall 1829. After only one year, however, Holmes left his alma mater in order to study medicine and concentrate on writing. Reflecting on this decision, Holmes claimed, “The labor which produces an insignificant poem would be enough to master a solid chapter of law” (European Graduate School, “Oliver Wendell Holmes”). In 1836 Holmes earned his M.D. from Harvard with his dissertation on acute pericarditis. However, despite each of Holmes’ varying educational interests, his passion for writing never faded. Even at his busiest, Holmes somehow found time to write. The same year he earned his M.D., he also published his first collection of pieces, which he titled *Poems*. His popularity quickly grew, and as a result, people began asking him to write poems for specific occasions or events. As well as poems of tribute, Holmes also notoriously wrote poems about his observations of the world around him. Since he lived during the time of slavery and the Civil War, Holmes witnessed first hand slavery’s many evils and the war it caused. These troubling observations led Holmes to side with the Northern cause as an abolitionist. Consequently, his strong political stances became evident through his writing. One of

¹A “gyve” is a fetter or shackle.

these poems, “The Flower of Liberty,” describes the loyal and necessary patriotism found in the American flag. To him, the flag represented all the lives of the American people who sacrificed their lives for freedom, and this freedom was meant for everyone, even slaves.

“The Flower of Liberty”

WHAT flower is this that greets the morn,
 Its hues from Heaven so freshly born?
 With burning star and flaming band
 It kindles all the sunset land:
 Oh tell us what its name may be,--
 Is this the Flower of Liberty?

It is the banner of the free,
 The starry Flower of Liberty!

In savage Nature’s far abode
 Its tender seed our fathers sowed;
 The storm-winds rocked its swelling bud,
 Its opening leaves were streaked with blood,
 Till lo! earth’s tyrants shook to see
 The full-blown Flower of Liberty!

Then hail the banner of the free,
 The starry Flower of Liberty!

Behold its streaming rays unite,
 One mingling flood of braided light,--
 The red that fires the Southern rose,
 With spotless white from Northern snows,
 And, spangled o’er its azure, see
 The sister Stars of Liberty!

Then hail the banner of the free,
 The starry Flower of Liberty!

The blades of heroes fence it round,
 Where’er it springs is holy ground;
 From tower and dome its glories spread;
 It waves where lonely sentries tread;
 It makes the land as ocean free,
 And plants an empire on the sea!

Then hail the banner of the free,
 The starry Flower of Liberty!

Thy sacred leaves, fair Freedom's flower,
 Shall ever float on dome and tower,
 To all their heavenly colors true,
 In blackening frost or crimson dew,--
 And God love us as we love thee,
 Thrice holy Flower of Liberty!

Then hail the banner of the free,
 The starry FLOWER OF LIBERTY

JOHN PIERPONT (1785-1866)

Educator, attorney, minister, politician, and poet, John Pierpont is famous for boldly expressing his abolitionist beliefs through his work. Born into an illustrious family on April 6, 1785, in Litchfield, Connecticut, Pierpont was destined for a life of achievements. Among the first of these famous achievements was the success gained from his book of poetry, *Airs of Palestine*, published in 1816. Soon after its publication and his resulting new found literary acclaim, Pierpont wrote several school readers, such as *The American First Class Book*, and published multiple pieces of moral interest. Whilst developing his respected authorial standing, he simultaneously earned esteem as a Unitarian pastor for Hollis Street Church in Boston and again as a seventy-six year old chaplain of the 22nd Massachusetts Infantry. Despite the frequent shifts in career, Pierpont held firm to his spiritual convictions and repeatedly shared his anti-slavery ideals, even when they were not well received. Recalling the uproar caused by Pierpont's *Anti-Slavery Poems* published in 1843, the author says: "Though some of my friends may grieve, and wish that I had been more prudent than to write the pieces that touch thus upon Human Liberty, and upon the outrageous wrongs that, in these days and in this our land, it has suffered, their grandchildren will thank me, and *may* be freer men for them" (Antislavery Literature Project). Though written in 1839, his poem titled "The Fugitive Slave's Apostrophe To The North Star" is exactly the type of 'piece' his 'friends [did] grieve.' Written from a slave's point of view, Pierpont describes the hope placed in the God who created the star "over Bethlehem's manger" and their pleas for delivery and his guidance. Soon after finishing this poem, Pierpont wrote its similarly titled antithesis "Slaveholder's Address To The North Star." Here, he describes the prideful thoughts and rationale of many slave owners, ultimately portraying them simply as ignorant fools.

"The Fugitive Slave's Apostrophe To The North Star"

STAR of the North!² though night winds drift

The fleecy drapery of the sky
 Between thy lamp and me, I lift,
 Yea, lift with hope, my sleepless eye
 To the blue heights wherein thou dwellest,
 And of a land of freedom tellest.

² "The Star of the North" is referring to the star in Matthew 2 of the Christian Bible, which led the wise men to Jesus.

³ This line parallels the slaves' secret Underground Railroad to the wise men's attempt at staying hidden by traveling only at night.

Star of the North! while blazing day
 Pours round me its full tide of light,
 And hides thy pale but faithful ray,
 I, too, lie hid, and long for night:³
 For night;—I dare not walk at noon,
 Nor dare I trust the faithless moon,—

Nor faithless man, whose burning lust
 For gold hath riveted my chain;
 Nor other leader can I trust,
 But thee, of even the starry train;
 For, all the host around thee burning,
 Like faithless man, keep turning, turning.

I may not follow where they go:
 Star of the North, I look to thee
 While on I press; for well I know
 Thy light and truth shall set me free;—
 Thy light, that no poor slave deceiveth;
 Thy truth, that all my soul believeth.

They of the East beheld the star
 That over Bethlehem's manger glowed;
 With joy they hailed it from afar,
 And followed where it marked the road,
 Till, where its rays directly fell,
 They found the Hope of Israel.⁴

Wise were the men who followed thus
 The star that sets man free from sin!
 Star of the North! thou art to us,—
 Who're slaves because we wear a skin
 Dark as is night's protecting wing,—
 Thou art to us a holy thing.

And we are wise to follow thee!
 I trust thy steady light alone:
 Star of the North! thou seem'st to me
 To burn before the Almighty's throne,
 To guide me, through these forests dim
 And vast, to liberty and HIM.

Thy beam is on the glassy breast

⁴ The "Hope of Israel" refers to God's promise to the Israelites to deliver them from Egyptian enslavement in Exodus 6:6.

Of the still spring, upon whose brink
 I lay my weary limbs to rest,
 And bow my parching lips to drink.
 Guide of the friendless negro's way,
 I bless thee for this quiet ray!

In the dark top of southern pines
 I nestled, when the driver's horn
 Called to the field, in lengthening lines,
 My fellows at the break of morn.
 And there I lay, till thy sweet face
 Looked in upon "my hiding-place."

The tangled cane-brake,—where I crept
 For shelter from the heat of noon,
 And where, while others toiled, I slept
 Till wakened by the rising moon,—
 As its stalks felt the night wind free,
 Gave me to catch a glimpse of thee.

Star of the North! in bright array
 The constellations round thee sweep,
 Each holding on its nightly way,
 Rising, or sinking in the deep,
 And, as it hangs in mid-heaven flaming,
 The homage of some nation claiming.

This nation to the Eagle cowers;
 Fit ensign! she's a bird of spoil;
 Like worships like! for each devours
 The earnings of another's toil.
 I've felt her talons and her beak,
 And now the gentler Lion seek.

The Lion at the Virgin's feet
 Crouches, and lays his mighty paw
 Into her lap!—an emblem meet
 Of England's Queen and English law:—
 Queen, that hath made her Islands free!
 Law, that holds out its shield to me!

Star of the North! upon that shield
 Thou shinest!—O, forever shine!

The negro from the cotton-field
 Shall then beneath its orb recline,
 And feed the Lion couched before it,
 Nor heed the Eagle screaming o'er it!

“The Slaveholder’s Address To The North Star”

STAR of the North, thou art not bigger
 Than is the diamond in my ring;
 Yet every black, star-gazing nigger
 Stares at thee, as at some great thing!
 Yes, gazes at thee, till the lazy
 And thankless rascal is half crazy.

Some Quaker scoundrel must have told ‘em
 That, if they take their flight toward thee,
 They’d get where ‘massa’ cannot hold ‘em;
 And, therefore, to the North they flee.
 Fools! to be led *off*, where they can’t earn
 Their living, by thy lying lantern.

Thou’rt a cold water star, I reckon,
 Although I’ve never seen thee, yet,
 When to the bath thy sisters beckon,
 Get even thy golden sandals wet;
 Nor in the wave have known thee dip,
 In our hot nights, thy finger’s tip.

If thou *wouldst*, nightly, leave the pole,
 To enjoy a regular ablution
 In the North Sea, or Symmes’s hole,⁵
 Our ‘Patriarchal Institution,’
 From which thou findest many a ransom,
 Would, doubtless, give thee something handsome.

Although thou ‘rt a cold water star,
 As I have said, I think, already,
 Thou ‘rt hailed, by many a tipsy tar,
 Who likes thee just because thou ‘rt steady,
 And hold’st the candle for the rover,
 When he is more than ‘half seas over.’

⁵ Symmes’s hole was the hypothesis proposed by Edmond Halley that the earth was in a hollow shell.

⁶ In Genesis 5:32 of the Bible, Ham is described as the son of Noah, who was the man that built the ark.

⁷ Also a biblical reference to Genesis 1:28 where God commands Adam and Eve to “increase and multiply.”

But, while Ham's⁶ seed, our land to bless,
 'Increase and multiply'⁷ like rabbits,
 We like thee, Yankee Star, the less,
 For thy bright eye, and steady habits.
 Pray waltz with Venus, star of love,
 Or take a bout with reeling Jove.

Thou art an abolition star,
 And to my wench wilt be of use, if her
 Dark eye should find thee, ere the car
 Of our true old slave-catcher, 'Lucifer,
 Star of the morning,' upward rolls,
 And, with its light, puts out the pole's.

On our field hands thou lookest, too —
 A sort of nightly overseer—
 Canst find no other work to do?
 I tell thee, thou'rt not wanted here;
 So, pray, shine only on the oceans,
 Thou number one of 'Northern notions.'

Yes, northern notions, — northern lights!
 As hates the devil holy water,
 So hate I all that Rogers writes,
 Or Weld, that married Grimké's daughter:—
 So hate I all these northern curses,
 From Birney's prose to Whittier's verses.

'Put out the light!' exclaimed the Moor —
 I think they call his name Othello —
 When opening his wife's chamber door
 To cut her throat — the princely fellow!
 Noblest of all the nigger nation!
 File leader in amalgamation!

'Put out the light!' and so say I.
 Could 'I quench *thee*, thou flaming minister,'
 No longer, in the northern sky,
 Should blaze thy beacon-fire so sinister.
 North Star, thy light's unwelcome — *very* —
 We'll vote thee 'an incendiary.'

And, to our 'natural allies' —
 Our veteran Kinderhook Invincibles,
 Who do our bidding, in the guise
 Of 'northern men, with southern principles, '—
 Men who have faces firm as dough,
 And, as we *set* their noses, go —

To these, we'll get some scribe to write,
 And tell them not to let thee shine —
 Excepting of a cloudy night —
 Any where, south of Dixon's line.
 If, beyond that, thou shin'st, an inch
 We'll have thee up before Judge Lynch:⁸ —

And when, thou abolition star,
 Who preachest freedom, in all weathers,
 Thou hast got on a coat of tar,
 And, over that, a cloak of feathers,
 That thou art 'fixed' shall none deny,
 If there's a fixed star in the sky.

WILLIAM GILMORE SIMMS (1806-1870)

By the age of eight, renowned author and historian William Gilmore Simms had already written his first poem. Best known for his political writings and pro-slavery arguments, famous poet Edgar Allen Poe described Simms as “the best novelist, which this country has, on the whole, produced.” Born on April 17, 1806, in Charleston, South Carolina, Simms would grow up to be a prominent voice of antebellum Southern Literature. Although he dedicated most of his life to documenting the culture and history of his beloved South, at age eighteen Simms enrolled in law school. After passing the bar exam in 1827, he began to practice in his hometown of Charleston. However, soon thereafter Simms realized the irritating and unavoidable facets of practicing law and consequently deserted his career to focus on both his love for literature and the southern half of the United States. Unsurprisingly, since those were his two greatest passions, nearly all of his writings have Southern influence or themes. His book *The Sword and the Distaff* is among his most famous pieces, and stems from his clear opposition to Harriet Beecher Stowe's widespread antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In addition to his famous novels, however, Simms also published works of poetry. In his poem “Billows,” Simms briefly describes only part of his argument for slavery, which essentially stated that slaves happily and sometimes even willingly served their owners because of their newfound purpose for their otherwise useless lives. Simms also wrote the poem “Yes, Lone Where My Bosom,” which portrays a conversation between a Southerner doubting his faith and the God causing his doubt.

“Billows”

Gently, with sweet commotion,

⁸Lynching is the act of murdering someone, usually by hanging, which predominately happened to slaves and post-antebellum freed blacks.

Sweeping the shore,
 Billows that break from ocean,
 Rush to our feet;
 Slaves that, with fond devotion,
 Prone to adore,
 Seek not to stint with measure
 Service that's meet;--
 Bearing their liquid treasure,
 Flinging it round,
 Shouting the while the pleasure
 True service knows,
 Then as if bless'd with leisure,
 Flung on the yellow ground
 Taking repose!

"Yes, Lone Were My Bosom"

Yes, lone were my bosom if liken'd to thine,
 And base were my soul if it knelt at thy shrine;
 And the heaven we worship were false if it be
 More true to the spoiler than thou wert to me.

If the hope that has cheer'd me through danger and death,
 Be as easily lost as its owner's frail breath,
 Then 'twere meet that my heart in its conflict should fly,
 To the succor of him who decrees it to die.

If my hope of the future, as they tell me be vain,
 Thy lures shall not win me to trust it again;
 And the evening of life were but anguish to me,
 Did I deem its sad sunlight vouchsafed me by thee.

Thou mayst rule o'er the slaves whom thy fortune has made;
 I am none, and by me thou canst ne'er be betray'd:
 I call for no curse on thy head but the one,
 To trust with my trust, and, like me, be undone.

CONCLUSION

President Abraham Lincoln said it best with his foreboding pre-Civil War sentiment that "a house divided against itself cannot stand." As shown through these selected poems, the divisive issue of slavery drove a nearly catastrophic wedge through the American people whether it is politically or poetically. Through the poems' implicit tropes and explicit opinions, one begins to understand the sheer magnitude and polarizing nature of slavery, and also understand why the legacy of slavery persists today.

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Children in Chains: On the Productive and Exploitative Tendencies of Representation in *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*

– Kathryn Hampshire, *Ball State University*

Currently on its sixteenth season, there is no question that NBC's *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (SVU) has gained immense popularity in modern television. One of many spin-offs from the original "Mother Ship" *Law & Order* program, SVU focuses on crimes with "special victims," which usually refer to those of sexual assault, as the opening narration states:

In the criminal justice system, sexually-based offenses are considered especially heinous. In New York City, the dedicated detectives who investigate these vicious felonies are members of an elite squad known as the Special Victims Unit. These are their stories.

It also depicts other crimes including cases with children, the elderly, and trafficking victims.

This show is not without its critics, however. Many in the academic community point to the sexually-charged content as both the reason for SVU's success and also the site of its controversy. Scholar of media culture and author Cynthia Chris states, "No amount of stolid narrative closure... could temper the graphic fear contained in" a particularly harrowing 2008 episode. "There was something sticky and toxic at work in the show," Chris continues, "and I could not overlook it ever again" (62). Scholars like Chris find themselves questioning SVU's graphic content, coming to the same conclusion: "we don't really know why so many are drawn to these entertainments, nor to what effect. We don't even have a firm grasp on the scope and received meanings of violence contained within popular entertainment products" (62).

Many others focus on the implications this show has for questions of gender and race in the media. SVU hangs on a point of tension within the critical discourse thanks to the diversity—and lack thereof—in the cast, which has yet to receive much explicit attention. The show features many elements characteristic of the white savior trope, since only one

ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the depiction of child enslavement in the television show *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* and how this portrayal is ambiguous as it both productively explores this issue and also exploits it for entertainment purposes. The author focuses on the program's use of revictimization, the white savior trope, and its voyeuristic tendencies.

KEY WORDS:

Law & Order: Special Victims Unit, revictimization, white savior, child slavery, exploitation, trafficking

main detective, Odafin “Fin” Tutuola, is black. However, the gender factor disrupts the pervasiveness of this motif: this literary device usually leans heavily on strong white males, but *SVU* features a distinctly strong and empowering female presence in the character of Olivia Benson, the only detective to endure through all sixteen seasons and whose actress, Mariska Hargitay, is an influential victims’ rights advocate in real life. In this way, I propose that the show hangs in limbo between detrimentally buying into harmful media practices and productively contributing to diversity discourse.

Working within the more prevalent lines of discussion, professors Lisa M. Cuklanz and Sujata Moorti argue in their article, “Television’s ‘New’ Feminism: Prime-Time Representations of Women and Victimization,” that, while *SVU* does indeed incorporate a productive feminist perspective regarding sexual assault, the show’s depiction of women themselves problematically demonstrates “an anxiety about feminine characteristics and the power women possess within the private sphere” (304). In this way, Cuklanz and Moorti argue in a fashion that is representative of the feminist discourse surrounding the show, using scholarship ripe with “seemingly contradictory” moves (303). Often, the same scholars praising *SVU*’s efforts are also those tearing them apart.

In this paper, I will be engaging in a similar pattern of discussion, here addressing *SVU*’s depiction of child slavery—a facet of the show that has yet to receive much attention. While this program does indeed bring several important critical themes to light regarding enslavement and trauma, *SVU* still has exploitative tendencies. Here, I will examine several specific episodes about child enslavement to demonstrate the productive and exploitative tendencies of the show, analyzing specifically the themes of revictimization, the white savior trope, and problematic imagery, along with their implications for the show as a whole.

INNOCENCE AND EXPLOITATION: CHILD ENSLAVEMENT IN *SVU*

Slavery is abhorrent on all levels, but when the victims are children, the facts become much more heart-breaking. In the words of Sally Stoecker, a Scholar-in-Residence at the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center of American University in Washington, DC, “It is a sad commentary on the state of the global economy... that women and children are being traded as quickly as commodities.... This phenomenon can be called the ‘commodification of persons’” (13). In *SVU*, the storyline of several episodes includes depictions of child victims, often in the context of trafficking. While this practice could serve to dynamically bring about awareness regarding various aspects of the trafficking discourse, the potential for the situation to turn exploitative creates a site of moral ambiguity which needs to be considered.

In their essay, “Does ‘Special’ Mean Young, White and Female? Deconstructing the Meaning of ‘Special’ in *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*,” Central Washington University scholars Sarah Britto, Tycy Hughes, Kurt Saltzman, and Colin Stroh discuss the types of victims the show portrays and the implications of these choices: “Age, in both extremes, is used as a way to depict innocence,” and *SVU* certainly capitalizes on this (Britto et al. 43). The fact that many of *SVU*’s victims are children places a form of inherent emphasis on the subject matter of those episodes since “children represent both vulnerability and potential for the future and as such their images are attention grabbing and powerful, particularly when the issue is crime” (Britto et al. 42). In this analysis, I will be examining several episodes in which children in particular are the victims of slavery because of this emphasis.

By using children as the object of these crimes, *SVU* draws special attention to the subjects of these episodes and the messages they convey. Oftentimes, episodes contain scenes in which characters discuss the issues at hand in such a way that viewers can learn about real-life situations through the show's treatment of them. In "Merchandise," for example, a scene between detectives and an assistant US attorney informs the audience about the little-discussed issue of American children in various types of domestic slavery. According to the episode's executive producer Neal Baer, "We hear about sex trafficking, which is horrendous, but we don't hear as much about trafficking where kids are forced to work on farms and work for people in their homes" (qtd. in Keehn). In the episode, the characters discuss how foreign victims have access to aid, whereas domestic slaves "get nothing"; the assistant US attorney then describes several examples of children enslaved across the country. In this way, I propose that *SVU* constructively contributes to the much-needed efforts in the overall trafficking discourse "to expand the definition of trafficking to include purposes other than prostitution, such as forced labor, forced marriage, and slavery-like practices," as Dr. Jyoti Sanghera, Section Chief of Human Rights and Economic and Social Issues at the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, says (10). This scene in "Merchandise" is exemplary of how the show fits in moments meant to inform viewers while simultaneously moving the storyline along.

In addition to these conversations, characters often portray the real effects that enslavement can have in such a way that viewers can become more informed about trauma. Continuing our analysis of "Merchandise," the episode continues its efforts to engage in critical slavery dialogue when a child victim named Micah reveals the inherent non-linear nature of trauma in a way that can enlighten viewers into this aspect of a victim's experience.

Often, victims of extremely traumatic experiences face difficulties putting those experiences into a chronological, linear narrative that normal experiences generally allow. They instead remember and recount their trauma in nonlinear flashes of memories and feelings, which is evident in Micah's interview with psychiatrist Dr. George Huang. Micah begins his story in the middle, describing the sounds, smells, and feelings of the cellar in which he was held. He then says, "Do something wrong, make a mistake, and we all get a beating" ("Merchandise"). The rest of the conversation follows this nonlinear pattern. Huang attempts to put Micah on a chronological path with leading questions, but Micah's narrative continues to push back. This conversation demonstrates how severe trauma like slavery is resistant to a linear narrative.

In addition to nonlinearity, *SVU* also reveals the traumatic implications these experiences can have on their victims, based on real-life experiences. In her analysis of real-life child trafficking victims, Daniela Nicolaescu notes, "The analysed subjects show us that ... the forms of abuse which the child endured while being trafficked have disastrous consequences on the emotional balance and on the general behavior of the children," including Stockholm syndrome, panic, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and anxiety (102, 95, 99). Often, victims on *SVU* deal with these same results from their traumatic experiences, such as Kristen in "Stranger," a victim of prolonged sexual enslavement who suffers from PTSD and Stockholm syndrome. This episode even features a scene when the detectives discuss the implications of the latter, thus informing the audience about a commonly-misunderstood mental issue.

However, despite the various productive ways that the show is raising awareness about various slavery- and trauma-related issues, it is important to recognize the fact that it exists

within an entertainment medium. As Britto et al. explain, “children’s images... are often the basis of moral panics, suggesting when crime stories focus on children they have more salience among consumers” (42). They go on to speculate that this, perhaps, is the reason why *SVU* is the most popular of the Law & Order spin-off shows and to note that nearly “one-half of all the victims on *SVU* were under the age of 18, compared to NCVS [National Crime Victimization Survey] reports that suggest the actual figure is closer to one-quarter [of] all victims” (46). This calls into question whether the program’s emphatic and disproportionate use of child victims is as innocent as it may at first appear. *SVU* could be using this particular demographic in order to draw attention to issues, but the reasons could also be exploitative. They could be attempting to attract and maintain the attention of more viewers or perhaps unknowingly, but nonetheless perversely, providing a voyeuristic opportunity for viewers to observe the torture and maltreatment of children. Even with the ways that *SVU* is contributing to a discourse about trafficking, it is important to consider whether the price is worth paying in exchange.

Although one might hope that the show’s goals are to bring the abovementioned issues about slavery and trauma to light, the fact still remains that channels like USA broadcast *SVU* among other shows like *Necessary Roughness*, *Royal Pains*, and *Satisfaction*. It would be a very difficult case to argue that these other programs have activist goals in mind when they are so clearly meant for entertainment, and it is disturbing to consider that *SVU* may be using child enslavement for the purpose of entertainment. What does it mean when these types of seemingly-productive discourse-raising themes are present in a show which keeps such company? The use and heavy reliance on the child victim character type and the fact that this show is clearly at least partially, if not entirely, intended for entertainment creates a site of ambiguity when considering whether as a whole *SVU* productively contributes to the trafficking discourse.

WHEN WILL THE MADNESS END?: AN EXAMINATION OF REVICTIMIZATION ON AND OFF SCREEN

Victims of these types of crimes often experience further victimization after the initial crime has taken place. From the police officers who first take their statements to the medical professionals who attempt to care for their physical and mental needs, victims often seem to find themselves thinking that they would have been better off if they had simply remained silent. This process is known as revictimization, and it is prevalent in reality as well as in *SVU*.

In an article for *The Washington Post*, special counsel on human rights Malika Saada Saar recounts the story of Tami, a 15-year-old victim of forced prostitution who, when she finally escaped, was arrested instead of protected, and she questions: “But should an abused child be incarcerated for the abuses perpetrated against her?” Saar continues by arguing that “the people who rape these girls, the politely termed ‘johns,’ are rarely arrested for statutory rape, child endangerment or sexual assault of a minor.” Often, children forced into prostitution are treated like criminals when they are actually victims of a much graver offense; under-aged prostitutes, regardless of whether they are slaves or not, are victims of statutory rape and should be treated as such.

Often in *SVU*, revictimization is overtly prevalent, and thus the show productively raises awareness about it. Victims often express their displeasure with the way that they are treated

by the state, a sentiment grounded in reality. According to a study performed by Rebecca Campbell of Michigan State University, “43% to 52% of victims who had contact with the legal system rated their experience as unhelpful and/or hurtful” (704). The show makes it clear to viewers that, even though there is a chance for justice to be served, that chance often comes with a price.

Kristen exemplifies the cost a victim might face from pursuing justice in a particularly overwhelming scene from “Stranger.” She suffers from PTSD as a result of her enslavement. Soon after she is released from the hospital, the detectives take her out to retrace her steps in order to find her abuser. Throughout, Kristen becomes increasingly overwhelmed and triggered by the loud sounds and the detectives’ pressuring questions. Even though the purpose of this process was to assist her in getting justice, the overall result was further victimization. This demonstrates to viewers that even the most well-intentioned servants of the state may inadvertently cause further suffering for victims in the process of helping them get justice.

Within other episodes of *SVU*, the concept of revictimization becomes a site of contradiction. The show both raises awareness about this troublesome reality and also participates in it. One episode exemplary of this contradiction is “Merchandise,” which focuses on child enslavement and demonstrates “how these heinous crimes can be hidden in plain sight—and how victims of sex trafficking are often prosecuted as criminals” (Keehn). Detectives discover that Micah has a record for prostitution, despite the fact that he is only thirteen years old. Since Micah is paradoxically a victim of sex trafficking being charged with prostitution, the show points to how the legal system is revictimizing him by criminalizing actions that he was forced to perform. Instead of arresting the pimps, “johns,” or traffickers, officers have arrested their victim.

This theme continues later in the episode, only in a different light because the characters and the show itself revictimize Micah. During a struggle to take the boy in, his shirt tears, revealing a back covered in lacerations—putting the boy’s injured body on display for the viewers. Even though Micah is a fictional character, the way this scene takes advantage of the set-up of the episode and the real-life implications of this type of treatment are extremely problematic. This moment of cinematography is exploitative on many levels: it exposes the body of a victim, it shocks some viewers into a state of pity (which is problematic in and of itself) without the probability of productive action to take in response to this experience, and it capitalizes on other viewers’ desire to witness the results of torture.

When Micah begins to repeatedly hurt himself, Fin then goes to restrain Micah for his own protection. Detective Eliot Stabler protests, “You saw his back—they made him a slave. Are you going to treat him like one now?” To this, Benson states, “Maybe it’s the only thing he’s used to.” Here, Benson argues that Micah has been treated like a slave for so long that he can no longer process anything else, explaining his self-destructive behavior. However, regardless of what Micah is “used to,” they should not subject him to further victimization. By putting him in handcuffs, they are doing exactly what the show accused other officers of earlier: they are treating the victim like a criminal. Benson’s comment may have been true, but that does not justify further victimization of a child who has already been forced into labor and prostitution, repeatedly raped and sodomized, and arrested and charged with crimes out of his control.

Another source of secondary victimization is through the medical professionals with whom victims interact after an assault, specifically through the harrowing process of getting a rape kit. Campbell states that because “the survivor’s body is a crime scene,” an extremely

invasive and meticulous medical procedure is necessary to preserve evidence of the crime, a process which often leaves victims feeling as though they have been raped a second time (706). This aspect of revictimization is also addressed through *SVU*, but the way in which it is brought to light merits scrutiny. In “Stranger,” when a victim of sexual enslavement goes to the hospital with Benson, the scenes that follow are problematic. While Benson asks her about her trauma, the camera pans over the girl’s exposed body in suggestive patterns, down her back, up between her legs, and over her chest; focuses on a needle slowly penetrating her skin; and shows her expressionless, motionless, haunted face. These startling and pseudo-pornographic images, along with how her narrative is given as a voice-over, draw attention away from her narrating her trauma and toward her body. While this scene certainly demonstrates and raises awareness about the trauma of getting a rape kit, it does so in a way that is also exploitative.

THE WHITE KNIGHT WITH A BADGE: *SVU*’S USE OF THE WHITE SAVIOR TROPE

Throughout literature pertaining to slavery, one widespread trope is that of the white savior—the “messianic white self” who “is the redeemer of the weak, the great leader who saves blacks from slavery or oppression” (Vera and Gordon 33). The white savior is persistent throughout film and TV alike in such blockbusters as *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, *The Matrix*, *Avatar*, and *The Blind Side*, and it is much more harmful than it may seem.

Originating in Western traditions of enslavement, the white savior represents a history of white paternalism and racist abolition movements, as well as a supposition of nonwhite submission and an inherent need for a savior. According to authors Hernán Vera (a professor of sociology and a prolific race relations writer) and Andrew M. Gordon (an associate professor of English and a film critic), in contemporary media, these types of characters present “whites with pleasing images of themselves as saviors rather than oppressors of other races,” when history clearly shows the latter to be a much more accurate depiction (34).

When analyzing the depiction of an issue as racially-charged as slavery, it is important to evaluate whether the work in question is complicit in the use of this harmful and pervasive character type. Upon evaluating several episodes of *SVU*, I have found the white savior to be alarmingly prevalent. In order to demonstrate the various ways that the white savior trope is present in *SVU*, I will examine two episodes in particular: “Ritual” and “Merchandise.”

In “Ritual,” a white man purchases a young black boy from Nigeria through a trafficking ring to use for his own sexual perversions while his wife is away. The episode evolves to revolve around how these young black children from Nigeria are taken under false pretenses from their homes to be trafficked into the United States for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. Throughout this episode, the black child slaves are portrayed in a way similar to how Vera and Gordon analyze the treatment of natives in the film *Stargate*: they are “credulous, ignorant, and superstitious” and even have special amulets like the black characters of that movie (36). This places these characters in a white-savioristic situation, which problematically “racializes and separates people into those who are redeemers (whites) and those who are redeemed or in need of redemption (nonwhites),” as Mathew W. Hughey describes the trope in his book *The White Savior Film: Content, Critics, and Consumption* (2).

Over the course of this episode, the detectives work to uncover the trafficking operation. Toward the end, the detectives receive information which leads to a raid on a warehouse and the discovery of dozens of black children in chains, huddled in the dark, their faces now up-

turned from their previous stupor of hopelessness as they are rescued by their white saviors. This image of black bodies—much less those of black children—in chains is problematic on many levels which will be discussed later, but here I will emphasize the way that this episode positions the seemingly ignorant, helpless, compliant black slave children with the bold, justice-seeking white adults.

Later on in the episode, it is revealed that the main perpetrator of enslaving these children is a man from Nigeria himself, thus positioning the only adult from these children's home as the episode's villain. What's more, the typecasting for this character buys into mainstream colorism, a type of discrimination based on skin color (distinctly different from racism which is based on ancestry and various other factors in addition to skin color). According to Dr. Ronald Hall of the University of St. Thomas, who is one of the nation's leading scholars on skin color, "African American males who have darker skin are viewed as more sinister and threatening by both the dominant and dominated populations" (178). Since the actor for the Nigerian trafficker is one of the darkest male characters in the episode, the show is simultaneously ascribing negative connotations to him based on his darker skin color and potentially contributing to viewers' preexisting colorism mentalities. Even at the end of this episode when the one black detective, Fin (who notably happens to be much lighter than the trafficker), is accosting the trafficker and the situation turns violent, the white detectives intervene to make the official arrest, thus yet again "saving" the day.

In "Merchandise," the white savior trope takes a turn by juxtaposing the power of the various detectives on the force. When the case of enslaved at-risk American youths becomes one of federal jurisdiction, Benson and Stabler become temporary U.S. Marshals. It is important to note here that even though Fin—again, the team's only black detective—played an integral role in the case thus far, it is the white detectives who achieve this new level of authority. Indeed, directly following this scene, Fin expresses how impressed he is with their new credentials, reinforcing the underlying theme of white saviordom by juxtaposing his lack of power to save the children with the white detectives' newly-empowered ability to do so.

As these episodes are representative of trends within the show, it is clear that *SVU* leans on the white savior trope throughout its treatment of slavery. Even though we have already examined several ways in which *SVU* is productively adding to the trafficking discourse and raising awareness about real-world slavery concerns, it is important here to discuss the ways that its reliance on this character type could be causing some level of harm to viewers and, by extension, to race relations in modern society.

The white savior is a trope of contention wherever it appears with "people wrangl[ing] over the site and suitability" and "stak[ing] out a position along the spectrum of evaluations: good to bad, progressive to racist, and stereotype to true story" (Hughey 3-4). Within the context of *SVU* specifically, it is my position that the white savior falls on the latter side of this spectrum because of its subtlety; it is extremely prevalent without being so obvious that the average viewer would necessarily notice. The motif makes appearances in such a subversive way that could potentially derail any productive efforts the show could be having within the trafficking discourse. Similar to films depending on this trope, *SVU* characters might come across as straight-forward depictions of heroic characters, and "yet they are sites of both purposeful ideological labor and implicit explanations about race so normalized as common sense that many may fail to recognize them as ideological" (Hughey 8). From a show with a flawed framework which allows for this kind of treatment of race relations, it is

important to be critical about whether it can still make positive and productive contributions to the discourse surrounding slavery.

In a study on racial stereotypes, S. Plous and Tyrone Williams of Wesleyan University ascertained that: “Some 20% of the public expresses a belief that blacks are innately inferior in thinking ability, and a majority endorses at least one racial stereotype concerning inborn ability. In addition, roughly 50% of the public endorses at least one stereotypical difference in anatomy between blacks and whites” (811). Their research summary explains how stereotypes of this sort have firmly rooted themselves in the American history of oppression since early views about blacks centered on “characteristics which, it was argued, naturally suited them to slavery” (796). One of the reasons for these types of stereotypes remaining persistent today can be ascribed to the media’s treatment of people of color. In our visual culture, images have the ability to shape people’s worldviews. This includes both obvious sources like the news and also more seemingly innocent forms like entertainment television. In turn, we can posit that the way shows like *SVU* lean on racist and colorist tropes like the white savior is problematically adding to this harmful trend.

However, while certainly problematic, there could potentially be a somewhat plausible motive behind its use. Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Nicholas Kristof often uses this trope within his own writing, but he believes that it is for a greater cause:

Frankly, the moment a reader sees that I’m writing about Central Africa, for an awful lot of them, that’s the moment to turn the page.... One way of getting people to read at least a few [paragraphs] in is to have some kind of foreign protagonist, some American who they can identify with as a bridge character. And so if this is a way I can get people to care about foreign countries, to read about them, ideally, to get a little bit more involved, then I plead guilty. (qtd. in Hughey 3)

While Kristof’s argument may be partially applicable to *SVU*, it cannot fully excuse the trope’s presence due to the entertainment factor. Regardless of its attributes, this show still runs on TV stations like USA alongside other shows like *White Collar* and *Psych*, programs whose main purpose is to entertain. This begs the question of whether or not the primary goal of this show is to divert audiences, as opposed to getting them “a little bit more involved.” Thus, what value does its use of the white savior truly have? Especially when one considers all of the evidence which points to the trope being harmful, these small attempts at using it productively seem to be a weak justification at best.

Although it is clear that *SVU* has a problematic tendency to lean on the white savior trope throughout its treatment of the issue of slavery, this seemingly clear-cut issue is complicated by a single factor, namely a single character: Olivia Benson. Detective Benson is a strong female character in the show and always has been from the first season. Throughout the show’s sixteen seasons, she has advanced through the ranks to become the current supervisor of the detective squad. As a “feminist heroine” (Cuklanz and Moorti 305), Benson demonstrates many characteristics that many within the feminist conversation surrounding the show have praised as one of *SVU*’s most powerful and positive contributions to the gender discourse in modern television.

However, as a white detective, Benson still finds herself in the position of the white savior quite frequently, raising concerns about her character’s productive nature within the critical discourse surrounding the show as a whole. In his book, Hughey points to several films which include “characters whose innate sense of justice drives these tales of racial cooperation, nonwhite uplift,

and white redemption” (7). While these particular themes may not be applicable to the show as a whole, one can certainly make a case that they are present in the episodes discussed thus far in this analysis. Benson is certainly a white protagonist character who fits Hughey’s description of this type of white savior; however, we arrive at the point of contention when the gender factor comes into play because, usually, the white savior trope refers to a man.

Amidst the productive ways that Benson’s character interacts with the storyline in regards to feminist theory, there are these problematic elements of her character which stem from the show’s favoritism toward white savioristic depictions and situations. This again raises the question of whether or not the show is productive or problematic within the trafficking discourse. The severity of this tension makes it difficult to discern whether there is a clear answer.

Indeed, Benson is further complicated by the actress who plays her: Mariska Hargitay is an activist and advocate in real life for victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse. “It all started for me when I began my work on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* over a decade ago,” she says on the website for her organization, the Joyful Heart Foundation. She describes shocking statistics about sexual abuse, along with letters from viewers who wanted to share their stories about abuse. “That these individuals would reveal something so intensely personal—often for the very first time—to someone they knew only as a character on television demonstrated to me how desperate they were to be heard, believed, supported, and healed,” she writes, and these experiences moved her to become an activist. Not in name only, Hargitay has received training to become a crisis counselor, studied the subject, used her visibility to become an advocate and affect change, and has several advocacy awards to show for it.

This is not to sing Hargitay’s praises but to demonstrate her dedication to bringing about awareness and change regarding several issues central to the conflict in *SVU*. Indeed, according to Cuklanz and Moorti, “Hargitay’s volunteer work outside the show... emphasize[s] the commitment of both *SVU* the program and Benson the character to victims’ perspectives and experiences” (305). How, then, could a person so passionate about productive discourse possibly find herself complicit in a show which, as we have seen, has so many exploitative tendencies?

CINEMATOGRAPHIC SINS: EXPLOITATIVE PORTRAYALS AND VOYEURISTIC TENDENCIES

Since television is predominately visual, it is vital to consider the imagery in a show like *SVU* when questioning its potential for being productive versus exploitative. As viewers of this program most likely have noticed, often the images the producers select to tell these stories of trauma can be traumatizing in and of themselves. When discussing the issue of slavery, these images can have even more sinister implications which could potentially stand in the way of *SVU* being a productive venue for the trafficking discourse by becoming complicit in voyeurism.

In many episodes, the body of a victim is put on display for viewers. This has caused a great deal of controversy within feminist discussions of the show from the very beginning because “while the majority of the episodes in the first season focused on the victimization of ‘classic’ powerless subjects—women and children—storylines have increasingly drawn attention to other violated bodies, those gendered subjects who occupy the space of the female body in ‘rape scripts’” (Cuklanz and Moorti 301). Indeed, this progression has continued throughout the seasons with increasingly more disturbing visual representations of

victims' traumatic experiences. A prime example of this trend can be found in the medical exam scene from "Stranger."

These kinds of pseudo-pornographic images become much more explicit in some of the other episodes like "Slaves." In this episode, detectives investigate a case of a young Romanian girl being held as a domestic/sex slave. Even though "Slaves" brings to light several of the issues surrounding domestic slavery in the United States, several moments overtly point to the BDSM (bondage-discipline/dominance-submission/sadism-masochism) subculture. Throughout the course of questioning a suspect, the detectives use photos of tortured female bodies who allegedly had died as a result of torture. Later, upon searching the home of the suspect, they find various incriminating devices, including chains, head cages, and other instruments of torture, which could clearly point to sexual slavery. However, the case is complicated by the wife's seemingly willing participation (which turns out to be anything but) in these practices until the detectives discover the Romanian girl being held in a cage box built into the underside of the couple's bed.

The fact that this episode relies so heavily on BDSM culture while simultaneously engaging in the topic of slavery is a site of tension because of the fact that several sexually deviant behaviors associated in BDSM, while consensual, have their roots in fantasies of rape and sexual slavery. Scholar Marcus Wood asks in his book *Slavery, Empathy and Pornography*:

"Is it too much to see bondage, body art, sado-masochism, mystical religious cults, the constructions of black male and female sexuality by whites as having evolved, more or less directly, out of the submerged and devious reaction of successive Western societies to the inheritance of Atlantic slavery?" (12).

When considering *SVU*, the answer is an emphatic no. Even though the victim here is white, the episode nonetheless makes connections between the slave trade and modern sexual practices in such a way as to invite a voyeuristic viewing from audience members. Thus, it implicitly welcomes "white fantasies of black lives and suffering," which is "more or less, the cultural memory of English slavery," according to Wood (21). Specifically, the imagery of instruments of torture is fetishized by the photographs of tortured female bodies, the BDSM themes, the final image of the girl in the box, and the general context of the episode as a whole. In summation, this episode's imagery plays into a highly problematic tendency to associate legitimate sexual slavery with its consensual counterpart. "Slaves" is even more disarming to the viewer since it is the finale to the first season, which was one of the most moderate of the sixteen seasons.

Potentially even more problematic than the show's treatment of the enslaved female body is that of the black slave body. *SVU* buys into a media tendency to discount the value of a single black voice by reducing individualized narratives in favor of groups in need of salvation: "although a single white victim was frequently the sole focus of an episode on *SVU*, minority victims were almost always portrayed in groups" (Britto et al. 47). This practice mirrors that of reality since "similar to past media research when minority victims are shown [in *SVU*], they are often depersonalized by only showing a photo rather than a person and grouping victims together and not developing their individual stories" (Britto et al. 50).

This practice is arguably never more prevalent than in "Ritual" during the liberation scene. In this scene, the group of black children in chains draws on highly sinister roots in the heri-

tage of the slave trade. Historically, chains have served not only as devices of physical control but also of psychological dehumanization. By placing the slaves in chains, they are likened to animals, who are then rendered much easier to exploit and control. According to Wood, “The comparison of slave body with the animal body has often been considered in terms of the manner in which it legitimated inhuman behavior on the part of the slave owner” (403). “Ritual” specifically draws on this history in a disconcertingly vivid way since the children are often kept as domestic “pets” by white families: “Yet perhaps of more sinister cultural import is the manner in which the slave-animal comparison, within the context of the domestic pet, opened up areas of positive emotional identification” (Wood 403). Wood goes on to discuss the significance of the use of the collar and other forms of restraints in the iconography of enslavement, a trope which is clearly evident in this scene from “Ritual.” As one of the show’s most disturbing moments, this scene seems to serve no productive purpose and draws on a history of black subjugation in the exploitative context of the black child slave’s body, in addition to the white savior themes.

The fact that these types of abuse of the victim’s body take place within the context of a TV show adds an extra level of exploitation because of the viewer’s voyeuristic ability to re-watch scenes of torture and subjugation. This relates directly to Wood’s discussion of Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey*, when he says of the narrator: “He can come back to, and ‘enjoy’ the suffering of his fantasy slave at any time, and in any way he likes. This act of imaginative possession exists in a troubled relation to the manner in which a real slave-owner can use the slave’s body at any time, in any way” (16).

WATCHING REAL CHILDREN IN CHAINS: AN AREA FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Besides the various ways examined here regarding *SVU*’s exploitative practices, I believe that an even deeper and more threatening issue merits further consideration. There has yet to be meaningful research about what these experiences do to the child actors who facilitate these traumatic narratives. For example, a great number of young child actors of color were needed for the liberation scene from “Ritual” discussed at length above, and these young performers were actually physically occupying the space of a trafficked child being saved by white detectives. What is the show performing when it creates this situation where these children are acting out these highly traumatic scenes of racialized subjugation at such an impressionable age? While this is not a question I am qualified to answer here, it merits further consideration and warrants mentioning here since it represents a potentially highly problematic site of exploitation.

CONCLUSION

According to Baer, “*SVU* asks the major questions—troubling, difficult, intractable issues of our time ... I’m interested in how things fall apart” (qtd. in Lee 92). Indeed, the show does seem to spend a considerable amount of effort in productively participating in trafficking dialogue and raising awareness about critical issues pertaining to real-life themes. However, these efforts “fall apart” when one considers the various exploitative implications and underlying sinister themes of individual episodes and, by extension, the show as a whole. In order to be truly productive, *SVU* would need to shy away from harmful practices like the white savior trope and treat issues like revictimization in ways in which it does not end up participating in it themselves.

In such a visual medium as television, it is vital to ensure that a show of this nature does not become explicitly exploitative through cinematographic decisions. While graphic moments may draw viewers in, it does so for voyeuristic reasons, which are harmful to the show's overall value as a productive participant in the dialogue. In tackling difficult subject matter like child enslavement, it is understandable that a program merely meant for entertainment may come up short when critically examined for these types of issues. However, by choosing to focus on "special victims," *SVU* opens the door for this type of criticism. In terms of visual culture, it is important to note that because "images can educate as well as corrupt," the show has a responsibility to guide viewers to the former, although "the power of interpretation, or revision ... lies solely with the viewer" (Bachman 151). As the show progresses through its sixteenth season, critical viewers can hope that these types of considerations will be taken into account so that the potential for productive conversation can come to fruition.

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Speaking the Lacuna: The Archaeology of Plantation Slavery as Testimony

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In *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, Giorgio Agamben uses the framework of the Holocaust, specifically the Auschwitz death camp, to interrogate the very nature of testimony and the position of the witness. According to Agamben, witness testimony to the Holocaust from survivors of the camp occupies a particular hinge: “On the one hand, what happened in the camps appears to the survivors as the only true thing and, as such, absolutely unforgettable; on the other hand, this truth is to the same degree unimaginable, that is, irreducible to the real events that constitute it” (12). This hinge of the unimaginable and the incomprehensible, the unforgettable and the inarticulateable, is characteristic of “the aporia of Auschwitz,” “a reality that necessarily exceeds its factual elements.” However, this aporia is also indicative of a “lacuna” specifically imbedded in the nature of testimony itself. According to Agamben, “At a certain point, it became clear that testimony contained at its core an essential lacuna; in other words, the survivors bore witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to” (12). This zone of indistinction between the knowable and unknowable, of meaning that can never be externalized but exists only in retreat, makes up the “lacuna” of witnessing, the inherent impossibility of bearing witness that characterizes the act of witnessing itself.

Agamben’s theory of the “lacuna” of witnessing, by dealing exclusively with the writing and speaking subject, appears to engage only literary and witness forms of testimony. However, the “lacuna” of testimony contains an inherent material, spatial, and forensic dimension imbedded at the site of its etymology. The term “lacuna” means “a missing portion in a manuscript,” as well as both “an unfilled space or gap” and “a cavity or depression, especially in bone.” While the “lacuna” of Agamben’s definition is applied explicitly to witness testimony in his work, the etymology of the term implicitly includes other testimonial forms. By referencing “a missing portion in a manuscript,” alongside “an unfilled space or gap” and “a cavity or depression, especially in bone,” the

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines plantation archaeology as a form of material testimony and bearing witness to the historical trauma of slavery. Exploring intersections of literary and spatial analysis, and using a critical framework that combines Agamben, Weizman, and Felman, the author argues that the material testimony of plantation archaeology embodies a “lacuna” of witnessing, and may even replicate historical dynamics of violence.

KEY WORDS:

Slavery, archaeology, forensics, anthropology, trauma studies, Shoshana Felman, Giorgio Agamben, Eyal Weizman

etymology of “lacuna” alludes to an unexplored and fundamental relationship between witness and literary testimonies and the material testimony of objects and spaces. In this way, the etymology of “lacuna” also hints at the ways in which material, forensic, and archaeological forms of testimony may also embody the crisis and inherent impossibility of bearing witness.

In its contemporary context, forensic archaeology has become increasingly utilized as a method to structure political interventions on behalf of victims of atrocity, to investigate and expose violence, to commemorate its events, to recognize the presence of historical trauma in contemporary life, and to pursue a project of collective healing. According to Keenan and Weizman, the advent of forensic aesthetics fundamentally shifted the privileging of witness testimony to that of the material testimony of objects. As Weizman also points out, this critical shift in the aesthetics of public truth-construction is fundamentally rooted in the desire to resolve the instability of witness testimony (Keenan and Weizman, 23). In this way, by privileging material, forensic, and archaeological methods of representation over witness testimony, it could be argued that this shift engages a belief in the ability of these methods to resolve the “lacuna” of testimony by extracting and representing a pure externalization, an objective reality of the memory and experience of trauma.

This belief is reflected in the methods of the archaeology of slavery. According to archaeologist scholar Patricia Samford, “[T]he lives of slaves, in many respects, are shadowy and inaccessible. Because most of the enslaved were kept from learning to read and write, their thoughts and emotions come to us only indirectly” (2). In an apparent parallel to this perceived inadequacy, Samford argues that the past of enslaved Africans are “visible now only to archaeologists, who carefully record and excavate the soil stains and brick foundations and preserve the thousands of artifacts revealed by digging” (3). In this way, Samford’s scholarship communicates a critical shift: a privileging of material, forensic, and archaeological testimony over witness testimony, rooted in the belief that these methods allow us to excavate and represent the memory and objective reality of slavery.

However, plantation archaeology embodies a fundamental site of paradox. According to Samford, “Just as historians make it possible for the words written by long-dead individuals to come to life, so too a skilled archaeologist can coax silent objects to speak” (3). Here, Samford’s language reveals a site of rupture and collapse within the supposed objectivity of material, forensic, and archaeological testimony. For, if plantation archaeology is meant to resolve the inherent “lacuna” of slave witness and literary testimony by recovering an objective reality of slavery, what then does it mean to make objects “speak” if the act of speech and the position of the speaking subject is rendered unstable and impossible via testimony? Within plantation archaeology, what is the relationship between witness/literary testimony and the testimony of objects and space? And, in what ways does the material testimony of plantation archaeology embody the “lacuna” of literary and witness testimony?

This analysis enacts multiple analytic processes to examine plantation archaeology as a form of testimony and bearing witness to the atrocity of slavery. By applying literary analysis to material testimony of slavery and by exploring representation of material testimonies in the literature of slavery, this paper aims to open up the relationship between literary and material testimonies of slavery. Using a critical framework that synthesizes Agamben’s theory of the “lacuna” of testimony, Shoshanna Felman’s concept of the “irreducibility” of literature, and Eyal Weizman’s concept of critical forensic practice, I examine the relationship between the literary and material testimony of slavery, as well as the forensic methods and digital archives of plantation archaeology. Using this framework, I aim to address what I have come to view as critical gaps in dialogue and application within intersections of mainstream trauma studies, comparative slavery studies, and the field

of critical forensic practice.

First, while Agamben's theory of the "lacuna" of witnessing and testimony has been historically important to the development of mainstream trauma studies, many have also noted the conspicuous absence of slavery from this framing. Similarly, while Felman has famously explored the relationship between literature and testimony, particularly the inherent "irreducibility" of literature and the inability of literary analysis to go "outside itself" in order to produce a pure externalization of meaning, the implications of this relationship to material forms of testimony, particularly the material testimony of slavery, remains obscured (Felman, *Writing and Madness: Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis*). In addition, while Weizman and other theorists within the field of critical forensics have analyzed the archaeology of many sites of historical atrocity and the relationship of these methods to knowledge production and the management of cultural trauma (including Holocaust concentration camps, Bosnian death camps, genocides in South America, and the colonial archaeology of Israel in the Palestinian territories), as of yet this critical forensic framework has not been used to analyze the archaeology of the transatlantic slave trade in the U.S.

In an effort to address these identified gaps, this paper makes several arguments. In the first section, I present an analysis of a section from Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy*. In this section of analysis, I identify the material and spatial dimensions of Morrison's literary testimony and bearing witness to the atrocity of slavery. Here, I argue that there is a fundamental relationship between literary and material testimonies of slavery and that the study of witness and literary testimony of slavery also inevitably illuminates these material forms. Analyzing the material testimony of Morrison's literary witnessing allows us to begin identifying the ways in which the material testimony of slavery is implicated in the "lacuna" of literary forms of bearing witness. In this way, the inseparable folding of the material and literary testimony of slavery in *A Mercy* allows us to identify the relationship between literary and material testimony within the archaeology of plantation slavery and frame an analysis of the particular "lacuna" of plantation archaeology.

In the proceeding sections, I apply Felman's literary theory to the methodology of plantation archaeology as a form of testimony and, specifically, to the archaeological methods of forensic osteological analysis and digital object archives. Here, I argue that the forensic methodology and digital archives of plantation archaeology, rather than resolve the "lacuna" of slave testimony by excavating and representing a purely externalized memory of slavery, instead are tainted always by their own processes of meaning-making. By analyzing the forensic methodology of osteological analysis, as well as the digital archives of the Digital Archive of Comparative Slavery, I will show that these methods, rather than recover the traumatic memory of slavery and enact an intervention against its violence, instead work to erase the historical trauma of slavery and rhetorically repeat the very structures of the violence of slavery itself. In this way, I argue that the "lacuna" of plantation archaeology ultimately further emphasizes that the traumatic memory and experience of slavery exists outside the possibility of excavation.

LITERATURE AND TRAUMA: THE MATERIAL TESTIMONY OF FLORENS'S "TELLING" IN *A MERCY*

The ending of *A Mercy*, Toni Morrison's devastating novel exploring intersecting systems of slavery, violence, and trauma in colonial America, contains a pivotal scene. In the text, the character Florens, a young, enslaved black woman, is subjected to compounded structural and interpersonal violence and abuse. Born into slavery, rejected by her mother and sold to a new master (to "save" her from sexual abuse from her previous master, unbeknownst to Florens), and

later violently rejected by the older, free black man who takes her as a lover, Florens ultimately returns to the farm she left, where her master has since died. Each night, in his room, on the walls of her master's house, Florens carves her "telling," her understanding of what has happened to her, her representation of her own trauma. "I am holding light in one hand and carving letters by the other. My arms ache but I have *need* to tell you this" (189). Here, Florens's "telling" ("I am holding light in one hand and carving letters by the other"), as well as her expressed need to tell ("My arms ache but I have need to tell you this"), reveals her "telling" as a form of testimony, a method of bearing witness to the memory and violence of slavery. But what manner of testimony is Florens's telling? Probing this question reveals an inherent doubling of testimony, an inseparable folding between witness, literary, and material testimonial forms. Florens's "telling" is, fundamentally, a witness testimony: she wishes to speak her understanding of her traumatic experience, to externalize the internal truth of what has happened to her. However, the act of externalization that transforms Florens into a speaking subject in order to bear witness also orients her "telling" within the realm of literary testimony. "If you never read this, no one will. These careful words..." (188). In the act of externalization, by becoming "letters of talk," and "careful words," Florens's "telling" undergoes an inevitable process of translation, a passing from language into discourse that can now be "read" and interpreted as text. However, in this very act of externalization, in the passage of language into discourse, Florens's "telling" folds again into another realm of testimony via the method of telling itself. "There is no more room in this room. These careful words cover the floor ... Round and round, side to side, bottom to top, top to bottom all across the room" (189). In the act of carving the "careful words" into the wall, Florens's witness and literary testimony also becomes material testimony. Carved into the wall, her "telling" becomes image and object, space and architecture. In this way, Florens's "telling" also takes on a forensic and archaeological dimension which is left behind where she hopes her traumatic memory and meaning of the experience of slavery will be excavated and unearthed.

This doubling and slippage between witness, literary, and material forms of testimony in Morrison's work points to a fundamental relationship, a simultaneous blurring, between testimonial forms. Florens's "telling" reveals that witness, literary, and material testimony of slavery, rather than falling into separable hierarchy, continuously folds and refolds, passing into and out of one another, leaving behind and mingling with the residue of other forms. In this way, Morrison implicitly destabilizes hierarchies of witnessing that privilege material testimony. Florens's "telling" reveals that the material testimony of slavery always contains a trace of the literary, while literary testimony is revealed as material.

The slippage between witness, literary, and material testimony in Morrison's novel also reveals the ways in which the material testimony of Florens's "telling" embodies the "lacuna" of bearing witness. Florens's "telling" literalizes an inherent blurring of subject and object imbedded within testimony; in the act of carving her "telling" into the wall, Florens's enunciation as subject is literally objectified. Similarly, in the act of being carved into, the object of the wall becomes subjectified, as the "talking room" is literally made to "speak." However, Florens's "telling," in the attempt to purely externalize and capture meaning, is soon revealed as a further deferral and alienation of representation. As she carves her "telling," Florens realizes that the one she leaves it for will never understand it. "Sudden I am remembering. You won't read my telling. You read the world but not the letters of talk. You don't know how to" (188). Her telling is untranslatable and unrepresentable, and its meaning cannot be extracted, instead existing always in deferral and retreat. This inaccessibility, the unrepresentable nature of her testimony, the inherent impossibility of externalizing her experience, is doubled by the

reader as audience. Although we are told of Florens's "telling," it is only described to us—we have no access to the "letters of talk" themselves. They are never revealed to us; as a result, we cannot read them, only about them. This perpetual deferral of meaning is further performed by the text itself, particularly in the lexical disjuncture of the speaking "I," as well as the text's use of metaphor and simile. In the text, Florens as speaking subject, articulated in "I," is often out of joint with grammatical structure. "Sudden I am remembering," "I am become wilderness..." (188-189). Here, the lexical disjuncture of the "I" of testimony performs the impossibility of bearing witness. Florens's speaking subject, always out of joint, cannot externalize and articulate itself; thus, the meaning of her testimony is always displaced and alienated by the very act of externalization undertaken. The meaning of her testimony, its representation, cannot be purely extracted; rather, the act of testimony becomes another deferral of meaning.

This impossibility of testimony, its perpetual deferral of meaning, is also performed by the use of metaphor and simile within the text. "Perhaps these words need the air that is out in the world. Need to fly up then fall, fall like ash over acres of primrose and mallow" (188). Florens, speaking on her own testimony, describes it in terms of simile and metaphor. Here, via the function of metaphor, Florens's testimony, the meaning of her experience, is again inherently displaced by the very attempt to externalize it. In metaphor, what is described is framed not in terms of what it is, but specifically as what it is not. In this way, Florens's use of metaphor again performs the impossibility of testimony—rather than creating a pure externalization of experience, the act of "telling" creates a further deferral of meaning and representation. Similarly, with the use of simile, what is being described is framed as "like" something but is also fundamentally *not* that thing. In this way, Florens's "telling," her representation of experience, exists always in this in-between space of inarticulation. Through the use of simile and metaphor, Florens's testimony is defined always in terms of absences and gaps, its meaning perpetually deferred, impossible to truly externalize. Florens's "telling," in the act of being self-reflexively described, in the act of being read "about" by the audience, performs a testimony of testimony, the readers ultimately bearing witness to the act of bearing witness. Like the "letters of talk" circling her master's room, Florens's "telling," as witness, literary, and material testimony, exists always in excess of its framing.

Florens's "telling" reveals a fundamental slippage between witness, literary, and material testimony of slavery. As a result, Florens's material testimony also embodies an endless deferral of meaning and externalization, performing the impossibility of bearing witness. Morrison's framing allows us to identify similar slippage within the testimony of plantation archaeology, as well as the ways in which the material testimony of plantation archaeology, in the form of osteological analysis and digital object archives, also embodies a "lacuna" of bearing witness.

METHODOLOGIES OF VIOLENCE AND ERASURE: AN EXAMINATION OF OSTEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Within archaeological practice, osteological analysis refers to the forensic examination of human remains. Examining bones and tissues, including skeletal structure, microbone morphology, disease pathology, ossification, and biophysics, is used to verify the identity of the deceased, as well as to reconstruct the circumstances of their deaths and recover the history and memory of former life. According to Weizman and Thomas Keenan, osteological analysis allows us to recover and represent "not just the moment of death but the entire history of a life- a sequence of illnesses, incidents, and accidents, along with conditions of nutrition, labor, and habit- that is fossilized into the morphology and texture of bones" (19). The authors goes on to say that "the bones of the skeleton are exposed to

life in a similar way that photographic film is exposed to light. A life, understood as an extended set of exposures to a myriad of forces (labor, location, nutrition, violence, and so on) is projected onto a moving, growing, and contracting negative, which is the body in life" (20).

As a result, osteological analysis has become particularly important to the archaeology of genocide and other forms of cultural violence and atrocity. Through the forensic examination of victim remains, the archaeology of atrocity seeks to restore a sense of political subjectivity to victims who have been utterly desubjectified by genocidal violence. In this context, osteological analysis is particularly important within plantation archaeology. According to Samford, osteological analysis is often utilized within plantation archaeologies as a method of representing the trauma and violence of slavery. The "photographic film" of bones and tissues can indicate overt physical trauma, as well as sustained patterns of abuse: "Studies focusing on the dentition of skeletons ... have shown, for example, very severe growth arrest lines (hypoplasia) indicative of extreme dietary deficiency or starvation; various types of malocclusion also reflect conditions of malnutrition" (20).

The use of osteological analysis to represent the violence and trauma of slavery is also intended to supplement the perceived instability, ambiguity, or unreliability of witness and literary testimony in the form of documentary evidence. According to Samford, "Osteological and pathological conditions not addressed in the documents have been observed on skeletal material from Newton and elsewhere" (26). As a result, "the skeletal data, in short, provides an independent data source and expansion or verification of narrative or literary sources" (26). In this way, by privileging the forensic testimony of osteological analysis over the witness testimony of documentary or narrative evidence, plantation archaeologists engage the belief that osteological analysis allows us to recover an "objective" reality and representation of slavery, to externalize its traumatic memory and meaning.

However, osteological analysis also inhabits a site of slippage and paradox. "Osteological," from the root "osteon" meaning bone, and "logia" meaning to speak, gestures at an etymological point of rupture, as does another term often used to refer to osteological analysis: "osteobiography." "To speak" and the term "biography" infer both witness and literary testimony. If osteological analysis is intended to subvert the ambiguity of the narrative and speech of the witness as subject, what does it mean to make bones "*speak*," to "*write*" and "*read*" them as text, as biography? In this way, osteological analysis hints at a fundamental relationship between testimonial forms: a destabilization of hierarchy at the site of etymology.

This inherent, etymological rupture between testimonial forms is further repeated within the practice of osteological analysis itself. Although osteological analysis is meant to resolve the ambiguity of witness and literary testimony, the process of supposedly recovering an "objective" re-creation and externalization of traumatic memory via material evidence inevitably requires a process of inscription, presentation, interpretation, and translation by a speaking and literary subject. In order to construct the testimony of material evidence, someone must translate the "speech" of the object and speak for it. As a result, "the predicament that characterizes the witness, for better or worse (faulty memory and ambiguity, for example) now appears as the state of the material object as well" (23). In this way, osteological analysis, by attempting to re-subjectify victim remains, also moves through witness testimony. As a result, something of the "residue" of ambiguity and impossibility that characterizes witness testimony is transferred and replicated by the material testimony of bones. In addition, by constructing a "biography" of bones, in a sense "inscribing" bones with meaning and signification, the material testimony of osteological analysis passes into and out of the realm of literary testimony, with victim remains being "written" and "read" as texts. In

this way, while osteological analysis is intended as a means by which to externalize the traumatic memory and meaning of slavery, its meaning cannot be purely extracted from its own context of meaning-making—something of the “residue” or trace of interpretation, translation, and analysis taints its meaning via the very process of extraction. Osteological analysis, rather than interpreting the “sign” and signification of bones, instead renders bones another sign in a further deferral of meaning. Here, rather than resolve the ambiguity and impossibility of witness and literary testimony in order to externalize memory and meaning, we see that osteological analysis folds and refolds into the testimonial realms of the literary and the witness, destabilizing hierarchies of testimony. In this way, osteological analysis also embodies a “lacuna” of bearing witness.

This “lacuna,” the inherent rupture and impossibility of osteological analysis, has specific implications to its practice in the plantation archeology of slavery. Osteological analysis, through the forensic analysis of victim remains to verify identity and reconstruct traumatic memory and meaning, attempts to return victims to subjectivity, to resubjectify what was stripped away by the inherent objectification, commodification, and fetishization of slavery. However, the methods and practice of the osteological analysis of slave remains constantly undercut their own project and even repeat the dynamics of violence inherent to slavery. Although osteological analysis aims to “resubjectify” victim remains via identification, in order to enact identification, all of these instruments and objects become commingled with traces of the human: something must be put into the DNA amplifier, the blood card, the centrifuge; the plastic boxes do not remain empty. Yet in the process, these traces of the individual, the subject, the missing person, are effectively annulled, flattened out into the very same equipment or instrumental level as every other item on the list, the human remains losing their remaining identity to the very tools and objects meant to identify them. (172)

Mapping this analysis specifically onto the osteological analysis of plantation archaeology, victim remains of slaves, in the process of resubjectification, mingle with the material instruments of osteological identification. Pressed between slides, passing into and out of centrifuge and microscope, victim remains slip into and out of material and witness testimony, subject and object, phasing between them, undergoing a continuous and simultaneous process of subjectification and desubjectification. As a result, the remains of slaves are again subjected to further abstraction, objectification, and commodification via the very processes intended to restore subjectivity. In this way, osteological analysis of plantation archaeology repeats the dynamics of violent erasure and desubjectification it aims to subvert. Rather than resolve the “lacuna” of witnessing via the material testimony of osteological analysis, plantation archaeology further illustrates the ways in which the testimony of slavery, its traumatic memory and meaning, cannot be purely extracted and externalized, instead existing always in retreat.

TRAUMATIC OBJECT ARCHIVES: ANALYSIS OF MATERIAL TESTIMONY AND ETHNOHISTORIC APPROACHES IN THE *DIGITAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVE OF PLANTATION SLAVERY*

The *Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery*, established by a team based within the Department of Archaeology of Monticello, is a complete digital archive of “artifact, context, spatial, image, and map data from excavated sites of plantation slavery” (1). The archive contains interactive, image-laden media representing archaeological sites in Chesapeake, Jamaica, Nevis, and St. Kitts, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Each archival representation of an individual plantation slavery site contains documentary evidence, a comprehensive excavation history, an outline

of archaeological procedures, and a methods summary of research and analysis. In addition, the archive also contains image-laden object galleries highlighting artifacts, documents, and maps from each of the individual archaeological sites. As a result, the content of the *Digital Archaeological Archive* combines images of objects with the presence of accompanying texts.

The *Digital Archaeological Archive* incorporates several methods characteristic of plantation archaeology. Within plantation archaeology, and demonstrated within the *Digital Archaeological Archive*, the presence of material culture is used to establish and verify “slave status,” an archaeological term indicating the presence of slaves at a site. In addition, material culture is used to reconstruct the experience of slave life, to excavate and externalize the memory of slavery. According to Frederick W. Lange and Jerome S. Handler, patterns in the presence of material culture can establish and verify slave status of a site and represent the experience of slave life at a site where documentary evidence is seen as ambiguous or inadequate. “Documentary sources have generally been vague on slave material culture ... Material culture is very unevenly reported in most documents” (28). As a result, material evidence supplements this perceived inadequacy. “For example, artifact remains within the identified areas have shown what the domestic kits of plantation sites consisted of ... Remains of cooking and eating dishes, food processing equipment, and faunal and floral remains have provided some hard data on what slaves ate ... a point that was ambiguous in the documentation” (27). In this way, plantation archaeology presents material evidence as a means by which to fill the “gaps” in documentary evidence in order to produce a pure externalization of the memory of slavery.

The use of material culture as evidence to supplement the instability and inadequacy of documentary evidence is further reflected within ethnohistorical archaeology approaches, which are favored within plantation archaeology and replicated within the textual and material interplay of the *Digital Archaeological Archive*. Within ethnohistorical approaches, an interplay of documentary and material evidence is favored in order to verify slave status and reconstruct slave life. However, the interplay of documentary and material evidence within ethnohistorical approaches also implicitly privileges material evidence within this archaeological framing. Descriptions of ethnohistorical models within the scholarship of plantation archaeology emphasize the ways in which the interplay of material and documentary evidence is utilized specifically to supplement textual inadequacy. “Historic sites of archaeology- using an ethnohistoric methodology emphasizing an interplay between the documentary and archaeological data bases- offers the potential to develop quantifiable patterns ... The delineation of patterns with a high probability of indicating plantation slavery conditions will allow us to search for these patterns in *undocumented sites* or, by extension, to search for evidence in *preliterate sites* as well” (28, emphasis mine). As a result, “There is a much higher probability than there was 10 years ago that slavery can be defined from purely archaeological data” (28). Here, the interplay between material and documentary evidence within ethnohistorical methods in plantation archaeology is revealed as a means by which to supplement the ambiguity of the textual via the introduction of the material in order to establish slave status and reconstruct the experience of slave life. In this way, both the use of material culture and ethnohistorical approaches within plantation archaeology can be understood as forms of material testimony intended to resolve the “lacuna” of literary and witness testimonies in order to externalize the traumatic memory of slavery.

However, the use of material culture and ethnohistorical methodology also embodies a site of profound rupture and slippage, as illustrated in the *Digital Archaeological Archive*. Within the *Digital Archaeological Archive*, images of excavated objects are presented alongside accompanying

textual descriptions and documentation intended to contextualize the material culture of slavery, to capture and externalize its memory and meaning. However, this interplay of the material and textual automatically problematizes its own project and points to a constant dehierarchization and slippage between testimonial forms. Texts that accompany images of objects in the archive describe the object itself, as well as speculate on how the object would have been used in the material culture of slave life. By describing excavated objects and speculating on their use, the *Digital Archaeological Archive* enacts an inevitable and simultaneous process of subjectification and narrativization in which objects are translated, interpreted, and implicitly fictionalized. In order for the traumatic memory of slavery to be excavated and externalized via material testimony, objects must be made to “speak” as subjects, as well as “written” and “read” as “texts.” This interplay of documentary and material evidence within the *Digital Archaeological Archive* reveals a fundamental slippage between testimonies; in order to extract material testimony from excavated objects, the objects of the *Digital Archaeological Archive* must pass into and out of witness and literary dimensions of testimony. In addition, rather than extracting a pure externalization of meaning and memory, material testimony becomes always implicated in the process of its own extraction—it can never get outside itself. Instead of extracting a pure externalization of memory from the testimony of excavated objects, the *Digital Archaeological Archive* reveals the objects themselves as another sign, enacting an endless deferral of meaning in which what is analyzed contains always the residue of its own interpretation. In this way, rather than resolve the ambiguity of literary and witness testimony, the *Digital Archaeological Archives* embody the same “lacuna” of testimony, the inherent impossibility of bearing witness.

This “lacuna” of material testimony within the *Digital Archaeological Archive* has specific implications to the field of plantation archaeology. The interplay of object and text within the *Digital Archaeological Archive*, in the very process of verifying slave status and reconstructing the memory of slavery, also participates in erasure and rhetorically replicates the dynamics of the violence of slavery itself. Within plantation archaeology and the *Digital Archaeological Archive*, the verification of slave status and reconstructing the lives of slaves via material testimony is supposedly intended to subvert the violence and erasure of slavery, memorializing memory and returning slaves to subjectification. However, in the process of verifying the presence of slaves at a site via material culture, the bodies and lives of slaves are represented by and reduced to objects. In this way, the extraction and exteriorization of the traumatic memory of slavery requires that the slave be made object, the process of subjectification engaging a simultaneous desubjectification. In this way, in the process of verifying slave status based on material evidence, the *Digital Archaeological Archive* repeats the objectification and commodification of slave bodies and lives inherent to the violence of slavery itself.

In a similar vein, while the interplay between documentary and material evidence in the *Digital Archaeological Archive* is intended to externalize the memory of slavery by recreating and representing the lives of slaves, slaves themselves are strangely absent from the archive. Slaves are rarely mentioned; the few mentions of slaves within the archive rhetorically repeat dynamics of violence and erasure. Only three slaves are mentioned and given biographies in the archive. The biographies of the slaves Little George, Isaac Jefferson, and Joe Fossett can be found in the documentary evidence section of an archaeological site at Monticello called Building D/j, which functioned as a blacksmith’s and nailer’s shop. The biographies are presented alongside images of excavated objects from the site, as well as maps and images of the excavated site itself. The biography of Little George, a mere four sentences, includes that George “... ran Monticello’s blacksmith

shop from 1783 to his death in 1799 ... George was selected to be the first manager of Jefferson's nail-making business in 1794 and even received a small portion of its profits" (1). Similarly, the five-sentence biography of Isaac Jefferson includes that he "studied tinsmithing during an apprenticeship in Philadelphia" and "became one of the most productive nail-makers in Jefferson's nail-manufacturing shop" (1). Finally, the 4 sentence biography of Joe Fossett emphasizes that "[a]s a blacksmith, Joe was allowed to keep one-sixth of the blacksmith's shop's profits" and that "Joe was one of five slaves freed in Jefferson's will" (1). The selective inclusion and framing of slave biography subtly erases and romanticizes slave labor and is invested in reproducing the a historical idea of the "benevolent/kind master" in Thomas Jefferson. Rather than excavate and represent the cultural memory and experience of slavery, the ethnohistorical use of biography in the *Digital Archaeological Archive* rhetorically commodifies the lives and bodies of slaves in service of a perpetual, coerced production of white guilt and benevolent fantasy. Slaves are objectified and erased in biography, forced to perform a continuing ideological labor even in death. In this way, the ethnohistorical use of biography in the *Digital Archaeological Archive* rhetorically repeats the violence of slavery. The material testimony and ethnohistorical methods of the *Digital Archaeological Archive*, rather than externalize the traumatic memory of slavery and interpret its meaning, instead constantly undercuts its own project. The *Digital Archaeological Archive* illustrate again that plantation archaeology cannot speak outside of itself. The process of extracting the memory of slavery is always tainted by the very process of its extraction, endlessly deferring meaning and representation. Rather than resolve the "lacuna" of witnessing, plantation archaeology exists always within its impossibility.

CONCLUDING SUMMARY, PATHS OF INTERVENTION, AND COLLECTIVE HEALING

This analysis enacted multiple analytic processes to examine plantation archaeology as a form of testimony and bearing witness to the atrocity of slavery. By applying literary analysis to material testimony of slavery, and by exploring representation of material testimonies in the literature of slavery, this paper aims to open up the relationship between literary and material testimonies of slavery and allow them to "speak" to one another. Analyzing the representation of Florens's "telling" in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* reveals a fundamental slippage and dehierarchization of witness, literary, and material forms of testimony that allows us to think toward the ways in which plantation archaeology also embodies a "lacuna" of bearing witness. The rhetoric of osteological analysis and the *Digital Archaeological Archive* of Comparative Slavery reveals that the methods and practice of plantation archaeology, rather than resolve the "lacuna" of testimony by recovering an "objective" memory of slavery, instead embodies a site of paradox and traumatic rupture. Applying Felman's concept of the "irreducibility" of literature to plantation archaeology reveals that its material testimony cannot be purely extracted and exteriorized but is always tainted by the very methods of its analysis. In addition, this critical examination reveals that the archaeology of plantation slavery often rhetorically repeats the violence of slavery itself.

I wish to gesture at potential paths to address these sites of rupture within plantation archaeology and pursue both intervention and collective healing. Here, we return again to Agamben's theory of the "lacuna" in which he says that this inherent crisis of testimony is not to be resolved in order to achieve representation. The location of testimony cannot be found by resolving its "lacuna"; rather, testimony can be understood as its inherent "lacuna" itself. Similarly, in her concept of the "irreducibility" of literature, Felman argues that this irreducibility is in fact the essence of literary testimony, embodying what she calls "the literary thing." Any method of investigation and

commemoration of the cultural trauma and violence of slavery will therefore be called to acknowledge the inherent inability of testimony to “say itself,” to be extracted without being tainted by its very methods of externalization.

Weizman puts forth his concept of “Forensis” as means of intervening in the rhetorical violence and erasure of forensic archaeological practice. The term “Forensis” refers to a critical process in which the methods of archaeological analysis are subjected to simultaneous critique; “Forensis” therefore combines forensic methods of research and investigation, as well as simultaneous critical analysis of these practices, in order to interrogate their epistemologies, assumptions, protocols, and politics of knowledge production” (4). In this way, Forensis opens potential for harnessing forensic practice as a method of intervention via a turning of the forensic gaze.

In *Testimony: The Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Felman and Laub engage with the importance of examining the relationship between literature and testimony to understand the position of bearing witness within history and contemporary life. In addition, Felman argues that acknowledging and “claiming” the “irreducibility” of literature, the impossibility of testimony, enacts a form of “radical loss.” Enacting a claiming and recognition of this “loss” of meaning, according to Felman, “is the only way one has of winning it” (127). By presenting a “Forensis” and literary critique of the methods of plantation archaeology, this paper is intended to model the very paradigms of critical intervention and healing it pursues. In addition, the author of this paper wishes to recognize that, in an attempt to externalize the meaning of the testimony of plantation archaeology, this paper is further implicated in the deferral of meaning it attempts to orient and fix. By claiming the irreducibility of our own analysis, this paper also attempts to enact a form of “radical loss.”

To end our analysis, we again return to Florens’s testimony in *A Mercy*. Upon carving her “telling” into the walls, rendering it as image and object, Florens realizes her testimony cannot be extracted. “These careful words, closed up and wide open, will talk only to themselves” (188). Here, Morrison pushes us to realize that the unexcavateable testimony of slavery, including its material testimonies, cannot be said outside its own methods of saying.

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The Desensitization to Violence and the Perpetuation of Oppression and Slavery in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* Trilogy

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In an interview with Rick Margolis in 2008, Suzanne Collins explains where she discovered her inspiration to write her best-selling trilogy, *The Hunger Games*:

One night, I was lying in bed, and I was channel surfing between reality TV programs and actual war coverage. On one channel, there's a group of young people competing for I don't even know; and on the next, there's a group of young people fighting in an actual war. I was really tired, and the lines between these stories started to blur in a very unsettling way ... there is so much programming, and I worry that we're all getting a little desensitized to the images on our televisions. (Margolis)

ABSTRACT:

This paper analyzes slavery in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy by contextualizing her works within the history of Roman gladiator fighting and by examining the social structures of oppression within the society that Collins creates. The essay explores how the trilogy highlights the ways that people can perpetuate systems of slavery within a society when they become desensitized to violence and both benefit from and are entertained by the exploitation of others.

KEY WORDS:

The Hunger Games, desensitization to violence, Roman gladiators, slavery and entertainment

The inherent problem that Collins saw on her television that night and the backbone of her trilogy is the blurring of reality with fiction, the seeing of something real (such as violence or war) and treating it as something fictitious or dramatized. Collins noticed this competition between actual and staged violence, and she used this concept to write a novel series centered on the dramatized and staged fighting of children in an arena. Not only does the violence that occurs in the arena include ties to ancient Roman gladiator fighting, but it is also reminiscent of modern-day reality television programs.

But, this focus on staged violence and the subsequent desensitization to that very same violence is not the only theme that appears in Collins's trilogy. The fighting that appears in the arena of the *Hunger Games* is situated in the larger society of Panem, which is the country in which *The Hunger Games* trilogy takes place. It is in this society where the citizens of the twelve districts are enslaved by the Capitol and forced to produce the commodities that are used by the citizens of the Capitol as they live their opulent lifestyles. The citizens of the districts are controlled by the Capitol and their peacekeepers, who punish anyone who does not comply with the Capitol's orders. Despite

the presence of brute force and violence, the actual structure of Panem's society – such as the physical layout of the districts and the role of the reaping and the Hunger Games – is instrumental in enabling the enslavement of the district citizens to occur. In this way, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy performs two crucial functions in its discourse on slavery. First, the resemblance of Roman gladiator fighting inherent in the annual Hunger Games provides us with a warning about the dangers of becoming desensitized to violence. Second, the structure of Panem's society, which I will analyze through the application of theories about slavery, provides us with a second warning about the effects that social structures can have on the existence and perpetuation of slavery. In the end, analyzing these two elements of Collins's trilogy highlights important issues present in modern-day society and its treatment of slavery today.

BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS

Before I move on, I believe a brief reprise of the trilogy would aid in a clarification of my argument. *The Hunger Games* trilogy is set in a futuristic country called Panem that occupies part of North America. Seventy-four years before the start of the first book, there existed thirteen districts and a capitol that ruled over them. When the districts rebelled, the Capitol subdued twelve of the districts and destroyed the thirteenth. To punish the districts for their rebellion, the Capitol created an annual event called the Hunger Games. Every year, a male and a female child between the ages of twelve to eighteen are picked from each district and sent to the Capitol as tributes and retribution for the rebellion. Those children are then forced to fight to the death in an arena while the entire nation of Panem is forced to watch. Ever since the rebellion, the citizens of the districts are forced to work in their own districts for all of their lives, while the citizens of the Capitol live a luxurious lifestyle where they enjoy the fruits of the districts' labor. The trilogy is then focused on a girl chosen from District 12, Katniss Everdeen, and her ensuing fight against the control of the Capitol.

In this paper I will be exploring how slavery is presented in the trilogy; therefore, I believe it is pertinent to provide a concrete but not exhaustive definition of slavery. Sociologist Orlando Patterson defines slavery in terms of power and domination: "Slavery is one of the most extreme forms of the relationship of domination, approaching the limits of total power from the viewpoint of the master, and total powerlessness from the viewpoint of the slave" (1). In his analysis of modern-day slavery, Kevin Bales describes the system of slavery as "the state of control exercised over the slave based on violence or its threat, a lack of any payment beyond sustenance, and the theft of labor or other qualities of the slave for economic gain" (9). Both of these scholars consider slavery in a way that includes a display of complete control and domination of one person over another. This is the definition on which I will base my analysis.

ANCIENT ROMAN GLADIATORIAL EVENTS AND THE DESENSITIZATION TO VIOLENCE

The theme of desensitization to violence in *The Hunger Games* trilogy centers on the annual Hunger Games and the arena where the tributes are forced to fight one another. In order to fully understand this theme that Suzanne Collins presents, we must first examine the Hunger Games' resemblance to gladiatorial events in Ancient Rome. By doing this, we can better understand how the desensitization to violence occurs.

The earliest recorded gladiatorial event held in ancient Rome occurred in 264 B.C. The early gladiator games were called a *munus*, or a "duty" or "gift," which was done in honor of the dead. In

her research on Roman gladiators, Alison Futrell tells us that the early *munus* was connected with the funerals of deceased and prominent members of Roman society (19). But, as Roger Dunkle explains in his book on gladiatorial spectacles, the games would eventually cease to be associated with funerals and would stand as a spectacle in and of themselves (7). Dunkle also points out that we currently hold an incorrect notion that gladiatorial events were an everyday occurrence in Roman society. He notes, “In the Republic and the imperial period, gladiator games were a relative rarity, even under emperors who were active givers of spectacles, and that rarity was an important factor in the popularity of the games” (72). It stands to reason that the “rarity” of the games built up more hype surrounding the games themselves, which made it more effective and popular among the people. We can see this fact present in *The Hunger Games* trilogy as well. The infrequency of the annual Hunger Games mimics the timing of the Roman gladiatorial games, and the popularity of the games among the citizens of the Capitol could also be attributed to the rarity of the games.

The desensitization to violence originated in Ancient Rome because of the attitudes of the spectators towards the gladiators themselves. This will become apparent when we examine who the gladiators were. Among those fighting in the arena, there were typically two main types of people who became gladiators. The first were people who were forced to train and fight in the arena, usually as a form of punishment. These would consist of slaves, prisoners of war, and criminals convicted of capital crimes (Dunkle 30). An interesting fact is that there were also other criminals killed in the arena, but they were not gladiators. The criminals who fought in the arena as gladiators were called *damnati ad ludum gladiatorium*, but the other criminals were called *noxii*. Instead of fighting, the *noxii* were killed during the noonday festivities that split the morning and afternoon gladiatorial events. As Donald Kyle points out in his overview of gladiatorial events, the *noxii* were “men (and women) sentenced to execution, crucifixion, fire, or the beasts” (91). Punished for extreme criminal acts against the state, these criminals were deprived of the rights of Roman citizens and were thus given the worst forms of capital punishment. Unlike the gladiators who were given a chance to fight and survive, *noxii* had no chance of surviving the games. The two types of gladiators are also represented in *The Hunger Games* trilogy; interestingly enough, the tributes are actually a combination of the gladiators and *noxii*. They are allowed to fight in the game and thus have a chance of winning, and in that sense they are like gladiators. At the same time, twenty-three of the tributes are destined to die and, thus, have no chance of winning; in that sense, they are like the *noxii*.

The other group of gladiators was formed from people who were not forced to fight; instead, they were volunteers. In his book on the invisible people of ancient Rome, Robert Knapp states that, upon signing up for gladiatorial training, the volunteer “swore he would give up his rights to protection under the law, promising to allow himself to ‘be burned, chained, beaten, or killed’ in his contracted position” (267). In essence, the volunteer lost all of his legal rights in exchange for a chance to fight for fame and fortune. Similarly, those who volunteer for the Hunger Games are also treated in this manner; upon volunteering, they too lose all rights and are forced to fight to the death, just like the tributes who are picked by the reaping.

All in all, even though there were both gladiators who were forced to fight and those who volunteered, all of the gladiators were usually viewed as criminals. According to Roger Dunkle, this meant that spectators inevitably came to one conclusion about gladiators: “The prevailing feeling among Romans was that gladiators, given their background of slavery, crime or opposition to the Roman state as enemy soldiers, deserved whatever fate they suffered” (18). This feeling was also leveled against the tributes: because the tributes are all from one of the twelve districts, and

because the Hunger Games is a form of punishment and retribution for the rebellion, the Capitol believes all of the tributes, whether they were reaped or volunteered, deserve to die for the crimes their people committed in the past.

This level of dislike and contempt for gladiators and tributes also leads to a feeling of apathy toward the wellbeing of the fighters, which can be seen in the lives of the gladiators after they leave the arena. Many gladiators seemed to have died in the arena; of those who did not, the remainder of their lives was short-lived and painful (overall gladiators did not normally live past the age of thirty). An excavation of sixty-seven skeletons of gladiators in Ephesus, Turkey, revealed that most of the skeletons had sustained physical deformities and traumas from fighting in the arena (Knapp 277-278). Even if a gladiator survived the arena, the injuries he sustained from fighting ailed him for the rest of his short life. Not only did gladiators suffer from their fighting, but spectators also did not care what happened to the gladiators; spectators believed that gladiators deserved what they received from fighting, which made them apathetic toward the pain and suffering the gladiators endured. The Hunger Games also had similar impacts on the tributes. As Suzanne Collins points out in an interview she gave about the *Catching Fire* film in 2013, Katniss displays signs of post-traumatic stress disorder at the beginning of the second novel (Grossman). With the fact that Peeta is given an artificial leg after he left the Hunger Games in the first novel, even the victors do not escape the games unscathed. And, most importantly, after Katniss and Peeta win the Hunger Games, the citizens of the Capitol are much more interested in their love life than they are with their physical and emotional suffering.

This feeling of apathy toward other human beings is best appreciated when we understand that the gladiator games, and the annual Hunger Games as well, were about entertainment and “putting on a good show.” In this light, the gladiator’s life, and whether he lived or died, became irrelevant. If a gladiator found that he could no longer fight, he could ask the editor, or the person in charge of the games, for *missio*, which was basically an honorable discharge from battle. If the *editor* thought the gladiator had performed excellently, he would grant *missio* and allow both gladiators to leave the arena alive. If, however, the *editor* refused to give *missio*, then the defeated gladiator was instantly killed by his opponent (Dunkle 140-141). In this manner, the gladiator’s life was still completely in the hands of the *editor*; he could be killed or his life could be spared, but both choices were out of his hands. Most importantly, the *editor* often based his decision on the attitude of the crowd or the Caesar; the *editor*’s ultimate goal was to ensure that a good performance and entertainment was provided. Katniss and Peeta find themselves in the very same situation at the end of the 74th Hunger Games. The Capitol has complete domination over their lives; even though the Capitol chooses to let both of them live, it is only because the Capitol must put on a good show, and having a Hunger Games with no survivors would not make that happen. In the end, the fact that the life of a tribute is dependent on providing entertainment, and simultaneously that the citizens of the Capitol are only interested in being entertained, is evidence of the apathy and desensitization toward the violence unfolding before them.

Ultimately, the research into gladiators in ancient Rome highlights the desensitization to violence held by the spectators of those violent spectacles. As we’ve seen, when applied to *The Hunger Games* trilogy, the context of gladiator history warns us about the dangers of being desensitized to violence. The citizens of the Capitol are consumed with the entertainment aspects of the annual Hunger Games. Unlike the people in the districts, who are forced to watch the Hunger Games, the citizens of the Capitol freely choose to indulge in the fighting and suffering in the Hunger Games. Katniss sums up this view of Capitol citizens perfectly: “What do they do all day, these people in

the Capitol, besides decorating their bodies and waiting around for a new shipment of tributes to roll in and die for their entertainment” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 65). The citizens of the Capitol are so accustomed to the death in the arena that they no longer care that children are dying. As if that wasn’t terrible enough, the Capitol citizens also seem to be extremely oblivious to the plight of all of the other citizens of the districts. According to Tom Henthorne, the attitudes of the members of the Capitol toward the other district citizens is much worse: “[the] citizens are so caught up in the artificial drama that plays out on television that they pay little attention to the fact that their ‘president’ is, in fact, a dictator who attained power by murdering his rivals or that their affluence comes at the cost of great privation elsewhere” (105). The last part is extremely indicative of their knowledge of slavery: the citizens of the Capitol are so obsessed with the entertainment the Hunger Games provides that they are blissfully unaware that the citizens of the districts are being oppressed and enslaved. This type of ignorance is like a veil placed over the Capitol’s eyes so that they don’t realize the horrors of the existence of the districts.

THE SOCIETAL STRUCTURE OF *THE HUNGER GAMES* AND THE PERPETUATION OF OPPRESSION AND VIOLENCE

We have already seen how the annual Hunger Games, in its connection to Roman gladiatorial events, highlights the dangers of becoming desensitized and apathetic to the suffering of other human beings. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, the social structure of Panem also warns us about the dangers that those very same societal structures can have in enabling slavery to occur. In *The Hunger Games* trilogy, this manifests itself in the physical layout of the districts, the reaping that chooses the children who will be the tributes, and the socioeconomic inequality among the district citizens.

One of the structures of Panem’s society is the layout of the districts, which utilizes the ideology of space and place. In the introduction to their book *Place of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, Greg Dickinson et. al. provide a definition for space and place. Even though their book focuses on the rhetoric within museums and memorials, their definition and distinction between space and place is, I believe, still relevant to my argument. They state, “Space and place [are used] ... to emphasize a difference in how physical situatedness is experienced. In such usages, a *place* that is bordered, specific, and locatable by being named is seen as different from open, undifferentiated, undesignated *space*” (23). Place is seen, then, as that which has a definite shape and border, and space is everything that has a lack thereof. But, I believe we can take this definition even further. We, as humans, build houses, walls, and even national borders; we like to inhabit places because their definite shape provides us with a sense of safety and identity. Everything not enclosed in those defined spaces is foreign and, therefore, for the most part, undesirable.

In *The Hunger Games*, the layout of Panem’s society constructs the twelve districts as places and the land outside those districts as merely empty space. The district citizens also seem to associate safety with their own districts. District 12, for example, is surrounded by “a high chain-link fence topped with barbed-wire loops. In theory, it’s supposed to be electrified twenty-four hours a day as a deterrent to the predators that live in the woods – packs of wild dogs, lone cougars, bears – that used to threaten our streets” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 4). The fenced-off edges of the district, which also make the district a distinct and safe place, serve to protect the citizens of the district from the “evil” lurking in the space outside their districts. Furthermore, this distinction between space and place causes the district citizens to actually desire to take refuge in their own districts. Katniss notes that, “In the fall, a few brave souls sneak into the woods to harvest apples. But always in sight of the Meadow. Always close enough to run back to the safety of District 12 if trouble

arises” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 6). The districts have been instilled with the notion that their enclosed district is protecting them from the unidentified space surrounding them. If we examine this structure closely, however, we notice that the citizens prefer to remain in the very places where their enslavement simultaneously occurs. Instead of seeking refuge and freedom in the free space outside their districts (which would signify that they would have to leave the “safety” of their districts), the district citizens believe the only safe place for them is in the very site that enables their own enslavement. Ultimately, the layout of the entire nation of Panem, and the accompanying feelings of the citizens toward that layout, is used by the Capitol to perpetuate the enslavement of all of its districts. In the end, the physical layout of the districts does more harm than good.

Part of the social structure in Panem also includes the annual Hunger Games the Capitol puts on. In order to select the children who must fight in the Hunger Games, the Capitol holds a reaping which chooses a boy and a girl at random from each district to be the tributes. But, the reaping itself does more than simply pick the tributes for each district. Inherent in the reaping itself are two major facets of slavery that Orlando Patterson defines, and these help create the enslavement of the districts. These facets are “natal alienation” and “deracination.” Patterson describes natal alienation as the “alienation of the slave from all formal, legally enforceable ties of ‘blood’ and from all ‘rights’ or claims of birth” (7). What natal alienation entails is the fact that a slave’s social connection and relationship to the people of his birth and heritage are not constituted as legally binding. Being natively alienated means that a parent and child may still have a relationship, but that relationship holds no legal standing or rights. Because of this, Patterson notes, “The master [has] the power to remove a slave from the local community in which he or she was brought up” (6). Patterson labels this action as “deracination,” or the loss of native status for any person by being physically removed from his or her home. In this way, natal alienation provides the threat of separation, and deracination fulfills that threat by physically uprooting slaves from their homes. But even though not all slaves are deracinated, Patterson states that the fact that separation is possible was enough to “strike fear in the hearts of all slaves” (6).

In *The Hunger Games*, the annual reaping enforces the natal alienation and enslavement of all of the district citizens while also providing the threat of deracination. At any moment, a child’s name can be called at the reaping. Because the threat of separation is always present in the reaping itself, the citizens’ relationships with their children are not legally enforceable. And, since every citizen is natively alienated, it is at the very moment in the reaping when the child’s name is called when the threat of separation is finally fulfilled and the child, now a tribute, is uprooted from his home and taken to the Capitol. Even though not all children are deracinated, the possibility of this occurring still has the same effect on all the citizens of the districts. Coupled together, the natal alienation of the citizens and the constant threat of deracination subject the citizens of the districts to a constant state of terror and fear, which subjugates them into submission and leaves them completely powerless to control and maintain their own relationships in society. These facets of slavery are created, as I said early, exclusively by the social structure that is the reaping.

The final element of the societal structure of Panem that perpetuates the cycle of oppression and enslavement in the districts is the presence of poverty and socioeconomic inequality, which leads impoverished citizens of the districts to take actions which put them at more risk of being selected for the annual Hunger Games. Poverty has long intersected with systems of slavery; those who study modern-day slave systems note that poverty often drives people to seek out work opportunities that may seem risky, which lead them to be taken advantage of and eventually, in some cases, to be enslaved. Kevin Bales notes that “while slavery may be linked to religion in one country, to caste

or ‘race’ in a second country, and to gender in yet another country, it always reflects differences in economic and social power” (10). The fact that poverty and low socioeconomic status drives people to seek opportunities that place them in a position to be enslaved is also present in the novels. This appears in the form of tessera in Panem’s society. When a child turns twelve, he or she can sign up for tessera, which is worth “a meager year’s supply of grain and oil for one person.” A person such as Katniss can apply for tessera for each of her family members, but each time a person signs up for tessera, their name is entered in the reaping an extra time. People can sign up for tessera each year, but the entries are also cumulative. By the time Katniss is sixteen, her name is entered in the reaping twenty times; Gale’s name is entered forty-two times (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 13). At the surface level, this appears like a way for families in poverty to receive extra food throughout the year. Another function of tessera is to make the poor more likely to be called for the annual Hunger Games. Children of financially sound families will only have their names entered once because they have no need for extra food. But, since those children in poverty are driven by a need for survival, they place themselves at a higher risk of being sent to the Hunger Games and, thus, of being subjected to further violence in the arena.

Another part of low socioeconomic status is the promise and lure to improve one’s circumstances in life. Every year after the boy and girl tribute have been selected, there is an option for citizens of the districts to volunteer. In places such as District 12, no one usually volunteers because “the word *tribute* is pretty much synonymous with the word *corpse*” (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 22). In these districts, children hardly ever volunteer because they have almost no chances of winning. In the wealthier districts, such as Districts 1 and 2, children train for the Hunger Games their entire lives and volunteer just so they can win the Hunger Games. Despite their improved lifestyles, even the members of the wealthier districts are still forced to work their entire lives, meaning they too want to escape their lives of enslavement. Collins never addresses their desire for volunteering, but one could assume it is driven by the desire to want to live in a life of luxury and pleasure for the rest of their lives. In the end, the volunteering functions as a societal structure that provides a hope of escaping the miserable conditions; coupled with the structure of tessera, which provides relief to struggling families, these two social structures allow the children of the districts to be more susceptible to entering the annual Hunger Games and enduring further violence and oppression.

MODERN-DAY IMPLICATIONS AND IMPORTANCE OF *THE HUNGER GAMES TRILOGY*

Some may believe that Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* trilogy is purely fiction and has no pertinence in our daily lives, but I believe these two themes present in the trilogy inform us greatly about problems in our modern-day society. According to a different interview with Suzanne Collins, conducted by Hannah Hudson, Collins believes that “watching people being humiliated or brought to tears or suffering physically” has an inherent “voyeuristic thrill,” one that is commonly present in reality television. Collins goes on to state that there is a “potential for desensitizing the audience so that when they see real tragedy playing out on the news, it doesn’t have the impact it should. It all just blurs into one program” (Hudson). Collins is clearly concerned with the fact that viewing dramatized violence and suffering can block out the reality of war and violence in the real world. She is deeply concerned with the fact that seeing fake suffering on reality television shows inhibits our ability to understand and comprehend the actual suffering of human beings in the world today. Remembering the way the Roman spectators and the citizens of the Capitol became desensitized to the violence they were viewing can aid us in remaining aware of

the actual suffering of real people enduring oppression and enslavement around the world.

Within Collins's novels there rests a second warning about allowing certain structures within society to remain that could lead individuals to be enslaved. As I've noted, the layout of the districts made the citizens feel like they needed to stay in their districts in order to survive and remain in safety. This construct was, as we have seen, a manifestation of Panem's society and the ideas instilled upon them, and when it was left intact, it persuaded more district citizens to stay where they could be enslaved rather than seek freedom. The poverty that was rampant in many of the districts also made some of the district citizens at a higher risk of going to the Hunger Games. If these social structures within the districts had been reformed and improved, those citizens would not have felt the need to place their lives on the line in order to survive.

Another construct that is quite prevalent in many societies today is the laws that require foreign citizens to have their passport to leave the country. It seems like a harmless law, one that is probably supposed to do more good than harm, but in reality it traps individuals in slavery. In Jesse Sage and Liora Kasten's book *Enslaved: True Stories of Modern Day Slavery*, many of the stories feature individuals who were trapped in foreign countries when they were enslaved because their passports were taken away and they could not leave the country. This construct of modern society effectively prevents modern-day slaves from fleeing their employers/captors because it is illegal to do so without a passport. Collins's novel warns us that if we do not change laws such as these that allow systems of oppression and violence to function, then the problem of slavery will not end but will actually continue to exist as long as these constructs are in place.

Finally, Collins's depiction of the reaping and the annual Hunger Games, and the fact that the citizens of the Capitol were completely oblivious to the suffering of the districts, reminds us of threatening social structures in the past, from the Japanese internment camps that were set up across America during World War II, to the concentration camps established during the Nazi Holocaust, to the military detention camps like Guantanamo Bay. These structures of oppression and enslavement are often created and sustained because the societies in which they are created either approve of their creation or are oblivious or unconcerned about their existence. Collins reminds us that if we do not recognize these systems of oppression in our world and become aware that a great violence is being committed, then there is no possibility of those systems of oppression and slavery being stopped. Thus, they will continue on indefinitely into the future and wreak havoc along the way.

CONCLUSION

Estimates put the current number of slaves in our world today at 30 million worldwide. Between sex trafficking and child labor, there are people being enslaved in virtually every country in the world. There are signs of modern-day slavery in every direction we look, including literature. As we have seen throughout this paper, slavery is so prevalent in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy; and, from our analysis, we can see just how devastating it can be to become desensitized to violence and allow oppression to continue through current societal structures. *The Hunger Games* trilogy may be fiction and it may not include a story detailing the suffering of actual people in real enslavement, but the oppression they face mirrors that of modern-day slaves. If readers could learn to read literature and examine the systems of slavery in the novels they read, thus taking from them knowledge of the suffering and oppression that any human being can face, then perhaps we might become a generation of educated and insightful human beings who have the desire and will to end slavery in our own lifetime.

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The Power of Language in and Following Moments of Trauma: An Analysis of *A Stolen Life*

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In June of 1991, a young Jaycee Dugard was taken off the street of her hometown neighborhood and forced into sexual slavery. She was only eleven years old. For years, Jaycee Dugard lived in the backyard of Phillip and Nancy Garrido's property, forced to spend her days in a system of tents and small buildings somehow concealed from the neighbors in a California town and raped repeatedly by Phillip. Her book explains how Phillip exploited and abused her, kept her locked up naked in a room alone in order to break down her will, used words to beat down her spirit, and slowly integrated her into his and his wife's lives as a part of a highly dysfunctional family. Jaycee's memoir details her strange day-to-day captivity as she gradually gained permission to leave the house and even use a computer. Many would wonder why Jaycee had not tried to escape sooner as her allowances increased, but by analyzing her thoughts and narration, we can better understand the debilitating brainwashing and psychological abuse that kept her from seeking an escape sooner.

The narratives that come from survivors about their experiences are essential tools in helping victims in the future, understanding the tactics of victimizers and how their abuse works on victims, and putting an end to sexual slavery and abuse of children. Detailing her captivity for eighteen years, Jaycee's book is full of insights into the perceived experience of an abused child, the ease with which her captors kept and abused her, and how cathartic the writing process is for victims of trauma. It is important to think about how we can look at trauma and the literature created through and surrounding it in discussions about some of the world's most awful subjects. Jaycee's experience is one that should never happen to any child. Yet millions of children, the overwhelming majority being females, are sexually abused and still kept as slaves today.

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the memoir of Jaycee Dugard, a woman who was kidnapped as a child and kept as a sexual slave for much of her life. Her work demonstrates how language is blocked in times of trauma but also how writing is an essential tool for victims to use to sort through their experiences. This paper also looks at the ways in which her captor kept her under his control through physical and verbal threat to show how language can help keep someone imprisoned. By looking more closely at stories like Jaycee's, people can better understand the experience of the victim and the tactics of the abuser, and people can more effectively help victims of sexual slavery and abuse.

KEY WORDS:

Child sexual slavery, sexual slavery, memoir, trauma, Jaycee Dugard

SLAVERY TODAY

As much as we would like to deny it, the number of abducted children who are forced into slavery is immense. According to a recent fact sheet from the International Labour Organization, almost 21 million people are living in slavery across the globe, with 11.4 million of these victims being women or girls and 9.5 million being men and boys. Four and a half million of these are forced into sexual slavery, meaning millions of children are still being exploited daily. A report in the *Huffington Post* from 2013 stated that two children are sold for sex every minute across the globe (Harden). Any child in slavery is one too many, and it should be everyone's concern that these numbers are erased as more children are brought home safely and those responsible for their exploitation are put behind bars. Another essential part of this course of rescue and reunion is the therapy and processing for the victims.

Many therapists realize the necessity of writing in dealing with victims of PTSD, as the memories and their effects can be very confusing. Authors Crystal Park and Carol Blumberg note this finding, explaining that "asking people to write on consecutive days about a previously experienced traumatic event ... is associated with better subsequent health as reflected by a number of different health indicators" (597-598). They then attempt in their article to look at what research has been done on "the potential underlying mechanism of meaning-making" by survivors of trauma through writing their experiences (Park and Blumberg 598). Indeed, many literary scholars of trauma theory have worked to look at how the psychological effects of trauma can cause trouble for a survivor who wants to narrate his or her experience. This, of course, has a scientific neurological basis, but it is theorists like Cathy Caruth who have helped us realize just how delicate the connection between language, memory, and mental health can be.

Trauma is personal and many times indescribable and unrecountable. James Berger puts it well in his article: "Trauma theory is another such discourse of the unrepresentable, of the event or object that destabilizes language and demands a vocabulary and syntax in some sense incommensurable with what went before" (573). Berger's article outlines the work of Caruth's book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, as well as work by other literary trauma theorists. In her book, Caruth explains that trauma writing is a recounting of "a history that literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood" (353). She quotes Schreiber Weitz who explains how difficult it is to study the events of people who, for them, never began or ended due to the imprinting and time displacements involved in trauma: "What do we do? Do we not talk about it? ... To speak is impossible, and not to speak is impossible" (qtd. in Caruth 354). In other words, he asks what is to be done to help those suffering from experiences that are unspeakable yet must be spoken about. Those who write about their traumatic experiences are taking control of times when they felt completely helpless, which is a way of bringing about mental processing and healing. Elissa Marder also looks at the history of trauma theory, specifically Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's influential book *Testimony*. Marder explains that Felman and her colleague Laub importantly stated that "even though we do not 'recover' from our traumatic past, nor can we 'cure' it, 'overcome' it, or even fully understand it, we can and we must *listen* to it and *survive* it by listening to its effects as they are transmitted to us through the voices of its witnesses and survivors" (Marder 4). This is exactly what we must do with the stories of survivors of child sexual slavery such as Jaycee Dugard.

In the introduction of her book, Jaycee explains the two reasons she decided to write her book. She says those reasons are "that Phillip Garrido believes no one should find out what he did to

an eleven-year-old girl” and that she wishes “that it will be of help to someone going through, hopefully not similar conditions, but someone facing a difficult situation of their own” (Dugard ix). She outlines the initial days of her captivity in detail and provides snapshots into what she can remember of the years she spent as Phillip’s slave. Though she does not overtly say it, we can see how she also uses the book to help her sort through what has happened to her. Jaycee writes in present tense when she writes about the events she shares, but she follows many of these with present-day commentary, sometimes saying how she is feeling in that moment as she is writing the memoir. Though she has moments where she says she does not know if she can go on, she does. Through her memoir, we get a glimpse into the mind of a child who is suffering from abuse and manipulation.

The brain of a child is not as developed as an adult’s, and to grow up in an environment of constant fear must have had an impact on her development in some way. This article will analyze how language is used within Jaycee’s memoir—how she perceives her experience now with the help of authoring her trauma, how language was used by her captors to keep her enslaved, and how she processes her experience during her time in captivity. All of these are examples of how powerful words are as they empower and disempower Jaycee throughout her book. To understand how this could be, let us look at some scientific research into the brain and how it reacts to and processes prolonged trauma.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND STRESS

Research has shown that certain chemicals flood the body when the brain is presented with life-threatening situations. You are probably familiar with the brain’s release of adrenaline when we find ourselves in thrilling situations like in a fast-moving roller coaster or running from something we find frightening. The brain also releases other chemicals that change our neurological chemistry in times of prolonged fear or stress. According to an article by Elizabeth Hopper and José Hidalgo, there are “neurological and neuroanatomical changes that are associated with exposure to traumatic stress. The perception of threat leads to a biologically-based fear response, causing the body to enter an instinctive survival mode with specific neurobiological changes” (201). Hopper and Hidalgo go on to explain in detail just what kinds of hormones are released during the human body’s response to stress and threats, including descriptions of how cognitive thinking becomes impaired:

There is decreased activity in the cortical system, particularly within the frontal cortex. With this decrease in frontal lobe activity, cognitive functions such as abstract thinking, problem-solving, planning, and impulse control are temporarily inhibited. Therefore ... people may experience impaired ability in effective planning and problem-solving. (203)

Similar descriptions of the brain’s functioning under stress can be found in Sandra Bloom’s article “Trauma Theory Abbreviated.” Bloom explains that our ability to think clearly is impaired by stress and that long-term effects can be found in victims in regards to how they think: “An intolerance of mistakes, denial of personal difficulties, anger as a problem-solving strategy, hypervigilance, and absolutistic thinking are other problematic thought patterns that have been identified” (5). There are also issues that arise in memory. How we process new memories and recall old ones is affected under stress. According to Bloom, “There are actually two different memory systems in the brain – one for normal learning and remembering that is based on words and another that is largely nonverbal” (5). When we are under high levels of stress, we lose some ability to

access our verbal memory and, in this way, “Problems may arise later [for victims of trauma] because the memory of the events that occurred under severe stress are not put into words and are not remembered in the normal way we remember other things” (Bloom 6). This is why, during flashbacks of traumatic experiences, victims often act out the previous event as their memory has been imprinted differently than normal, and sometimes their only way of accessing it, due to repression and other wonders of the brain, is through their physical memory. This is why it is especially hard for victims of trauma to put words to their past experiences. As Bloom explains, “For healing to occur, we know that people often need to put the experience into a narrative, give it words, and share it with themselves and others. Words allow us to put things into a time sequence—past, present, future. . . . Words allow us to put the past more safely in the past where it belongs” (7). This makes Dugard’s book that much more important as her authorship allows her to process and put words to the events she remembers from her childhood though she may not have complete verbal memory of them. Children are especially vulnerable to exploitation and psychological confusion when it comes to stress and abuse situations.

Children who are traumatized can have undeveloped coping skills, self-relation to others, or a sense of self (Bloom 10). Trauma interferes with normal development of senses of right and wrong and social skills. Children who grow up in these environments can become accustomed to the unhealthiness and then be unable to have fulfilling relationships with others because of this. Often, they are the kids who cause trouble as they try to sort out their trauma in ways that often go against social convention (Bloom 10). Bloom also explains that this can be due to a child’s increased exposure to the endorphins released from stress in his or her home, leading to an addiction to stress and a need to disrupt calm. Additionally, “Children who suffer disrupted attachments may suffer from damage to all of their developmental systems, including their brains, and we are particularly ill-suited to having the people we are attached to also be the people who are violating us” (Bloom 2). This explains a lot of what Jaycee struggles with throughout her time in captivity. She is confused, torn, and ultimately psychologically enslaved because of the way that the Garridos show her comfort and provide for her but also horribly abuse her. The brain of a child becomes damaged, making it harder and harder for them to see a way out of the situation or understand what a healthy familial relationship would actually look like. It is in the memoir that we can see into the mind of not only Jaycee but also into that of her abusers and how this noxious situation ate away at her being and further incapacitated her. For example, she mentions how she became trained to not show her feelings or to not ask too many questions because of how guilty and shameful Phillip would make her feel for speaking up. He would talk and talk and explain just how wrong she was. He would also provide her with conflicting comfort such as hugs and presents. By analyzing Phillip’s actions and words, we gain further knowledge into the psychological nature of abuse.

THE TACTICS OF THE ABUSER

This book also gives us a way to understand how abusers manipulate their victims. Phillip uses deprecation, conflicting treatment, and—most interestingly—his words to degrade Jaycee into what she becomes. In fact, he maintains most of his manipulation through his conversations with her, which made her feel guilty and hopeless. Slowly, she gains more privileges but never truly has a normal life while in captivity, though she seems to feel compassion for her captors. The Garridos even create a fake family of sorts, further entrapping Jaycee by providing something, though in a very twisted manner, that she so longs for and misses. It is important to understand just how

the abuser works to help us comprehend Jaycee's actions and emotions and to help others like her in the future. The deprivation of simple freedom of movement is just one of the ways the Garridos mold Jaycee and how she was slowly broken down.

We see in Jaycee's narrations of her start in captivity of how she lost track of time and days—something that worked to break her will. Soon after being locked up in the music room, Jaycee writes that she begins to wonder how long she has been there, though she feels like she has been there forever: “This room is getting hot when I wake up the next morning; at least I think it is morning. There is really no way to tell ... [sic] How much time has passed?” (Dugard 25). Being stuck in this room, chained up, she admits that she began to depend on Phillip for everything: “He became my entire world” (Dugard 26). In addition to suffering from sensory deprivation that could easily make someone start to go crazy, she also was kept in handcuffs for a good amount of time before Phillip would let her be in her cell without being further incapacitated: “He says he has to put handcuffs on me, but that they have fur on them so they won't hurt too much. I shake my head no and say that I won't try to get away. He says he has to because he doesn't trust me yet” (Dugard 21). Suffering in a hot room with no food, water, or toilet and not being able to use her hands, she admits she looked forward to him visiting her: “I depended on him.... He was my only source of amusement. I craved human contact so much by then that I actually looked forward to him coming to see me; it felt like he was bestowing a gift to me ... [sic] his presence” (26). This is a common practice in grooming someone for slavery. It is a form of torture to remove necessities like a place to go to the bathroom or a source of water or amusement from someone. Jaycee writes of how she survived having only a bucket to relieve herself, which Phillip would dump in the backyard after it had already needed to be dumped for quite a while. Slowly, she gained privileges like a TV, video games, even magazines and toys, but she still remained confined to the buildings in the back lot of the Garridos' property until late into her captivity; she eventually became so beaten down by Phillip's treatment that she was allowed outside of the house and still never dared speak up to anyone.

One of the most sickening ways Phillip abused and manipulated Jaycee was through his portrayals of shame and caring between his episodes of sexual assault on her. One of the first times we see this odd contradiction of comforting the person to whom you are causing pain is when she is first at the Garridos' house. When Phillip first captures Jaycee, he forces her to take a shower with him and asks her to touch his genitals. She complies, but soon after she is lying on the bathroom floor wrapped in a towel. She has just been taken from her family and been forced to do something very confusing to her. Crying because of his odd and confusing behavior, she is then presented with conflicting treatment as “the man takes [her] in his arms and offers comfort” (Dugard 19). She explains that she saw little choice and was just a scared child: “I do not want comfort from this awful man, but there is no one else here and I reluctantly lean into what comfort he gives.... Now I feel like a rabbit being comforted by a lion. I am so scared” (Dugard 19). It is difficult and heartbreaking to read this child's story and her emotions, but we can see here how horribly wrenching it is for a child to have to navigate her abuser being her only comfort and provider. This continues throughout the memoir.

One of the most gut-wrenchingly vivid scenes in the book comes early on with Jaycee's narration of Phillip's first rape of her in the small room he is keeping her. We can see the way he calculated his actions with her, thinking if he explained what he was about to do, then it would not be so bad for her—that if he asked her if she was okay afterwards, then it would be enough to make up for how he would be sexually abusing her for the following years. Her narration goes right back

into the terrified, confused mind of the young girl she was when this first began: “He lies on top of me. He is so heavy. I can’t stop crying. . . . Why is he doing this? Is this normal?” (Dugard 31). The rest of the rape is described by her in what way she can understand, which is hardly at all. But immediately afterwards he asked her if she was okay: “In my mind I am screaming NO I AM NOT OKAY ... [sic] GET OFF OF ME! Why are you doing this? What does it mean?” (Dugard 32). We see he does this a lot after he rapes her, another incident coming on page 54: “He takes me in his arms and says it’s okay, that he is done. . . . He won’t bother me like this for a while. I am so scared I don’t know what to think. I want to believe him.” Phillip mixed this abuse in with his poor caretaking of Jaycee, making her more and more vulnerable, manipulated, and confused. She also says that she would wish for the good man to come back during the times he raped her: “Everything will be okay I tell myself. He will be the nice person soon” (Dugard 54). Phillip combined this caring with a false sense of familial relationships that further entrapped Jaycee as the years went on.

As a child, Jaycee was extra vulnerable to the manipulation of an adult who would act like her father, especially when that child had always felt rejected by her fathers in the past. Jaycee explains she never knew her biological father and that her step-father seemed to not care for her much. It is easy to understand why she is so eager to grasp onto the moments when Phillip seemed to act like a caring father to her. He provided her with toys, became her sole source of comfort and affection, and maintained her physical needs like hunger (albeit extremely poorly). But after being locked up and unable to move during her first weeks in captivity, she is eager to accept whatever he gives her, quickly learning that it is best to take what little she can get rather than risk having nothing again. Slowly, the Garridos became like a small family, as Jaycee gave birth to Phillip’s children and his wife Nancy became a regular visitor to Jaycee’s prison in the backyard. Phillip used his words also to urge Jaycee that trying to escape would be futile and that outside there were many people that would hurt her, as if she was not being hurt enough by him. But Jaycee writes, “He always took care of everything. He always had an answer for everything. If I ever questioned him, yes, he would listen, but then he would tell me why I was wrong and why only his way would work” (Dugard 143). His use of language was just as powerful a tool to enslave her as was the abuse and deprivation.

The language he used kept her entrapped and also made her believe she was part of a family. In one of her chapter reflections, Jaycee explains, “Phillip’s verbal abuse was very effective. Although I would have liked some direct answers to my questions, I learned to not question too much because the answer I got would be lengthy and in the end make me forget the question in the first place” (Dugard 106). His words scared her about the outside world and his deprivation of her education; she felt as if she was still a little girl even when she was the mother to two children. She felt like she would never make it outside the Garrido’s home. She stayed with them out of fear for her ability to provide for her children. As her captivity went on, Nancy would become the person the children saw as their mother, making Jaycee’s isolation and the false family façade more complete. Jaycee would not be allowed to tell the children the truth and was forced to go by a different name. This was a further extension of how she had been forbidden by Phillip from writing her name in a journal she had once kept for one of her many pet cats. After she created the journal, she felt very proud of it and showed it to Phillip: “He preached to me for I think an hour about how I really didn’t want to write my name, and how dangerous that could be if anyone else ever read it. . . . So I tore out the corners with my name” (Dugard 79). Her confusion about how Phillip acted toward her continues to be something that she explores throughout the memoir. In a

journal entry she wrote in 1998 while in captivity, she writes: “I tell myself he is not touching me in a sexual way; it is more a fatherly way now. Not that I would know what that is like” (Dugard 169). She had voiced this confusion about the affection he showed her earlier in the memoir as well: “He gives me hugs sometimes and makes me feel loved. But am I really?” (Dugard 73). Of course we know that he did not truly love her and that he is actually an evil man, but the feelings of family are powerful tactics slavers use to make their slaves even more loyal and dependent.

Indeed, Jaycee notes her feelings of utter dependence on and faux familial ties with the Garridos: “I feel I am bound to these people—my captors—by invisible bonds instead of constant handcuffs” (Dugard 130). Orlando Patterson, in his book *Slavery and Social Death*, describes how the system of fictive kinship is an integral part of slavery. Since slavery’s inception, slaves have been referred to as “sons” or “daughters” and treated almost as family (Patterson 62-63). But those relations had a clear difference between those of actual adoption and what Meyer Fortes calls “quasi-filial” relationships of the slave and the master (qtd. in Patterson 63). Jaycee’s actions near the end of her time in captivity further show her utter reliance on the Garridos as she worries even in the police office that she will somehow ruin Phillip’s plan of escape. Throughout the book, Jaycee felt as if she had to keep her feelings and concerns to herself in order to keep Phillip and Nancy from getting upset. She still feels, even with police in front of her, that she must minimize the anger of her captors by keeping herself quiet. There are scenes in the book which appear very familial, as when the Garridos, along with Jaycee and her children, sit around the television eating fast food, or when Jaycee and Nancy go and get their nails done and go shopping. Jaycee sometimes seems confused about the nature of the relationship, but her fear is always constant. After years of hiding and playing the role of Allissa, she shakily writes her name on a piece of paper at the police department, and the process of reclaiming her life through language and writing begins.

JAYCEE’S USE OF LANGUAGE

After narrating her memories of being given a kitten and then it being taken away for the first time by Phillip, Jaycee shows her first complete acknowledgment of her pain and struggle to author her experience. On page 42 she states, “It hurts to write about this part. This has turned out to be a very hard book to write. Part of me does not want to continue. To reenter the state of mind I was at that age is difficult and twists my insides.” She ends this short reflection by finally deciding she will continue, though the difficulty is overwhelming to her. This glimpse into her thought process is one of many that we get in this memoir, which has a wealth of ways we can see into the experience of the traumatized sorting through their own trauma through language. Her writing comes in three forms: her narration of events during her captivity as if they were happening in real time, her many reflections on these events as she works through her memories in her own timeline of events, and the snapshots into actual words from her past through journal entries, which show the manipulation and the experience that is not often so vivid for us.

Most of the memoir is written in present tense. As she works through what she remembers of her time enslaved by the Garridos, she takes herself and the reader back into the mindset of the young girl who was trying so hard to survive. Many times in the book, she says she was just doing what she had to in order to survive. She acknowledges many times that her reactions to situations can seem difficult for readers outside of the situation to understand. Why did she not constantly fight to escape? Why did she not take every chance she could to make it difficult for the Garridos to enslave her? A lot of this has to do with the treatment she received from Phillip when she was first captured. A lot of this also has to do with the treatment she continued to receive as she was

emotionally, verbally, and physically abused. Some of this also has to do with her age when she was captured. Being eleven and being kidnapped and abused leaves one extremely helpless. Her schooling was stopped, and she had little ability to control her day-to-day life. By writing her story in present tense, she steps back into those moments when she was a scared and confused little girl and reclaims them. She relives them, and we get to watch as this process occurs. Many times, however, she must stop and take breaks to reflect on what she has been writing. Moments occur when things become too real and perhaps seem to be happening all over again to her. As theorists and scientists have explained, the memory of someone who has suffered prolonged stress can become blurred into a constant reality that never truly leaves. It is beautiful, then, that Jaycee allows us to see her therapeutic process of meaning-making and processing so vividly.

As stated before, Jaycee breaks up her reliving of her time in captivity with reflections. On page 110, after narrating the birth of her first child, Jaycee says, "How do you get through things you don't want to? You just do." This attitude of perseverance at whatever cost is essential to the portrait that Jaycee paints. We see a young girl holding onto hope that she will someday see her mother again and escape, as well as the reflections of a woman looking back at these experiences. Hope and the inner strength to persevere through horrible situations become the core of the self we see in our narrator. She speaks of how hard the process is for her: "This has turned out to be a very hard book to write, ... this is something I have worked hard to put behind me and to write about it in such detail years later is difficult. To get inside my head and relive all this stuff that happened back then is terribly hard for me ... [sic] I want to go on and I will finish it" (Dugard 42). Pages later, she describes the first time Phillip took her on what he would call a run, which were hours and hours of sexual abuse that he subjected Jaycee to as he was high on drugs. These were the worst moments of her life, and she notes that, as she writes, she finds herself sabotaging her process: "I just noticed I was trying to distract myself from writing this part My mind knows that what comes next is not easy for me. I am finding ways to avoid it" (49). What follows is a vivid description of the horrible things he would subject her to, including brutal rape in which he would call her by derogatory names. She writes, "I want to be somewhere else, but I am here and I must not panic" (53-54). In her reflections, she explains how he told her she was helping him not hurt other girls, how if she slacked off he would threaten to sell her, how "he would cry after he was done fucking me and beg my forgiveness" (57). Her reflections explain how confused this would make her, and how she now realizes how awful and selfish of a man he really is.

Shortly after this episode, Jaycee tells us about the first cat that the Garridos allowed her to have after complaining about how lonely she was. But it was not long before the cat became an object of shaming for Jaycee. She states how she "[began] to feel guilty for asking for her in the first place" (41). This is just one of many ways that Phillip shamed Jaycee, including in the previous page, how Phillip would explain to her that she was "helping him with his sex problem I think that sounds really weird, but I also don't want him to do what he is doing to me to someone else" (40). Phillip always found a way to make sure Jaycee felt guilty and in the wrong for anything that happened while she was his slave. She explains the strength of his manipulation but also how she still felt anger deep down. She now can look back at things and make more sense of them. Phillip Garrido kept her imprisoned in the mind of a confused 11-year-old girl even as she grew up. Her journals, which begin on page 165, let us see into her mind as she lives through these things. She often talks about her feelings of not being in control of her life and her longing for her mother. Jaycee writes about trying desperately to actually squash her longings to escape out of fear for her children. What is most beautiful is how she can continue to remain optimistic, telling

herself she has things to be thankful for and writing affirmations in her journals to cope. Her strength shines through in her journals and her reflections as she explains how she has moved on.

CONCLUSION

To understand the healing power of writing one's trauma, one needs simply to look at the beautiful work that Jaycee Dugard, the young girl imprisoned for years and now mother of two, wrote. Words hold so much meaning even though they are seemingly arbitrary collections of sounds we humans have put together. Talk to any literary theorist, and you will definitely learn that words are so much more. Read the work of any survivor of trauma, and you will see the power of words. During traumatic situations, our bodies react in ways that promote our survival but that can limit our brain functioning. This can lead to events that become timeless, constantly there but also impossible to name. This paper has worked to analyze the real therapeutic process of making meaning of a traumatic event by writing. Jaycee Dugard is living a free and private life with her two children and is the founder of an organization aimed at helping families dealing with reunification after abductions. Her story is inspiring and important, as it provides theorists and therapists with many ways of looking at the processing of trauma by a survivor through language. It is also important because, by sharing her story, Jaycee helps put a voice to the millions of children suffering in sexual slavery still today. The human brain is a remarkable thing that can dream and make meaning. It can contemplate the meaning of the words it uses to make meaning as well. Even while still in captivity, Jaycee showed how writing aided her and how she saw the power of words: "So many people do not listen to their soul. I know it's just a word, but that's how we have learned to communicate - with words and through behavior. It's only human to use words to describe what can never be touched" (171). Indeed, through her words, we can see more clearly what is impossible to understand, to touch, or to know—the individual experience of a sufferer of trauma.

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Hidden Slave Narratives: The Power of Teaching Empathy with Children's Literature

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As incredible as it may seem, there was a time when we as children were blissfully unaware that slavery existed. Whether it was through parents, school, or something we saw on television, we learned that humans exploit and abuse others for their own personal and financial gain. Even more upsetting, we eventually learned that this is not an institution of the past. This evil still exists, despite it being so obviously horrendous and wrong. Some of us might have felt this injustice and wondered what we could do to stop the abomination. However, with no ready solution and few actual encounters with the institution itself, most accept it as a sad but inevitable evil.

If parents, educators, and advocates could prevent this apathy from developing, however, would the problem continue to exist? According to Nicolas M. Dahan and Milton Gittens, change can be enacted if advocates are able to frame their case and move the issue from private to public. There are three framings needed to shape a problem into a public ethical issue. First, the activist must use *diagnostic framing*, which is pointing out the problem, its causes, and its consequences. Then, the advocate must come up with a *prognostic framing* that gives a suggested solution or plan of attack to eliminating the problem. Finally, they must use *motivational framing*, which gives their cause urgency and a rationale as to why their issue must be addressed quickly (230). One popular and effective way to introduce this to the general public is to enlist the help of the media, which “challenge[s] public indifference to... slavery” and “creat[es] the incentives for responsive governments to take remedial action” (Van de Glind and Kooijmans 162). One popular form of media that is already doing this is the sharing of narratives of slaves, both fictional and actual, through literature. These narratives work to make the readers feel and experience the plight of their fellow man in a way that facts and statistics do not because they call the readers to empathize with the victims.

Countless children's books also address the issue of slavery and give their readers a historical context that is invaluable for their comprehension of the issue. As the mind grows and taste becomes more sophisticated, children should be challenged to grow in their understanding of books

ABSTRACT:

This essay investigates depictions of slavery in *Holes* (1997) and *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1999) to argue that children's literature can be used to effectively teach empathy and to promote anti-slavery advocacy in children.

KEY WORDS:

Children Chapter Books, Historical Empathy, Teaching Empathy, Lemony Snicket, Louis Sachar, Contemporary Slavery, *Holes*, *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, *The Miserable Mill*, *A Bad Beginning*, Youth Advocacy

that are not explicitly about slavery but that include slave-like situations, especially since most of the slavery these readers will encounter in their lifetime will be underground and hard to spot. For this reason, I will examine the work Louis Sachar is doing with the issue in his book *Holes* and two of the thirteen books in Lemony Snicket's *The Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning* and *The Miserable Mill*.

TEACHING EMPATHY THROUGH FICTION

Slavery is a difficult subject to teach for many reasons, the main one being the problem of depicting slavery correctly as well as helpfully. For history teachers especially, this issue presents a challenge because they not only need to teach the facts and the context, but also the skill of *historical empathy*. Jeffery Nokes defined historical empathy as “the ability to comprehend a historical individual’s actions as a logical effect of his/her worldview” and claims this skill to be “among the most difficult of dispositions to develop, because they require unnatural thinking” (124). Historical empathy is unnatural because most concept-building practices take the inward to outward route, where the pupils draw from their own experiences and relate them to what they are trying to learn. Historical empathy takes the opposite approach, requiring students to go beyond their own surroundings and understand experiences that they are far removed from, and then relate those experiences to their own personal experience for comprehension. Many teachers attempt to remedy this dilemma in their history classes by incorporating historical fiction into their curricula. Fiction, more so than textbooks, engulfs the readers into the context and, if done masterfully, encourages the reader to understand perspectives through experiencing what the protagonist is sensing, encountering, and feeling.

With proper background information and careful reading selection, fiction has proved to be an effective tool in helping children grow in this empathy to understand past acts of slavery. They might not be able to comprehend all the complexities of the system, but they can start to build a clearer sense of how slavery affects people and why it was historically allowed to exist (Field 115). If fiction can be used to educate children about past slavery, then the same genre can help children encounter it in its current form. This can be done by developing a community perspective which teaches children that, as Sherry Field puts it, “they are not an island” (119). This me-centric logic is the default setting for childrens’ minds due to the underdevelopment of empathy at that age. In her article “Transforming Status-Quo Stories: Shifting from ‘Me’ to ‘We’ Consciousness,” AnaLouise Keating warns educators and parents against current education practices that perpetuate this dangerous thinking. In American school systems especially, where individualism is highly praised, extreme forms of egoism are teaching children to place the self above others, which “presumes and reinforces a model of domination, scarcity and separation in which intense competition leads to aggressiveness and fear: *my* growth requires *your* diminishment” (Keating 212). This idea is incredibly detrimental in a public that often allows slavery to exist because it benefits the public economically.

Keating calls for stories that encourage students to challenge the current status quo and recognize that their reality is interdependent on the existence of others. Without this outward awareness, children cannot understand their “accountability to others,” and they can never “recognize that their actions have a profound effect on others” (Keating 215). These are the stories that awaken a sense of injustice needed for children to grow into ethically aware adults who desire

to change the world's wrongs. Therefore, narratives need to teach not only how to empathize in general, but also how this empathy can become a call for action.

IS FICTION THE ANSWER?

While teaching children about slavery at a young age would be the ideal for creating future advocates, educators are concerned with how much can be revealed about the institution. Teaching empathy is one thing, but to expose children to the full and accurate reality of slavery in order to create true empathy would require depicting families being ripped apart, traumatizing accounts of deception and abductions, and sexually explicit rape scenes. All these subjects are more than the average child can handle and are, therefore, omitted in children's literature. The economic, historical, and psychological complexities of slavery needed to fully understand the motivation of both slaveholders and the victims themselves also go well beyond the comprehension levels of children. For all these reasons, any children's book that does choose to depict slavery must simplify the issue and tone down or ignore some of the more disturbing aspects of the abuse.

Depicting slavery appropriately is already difficult without having to censor the narrative for children's eyes, but many authors have tried. John Bickford III and Cynthia Rich studied many of these attempts through historical fiction and uncovered some of the strengths and weaknesses of the pieces. While many of these depictions help children comprehend slavery, there are misrepresentations of slavery in the writing that educators need to consider before using the books in their curriculum. These misrepresentations occur in the minds of children as they process the story they are reading, giving them an incomplete understanding of slavery, past or present. For example, a logical fallacy labeled presentism occurs when children cannot move past their own viewpoints and try to project their retrospective knowledge onto the characters of a story (Bickford III and Rich 68). This becomes problematic in slave narratives, fictional or nonfictional, because children cannot understand how the victims get into the situation or why they cannot leave. The article cites the example of Primo Levi, who is often asked by children reading his true account in the labor camps during the Holocaust why he did not escape. This audience reads his story "not as one of survival but instead as a missed opportunity to escape and seek revenge on the guards" because, in their minds, that is what they believe they would do in the same situation (Bickford III and Rich 73).

Much of this type of thinking cannot be helped because of a child's limited intellectual maturity. However, authors can find ways around these limitations or can even find ways to teach children to struggle against these logical fallacies. While the article discussed above focuses on teaching children to understand past acts of slavery, any genre of fiction can do the same work to help children grasp and become aware of modern slavery. Educators and parents are raising the future generation who has the potential to change the lives of millions by eradicating slavery from every corner of the globe. If these children are led to believe that slavery was just a pre-Civil War problem, which unfortunately happens too often with the current model of education, they will not even know that there is a problem to be solved. They might encounter people who are victims of slavery but never label them as such because they have an out-of-date notion of what slavery looks like. Historical fiction is limited because it will always have that historical tinge to the reader. Other forms of children's fiction can go beyond facts and context and present students with the structure and attributes of slavery that transcend specific time periods of slavery to show what is universal

throughout all the different types of slavery. To make these depictions as effective as possible, however, children need to be exposed to literature that does not fall into these logical traps. Louis Sachar's and Lemony Snicket's books are two examples that could be considered by educators to teach students the core structures of slave systems and explain the effects it has on its victims.

HOLES: COVER-UPS AND SLAVERY

With the knowledge of what makes a piece of literature effective in teaching slavery, I will now look more closely at the first book, *Holes*, to analyze what a teacher or parent could use to help their children understand slavery. Louis Sachar's book captured the imaginations of children and won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature in 1998 and the Newbery Medal a year later. The story of an innocent but criminally-convicted teenager forced to dig a hole every day with other juvenile delinquents has the distinction of being both offbeat as well as severely dark. It encounters themes of fate, education, and self-improvement, while tackling issues such as persistent racial prejudices, legal corruption, and the exploitation of unprotected classes.

At first, it is not overtly obvious that the protagonist and his fellow campers have fallen victim to slavery. While Stanley may be wrongly imprisoned, the camp is meant to be a correctional facility. As the narrator explains, "[I]f you take a bad boy and make him dig a hole every day in the hot sun, it will turn him into a good boy" (Sachar 5). The camp counselors even attempt to teach the boys that they are not doomed cases and that they have the power to redeem themselves and assimilate back into society. While the boys quickly assume the prison-style life of picking nicknames for each other, Mr. Pendanski "prefer[s] to use the names their parents gave them- the names that *society will recognize them by* when they return to become useful and hardworking members of society" (Sachar 18). The boys are constantly reminded that their choices led them to digging these holes, so they have no right to complain. People on the outside believe in this model of correction and therefore have no reason to question the admittedly awful, but objectively fair, punishment.

On the surface, the camp's setup seems reasonable. The boys are provided for, though not handsomely, lest they enjoy it better than the broken lives that more often than not led them to the crimes they committed. Their punishment has an end date, meaning that the campers always know they will be able to leave. In short, the campers are treated just horribly enough to make them reluctant to commit a crime that would make them come back to the camp. However, Stanley soon recognizes that this is not an innocent operation. He finds a lipstick tube, which would eventually be revealed as a clue towards the treasure the camp counselor has set up the camp to find. After the owner of the camp, simply named the Warden, enters the scene and insists on making the hole where they find the tube an excavation site, he realizes "[t]hey weren't just digging to 'build character.' They were definitely looking for something" (Sachar 71).

Once this thought is revealed to the reader, the camp begins to show its darker side. They start to move away from their original holes and begin a massive excavation project that progressively becomes more taxing than their previous labor. Stanley witnesses brutal abuses between the members of command, such as the Warden scratching Mr. Sir's face with rattlesnake venom-infused nail polish (Sachar 90). The boys fall victim to the Warden's growing agitation from the lack of progress, such as when she "jab[s] at Armpit with her pitchfork, knocking him backward into

the big hole,” which “le[aves] three holes in the front of his shirt, and three tiny spots of blood” (Sachar 78). Something unsettling is buried under the surface of this operation, and the more Stanley observes and digs, the more the cover-up begins to unravel.

The boys unknowingly begin to lose solidarity and turn on each other instead of against their masters. Interestingly enough, the only overt mention of slavery in the book occurs when the boys accuse Zero of being Stanley’s slave after the two boys make the agreement that Stanley would teach Zero to read in exchange for Zero helping him finish his daily hole. Racial tensions begin to flair, enticing X-Ray to comment, “Same old story, ain’t it ... The white boy sits around while the black boy does all the work” (Sachar 117). These jabs and remarks escalate over the following days, with Zigzag at one point suggesting that Stanley “should get a whip. Then if your slave doesn’t dig fast enough, you can crack it across his back” (Sachar 132). Soon, the argument turns into physical fighting, with Mr. Pendanski egging them on. Finally, after Zero nearly strangles Zigzag to protect Stanley and hits Mr. Pendanski over the head with a shovel, Zero runs off into the desert to defy the oppressive system.

The most disturbing part of this book surrounds the character of Zero. His treatment by the staff of Camp Green Lake shows just how disposable these laborers become when their well-being interferes with the operation’s goals. When he starts running, the only reason the Warden stops Mr. Sir from shooting him is because, “[t]he last thing we need is an investigation” (Sachar 139). When the trio is worried about what could happen if someone were to come and ask for him, Mr. Pendanski assures them that “[h]e had nobody ... He was nobody” (Sachar 144). Mr. Pendanski has always treated Zero differently from the other boys, even refusing to call him by his actual name, a courtesy he gives all the other campers. He feels that the name suits him because “there’s nothing inside his head” (Sachar 19). In Mr. Pendanski’s eyes, Zero is even lower in status than the other boys because he was a nuisance to society who no one would miss. His status as a homeless child makes him so easy to dismiss and also makes it simple to erase him from the records without fear of legal repercussions. In fact, if Stanley had not gone out to save Zero, no one outside of the system would even be aware that he was missing. Zero is a cautionary tale of what can happen when a person is wholly owned by the legal system and unscrupulous power holders use this fact to their advantage. Once they enter the penal system for any reason, they are powerless against exploitation.

Slavery has been tightly wound with the justice system in a twisted way for as long as law has been around. One major example in the last few centuries involved the Russian government. Starting in the reign of Peter the Great, criminals who committed capital offenses would be punished with a lifetime of hard labor, as well as loss of property and voidance of marriage (Patterson 43). They legally did not exist outside of the system, which gave the legal system the right to exploit them in any way the government saw fit. Incarceration necessarily involves convicts losing their rights as a consequence for breaking their social contract; but law enforcement can creep into abuses that toe, and sometimes cross, the line into slavery.

America has a particularly dark past with penal slavery due to the colonial transportation and exploitation of British convicts. According to Don Jordan and Michael Walsh, these slaves were “the first slaves in America and it was upon their labour, and later that of the African American slaves, that the nation was initially built” (19). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the problem of overcrowded prisons and a general wish to remove undesirables from the homeland induced Britain to create laws that sent these criminals to the colonies. This practice quickly became big business, with merchants claiming the convict trade to

be “twice as profitable as the black slave trade” (Jordan and Walsh 248). Strangely enough, this system has two disturbing parallels to the fictitious Camp Green Lake. One is that children were the first to be sent away in the purge. In 1618, the authorities “swe[pt] up hundreds of troublesome urchins from the slums... and shipped them to Virginia” (Jordan and Walsh 12). The government claimed it to be an act of charity by giving the children the chance to live off the rich resources of the colonies that they could not find in the streets of London, but “[i]n fact, they were sold to planters to work in the fields and half of them were dead within the year” (Jordan and Walsh 13). These urchins sound similar to some members of the camp, most notably, Zero. The other eerie connection between the convict servant trade and the fictional camp’s mission is that advocates for the perpetuation of the transportation claimed that the move and labor was for the “redemption of their souls” (Jordan and Walsh 258). This justification sounds dangerously close to the counselors’ assurances that digging holes builds character. So, while *Holes* more directly alludes to the leftover tensions of African-American slavery, it has a closer correlation to this forgotten segment of colonial history.

Penal slavery in general is a difficult form of slavery because it complicates our view of victimhood. While it is easy to label the act as an injustice for the people who are innocent, such as Stanley in *Holes*, it seems more justified for guilty members of society. These victims seem to deserve their lot because they are paying back their debt to society for breaking the law. Citizens cannot see the crimes against dignity in labor camps, nor do they feel the need to investigate them to make sure these people are treated fairly. Without these investigations, however, more corrupt members of the system with agendas exploit a powerless labor force. These parties work within the system, even redefining laws to ensure that there is a steady flow of workers (Patterson 45). In the case of *Holes*, Camp Green Lake came into existence because the Warden saw an opportunity to get people to dig holes for her, creating a cover story that digging holes corrects criminal behavior. She connected this to the juvenile correction system so that she would never run out of young fit boys to do her work because “vacancies don’t last long at Camp Green Lake” (Sachar 25).

This book tries to explain what happens when we allow our sense of justice to be twisted to the point that we lose sight of every person’s right for human dignity. No one “deserves” slavery, and every victim needs champions to challenge corruption and expose their abuses to the public. In a system that often teaches children to trust people of authority, *Holes* encourages children to trust their instincts when they sense that something is off and investigate it to the best of their ability, just as Stanley does while in captivity. Stanley is not part of the group stereotypically exploited, but he learns to identify with this group through a shared experience. This experience is especially important for changing children’s learned perceptions. For example, Mr. Pendanski, a seemingly kind and trustworthy adult, tells both Stanley and the readers what to believe about Zero. As the story progresses, and Stanley begins to see his fellow prisoners’ worth, this view is complicated and eventually proven false. Once the protagonist’s opinion begins to change, so does the reader’s. Stanley’s growth in empathy translates to the reader, not only giving him or her the ability to see this as exploitation and abuse, but also hopefully igniting a growing sense of injustice. This aversion to injustice drives Stanley to run after Zero, which could spur the readers to similar proactive decisions. If educators were able to harness this energy toward righting wrongs with their pupils, it could be a powerful tool for teaching the readers to grow up into advocates.

A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS: THE LOT OF THE POWERLESS

Our next author presents not only insights on how slavery can exist, but also helpful models for growing in empathy, which can be used to promote activism. Lemony Snicket published his first book in a thirteen book series two years after Sachar published *Holes* and took the children's literature market by storm. The first book, *The Bad Beginning*, won several awards, including the Colorado Children's Book Award, the Nevada Young Readers Award, and the Nene Award. Darker in subject than most other children's books on the shelves, the book begins with a house fire that leaves the protagonists, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire, as orphans and records the children's unfortunate lives through the span of thirteen books. Just when the reader thinks their lives cannot possibly become any more tragic, Snicket throws another tragedy into the mix. Snicket seems to break every rule about what to protect children from, only giving the readers a morsel of hope at the end to keep them going from book to book. It is no wonder that one of the issues he addresses is the cruelty adults can inflict on unprotected people for personal gain. This cruelty crosses the line into slavery more than twice, but I will focus on two prominent examples from the first and fourth installments in the series.

The Bad Beginning represents an unfortunately common glimpse into the life of domestic slavery. After the death of their parents, the Baudelaires are sent to live with a distant relative named Count Olaf. When first meeting him, the children already have an uneasy feeling about their new guardian, but Mr. Poe, who is in charge of their well-being, does not sense the danger and leaves them to start their new life. Olaf takes this opportunity as their new legal guardian to force the children into domestic servitude. Every morning, he leaves the children a list of instructions that includes "difficult chores, such as repainting the back porch or repairing the windows" (Snicket, *Bad* 30). Later, he requests that the children cook dinner for his entire acting troupe, even though the children have no idea how to cook. The children manage somehow, but they make pasta when Olaf is expecting roast beef. The scene takes an incredibly dark turn once their guardian finds out. Olaf turns to the orphans and says, "In agreeing to adopt you,' he said, 'I have become your father, and as your father I am not someone to be trifled with. I demand that you serve roast beef to myself and my guests'" (Snicket, *Bad* 46). Klaus stands up to Olaf saying that he is being unreasonable and cruel, to which the Count responds with a slap so hard to the boy's face that he falls to the ground. It becomes obvious to the children that this situation is well beyond just unreasonable parenting and is escalating into an abusive and slave-like situation.

When the children go to relate their plight to Mr. Poe, the readers get a disturbing glimpse at how the law can favor the privileged. Mr. Poe hears what the children have to say about the situation and responds, "Whatever Count Olaf has done ... he has acted in loco parentis, and there's nothing I can do about it. Your money will be well protected by myself and by the bank, but Count Olaf's parenting techniques are his own business" (Snicket, *Bad* 67). Essentially, he would do everything to protect their fortune, but because of *loco parentis*, which Snicket defines for the young readers as "in the place of parents," his hands are tied to protect them from their deplorable conditions. Jonathan Blagbrough explains that domestic slaves often experience an eerily similar situation because, "[a]s parental substitutes, employers may feel more at liberty physically to punish the child— especially as they interact in the private sphere ... the ambiguity of the relationship of the [Child Domestic Worker] to the employing family puts her in a legal vacuum as regards her care—as she is considered neither a worker nor a family member" (185). Olaf's actions are protected by

the law because the man in charge of the Baudelaires is too busy to ensure they are given a proper home and thinks that their fortune is worth protecting more than the children themselves.

Olaf uses the loopholes in the law again later on with his plans to marry Violet to legally obtain the inheritance. The plan is despicable, forcing the eldest under threat of her baby sister's life to go on stage and recite wedding vows in the guise of a play. Their neighbor, the kind but clueless Justice Strauss, is unknowingly brought into the plan, making the ceremony binding. What is disturbing, however, is how the adults react to Olaf's deception being revealed. The law states that this marriage is completely legal and, despite it being incredibly obvious that Violet was coerced into signing her name, Mr. Poe and Justice Strauss feel powerless to do anything because Olaf has followed the letter of the law. Only when Klaus reveals that the ceremony was voided because of a technicality do the adults think of trying to find a way to punish Olaf for his crimes.

To understand how these examples relate to modern slavery gives the readers a better understanding of how slavery is still allowed to exist, especially in areas where slavery is officially illegal. The Baudelaires almost fall victim to the legal mess that prevents current slave victims from escaping their captors. This is why antislavery advocates, such as Hans van de Glind and Joost Kooijmans, argue that “[c]lear, specific and unambiguous national laws against child slavery are crucial if it is to be addressed effectively” (160). The laws must be clear and well known because most victims do not have the same access to resources as the Baudelaires and cannot research how to work the system in their favor as Klaus does. In this tale, the law only protected the innocents because the innocents learned how to protect themselves. Most victims are not so fortunate because they are unaware of their rights in the first place. For example, Micheline Slattery, who started her journey into slavery in Haiti and was transported illegally to the United States, found herself in another slavery situation after she finally broke free. The man she was dating promised her citizenship and legal protection through marriage but then hung that protection over her to make her stay and be his sexual and domestic slave. She felt helpless to go to the police for fear of deportation. Eventually, she learned from a relative's lawyer that what her husband was doing was illegal and that, if she went to the authorities, she would still be allowed to stay in the country. What Slattery said about the ordeal was that, while legislatures had laws to protect people from legal repercussions, “few people know about these laws” (37). The Baudelaires have to read and study through obscure law books to find out how to escape Olaf's plan. Even so, because of the legal confusion, the adults of the book cannot act quickly enough to capture the Count. Had the protocol for their situation been less ambiguous, however, the legal system might have been able to stop Olaf then and there, saving the children from losing faith in their legal system and entering slavery for a second time.

The Miserable Mill shifts its focus from law to the power of business and money for inflicting the sorrows the orphans endure. Mr. Poe has dropped the kids off at Lucky Smells Lumbermill, frustrated by how quickly he is running out of convenient guardian options. In his haste, he hands their safekeeping to the owner of the mill, Sir, who takes advantage of the Baudelaires' need of protection against Olaf. Before he even meets the children, they find a memo on the door that reads: “Enclosed you will find a map of the Lucky Smells Lumbermill, including the dormitory where the three of you will be staying, free of charge. Please report to work the following morning along with the other employees” (Snicket, *Miserable* 17). They spend the night with other workers and report for dangerous amounts of labor with heavy machinery, where they are forced to work on a stick of gum for lunch and a communal casserole for dinner. After a morning of this labor, their employer/guardian calls them to meet him. Sir's business partner,

Charles, greets them and is the only person truly alarmed to find out that they are working. He believes that there has been a huge misunderstanding and assures them that a meeting with his partner would clear up the confusion.

Once they meet Sir, however, the children find out that he is profiting on their desperation, finding more ways than paying his employees in coupons to avoid labor costs (Snicket 42). When Charles asks him to clear the apparent misunderstanding about the children's living arrangements, the businessman admits that there has been no mix up. He turns to the children and says, "The deal is this: I will try to make sure that Count Olaf and his associates never go anywhere near you, and you will work in my lumbermill until you come of age and get all that money. Is that a fair deal?" (Snicket, *Miserable* 52). The children are stunned at the proposition, as well as the narrator of the story who explains to his readers that, "A fair deal, as everyone knows, is when both people give something of more or less equal value.... working for years in a lumbermill in exchange for the owner *trying* to keep Count Olaf away is an enormously unfair deal" (Snicket, *Miserable* 53). This financial exploitation of the unprotected orphans also shows a dark side of business practices that are closer to this seemingly outrageous and fictitious account than we like to think.

The most disturbing part of this scene, however, is that Charles, who half owns the company, is convinced that Sir is asking something reasonable of these children. While he does not agree with his partner, he willingly witnesses this transaction and does nothing to aid the children. In many modern slave narratives, there are many men like Charles. These are the people who encounter the victim but, for one reason or another, do not act upon their suspicions. For example, Jill Leighton talks about how her captor was able to take her to hospitals with clear signs of abuse marking her body, but no one ever questioned his stories about how she obtained the injuries (77). There was even an instance when she saw "a lady getting into her Cadillac with her husband" who simply watched as her captor "was tying my hands behind my back and putting me back into the trunk in plain view" (Leighton 78). This practice of adults witnessing abuse but turning a blind eye is a common theme in Snicket's tales, revealing an unpleasant but all too common response to people in slave situations. Through the example of Charles, Snicket challenges his readers to see this tendency toward passivity and to fight against it to help those suffering.

No one comes to the aid of these orphans, which gives the readers the chance to witness the choices victims have to face when left to their own devices. The siblings feel so trapped that even when they have a chance to escape, Klaus stops them by pointing out, "But what if he found us... Who would protect us from Count Olaf, if we were all by ourselves?" (Snicket, *Miserable* 104). These orphans have no choice but to accept their slavery because Mr. Poe is too busy to protect them from not only homelessness, but also from an evil man who had already committed the murder of two of their previous guardians. Worse, Charles, who could have easily done something to prevent this cruel trade, stands by acting as if his partner is not taking advantage of the orphans' situation. This story portrays how feeling trapped and vulnerable can lead to people willingly giving up their rights for protection. The Baudelaires are especially susceptible to enslavement because "[c]hildren in slavery tend to be from disadvantaged populations.... The situation of such children is compounded by cultural values and practices that rank children low in status, which encourages others to disregard their rights" (Van de Glind and Kooijmans 162). Both Olaf and Sir exploited loopholes and vulnerabilities to ensure that the children ended up in these situations, which mirror the real world of modern slavery all too accurately.

Snicket, more so than many children's authors, does not shy away from dark issues such as death, corruption, and violence. Even compared to Sachar, Snicket does not try to shield his readers from cruelty. From book one, page one, the narrator speaks of this tale as a story of misery and woe, warning people against reading it by stating:

If you are interested in stories with happy endings, you would be better off reading some other book. In this book there is no happy ending, there is no happy beginning and very few happy things in the middle... Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire were ... extremely unlucky, and most everything that happened to them was rife with misfortune, misery, and despair. I'm sorry to tell you this, but that is how the story goes. (Snicket, *Bad* 1)

Our eyes naturally avert from suffering, but Snicket uses reverse psychology in a strange but effective way to combat that inclination. He is daring children to read it by telling them not to read it. Once he has them reading his tale, he is constantly trying to help his readers understand the Baudelaires' suffering by taking the narration out of the scene and addressing the audience directly. For example, after an emotional moment where Klaus shouts about his distress over his new living situation and the loss of his parents, his sister agrees softly, which creates a healing moment for the two. The reader might be confused how this made the two feel better because their situation is clearly not fixed. The narrator takes them aside to say, "Sometimes, just saying that you hate something, and having someone agree with you can make you feel better about a terrible situation" (Snicket, *Bad* 31).

Children's literature must teach empathy in this manner when trying to explain slavery because, if the children cannot understand a character's emotions or actions, the readers are lost. Victims of slavery often must do seemingly illogical things to survive for reasons that are beyond many people's comprehension. The job of any slave narrative, fictional or real, is to explain how they survived and to make the incredible sound reasonable. By properly explaining these extremes, audience members start to realize how desperate slavery makes the victim, and the experience awakens a sense of disgust towards the persecutors that creates a sense of urgency.

SACHAR AND SNICKET: HELPFUL DEPICTIONS?

Both of these authors' works succeed in trying to build empathy and tackle the theme of power abuse that leads to exploitation of children. These depictions, whether intended or not, act as models of slavery that share attributes of both past and present slavery practices. But, are they helpful models that will give the reader a clearer sense of the causes and realities attached to this slavery? Or, do these depictions fall into logical traps that block students from understanding the issue of slavery better?

To answer this, we must return to some of the misrepresentations outlined in Bickford III and Rich's article that I discussed earlier. Both Sachar and Snicket have a lot to offer children, but they too are not perfect. For *Holes*, this trap is called *heroification*, which occurs in a narrative "when a lone person seemingly single-handedly transforms history" (Bickford III and Rich 69). Stanley definitely takes this role in the story because his actions and his insight not only save Zero and himself, but also shut the entire operation down. This gives readers the idea that individuals have a lot more agency than most victims of slavery actually have, which might give them the false impression that fighting slavery is only done by hero types who have everything going for them. This can be problematic because slavery can be abolished by ordi-

nary, everyday people, but it requires working as a team and overcoming roadblocks. *A Series of Unfortunate Events* also has a misrepresentation. This is *villianification*, which occurs when an antagonist is “portrayed as only bad and without benefit of others’ aid for misdeeds” (Bickford III and Rich 69). Snicket represents both Count Olaf and Sir as caricatures, presenting them as over-the-top evil. This actually makes it harder for the readers to identify those responsible for slavery because they assume that people who would be part of this exploitation would be easy to spot from a mile away.

A perfect depiction of slavery for children may not be possible, however, because the institution is multifaceted and complicated. Parents and educators must always be aware of a book’s limitations and help the students understand what is fictional and what is real. However, just because a book cannot be perfect does not mean that it cannot do important work. Both books truly do call the readers to understand the plight of their heroes and lead them, either covertly, as with Sachar, or overtly, as with Snicket, toward an active understanding of how the protagonists are feeling. Readers are called to experience the pain slave systems inflict on their victims in a way that cannot be ignored. If educators can harness the power of this empathy, they can prevent children from falling into eventual apathy for the issue. This could inspire children to grow up and be champions for people who live the actual pain portrayed in these books. If this could happen with enough children, perhaps we would be one step closer to global abolition of slavery.

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The Human Zoo: A Critique of Brett Bailey's *Exhibit B*

– Mercadies Brown, *Ball State University*

With Brett Bailey's modern re-creation of early nineteenth-century human zoos, many have engaged in public critiques of the colonial practice of putting humans on display. *Exhibit B*, Bailey's installation, is meant to spread awareness of the widely popular human zoos of the past. Audiences stand on both sides of *Exhibit B*—some protesting the “otherness” of hired actors and some praising the risks Bailey takes by creating such an exploitative performance. My essay investigates whether or not re-creating scenes of slavery does more harm than good. In order to

spread awareness of early nineteenth and late twentieth-century human zoos, Bailey subjugates non-white actors to portray performances similar to those from these previous periods. Is there an effective way to recreate scenes of slavery and oppression? Does *Exhibit B* provide a critique of racism and colonialism? Or, could *Exhibit B* be another instance of racism?

In this paper, I am going to argue that Brett Bailey's *Exhibit B* is a poor attempt to provide an artistic critique of nineteenth and twentieth-century colonialism and racism in the practice of the human zoo. I will do this by examining the history of the human zoo and recounting the story of the real-life Hottentot Venus. This will help us understand how the human zoo is historically tied up with colonialism and racism. I will then look at Bailey's own views surrounding *Exhibit B* and, lastly, I will provide an analysis of why *Exhibit B* is not a proper representation of the history of American and European ethnological enlightenment. I will also discuss why Bailey's intentions cannot overcome the colonialism and racism that lingers around his modern re-creation of the human zoo.

If you think the human zoo is a thing of the past, you may want to reconsider. South African artist Brett Bailey has created a modern representation of the human zoo called *Exhibit B*. In his exhibit, actors portray nineteenth-century human zoos in scenes that have been historically re-created. In one such scene, titled “Civilizing the Natives: Herero prisoners cleaning Herero skulls for European museums,” two African-American women hold human skulls and pieces of glass. The plaque next to this display explains the history of African women being forced to clean skulls that were meant to be sent to Germany for “pseudoscientific examination” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Carvajal). In Bailey's rendition, the women are enclosed

ABSTRACT:

This essay examines *Exhibit B*, a controversial art installation by South African artist Brett Bailey in which actors portray historical scenes of colonialism and slavery. *Exhibit B* is meant to spread awareness of the widely popular human zoos of the past. Brown's essay investigates whether or not recreating scenes of slavery does more harm than good.

KEY WORDS:

Brett Bailey, human zoo, slavery, *Exhibit B*, critique, colonial practice



Civilizing the Natives: Herero prisoners cleaning Herero skulls for European museums © Brett Bailey

in a small area, fenced off by barbed wire. A large cooking pot sits upon a stack of wood between the women. Hanging from the barbed wire are what look to be pieces of flesh. The entire display is placed behind four pedestals, and on these pedestals are four skulls enclosed in glass cases. A backlight causes the faces of the women to be lost in shadows—the darkness of the exhibit further dimming their already dark skin. Spotlights draw attention to the hands of the actresses, causing the audience to focus on the actions taking place, as described by the plaque.

Also featured in *Exhibit B* is “A Place in the Sun: quarters of an officer of the German Colonial Forces, Windhoek 1906.” This scene involves a woman with an iron chain around her neck. In the eighteenth, nineteenth, and even early twentieth century, it was common practice for European colonists to chain up an African woman and allow her access to food in exchange for sexual services. This type of action sought to demean the women to little more than poorly treated house pets. As an African-American actress sits on a bed inside Bailey’s “A Place in the Sun” exhibit, she stares into a mirror hung on the wall. With her back to the audience, the only sight of this woman’s face is whatever glimpse of reflection you may catch in the mirror. Clothed in only a bed sheet, emphasis is placed on the chain collar around her neck. On the walls hang animal furs and heads, as well as framed photos of indigenous tribes. The woman is not given a name, but instead a piece of paper scribbled with a series of numbers is attached to the sheet that she wears in lieu of a nametag. A man’s clothing and belongings are scattered about the room. His pants lie across the bed and his boots are thrown about the floor. A rifle is propped against the bedpost should the woman get any ideas about escaping her chain collar.



A Place in the Sun: quarters of an officer of the German Colonial Forces, Windhoek 1906 © Brett Bailey

The exhibit has caused such uproar that Change.org features a petition to have the London showing cancelled. Protestors did end up with a victory, as this particular London theatre, the Barbican, withdrew its showing of *Exhibit B*. Responding to the cancellation, Bailey wrote an article featured in *The Guardian* which included the following:

The intention of *Exhibit B* was never hatred, fear, or prejudice. It is about love, respect, and outrage. Those who have caused *Exhibit B* to be shut down brand the work as racist. They have challenged

my right, as a white South African, to speak about racism the way I do. They accuse me of exploiting my performers. They insist that my critique of human zoos and the objectifying, dehumanizing colonial/racist gaze is nothing more than a recreation of those spectacles of humiliation and control. The vast majority of them have not attended the work ... I do not portray the world in the binaries of black and white, wrong and right, good and evil. I am an artist who works with colours and shades. (Bailey, "Yes, *Exhibit B* is Challenging")

With thirty-eight tour dates scheduled for the 2014 calendar year, Bailey's exhibit has been able to spread awareness regarding European and American history of "ethnological enlightenment" ("The Human Zoo" 3). The question remains, however, if awareness was spread in a manner deemed appropriate.

Before further examining *Exhibit B*, we first need to look at the long history of the human zoo in order to understand the importance of the racial ties that continue to be present in Bailey's modern re-creation. Zoos have been a large part of human history. Once entrepreneurs figured out that an audience would pay to see unique and exotic animals brought to nearby cities, zoos rapidly became popular. Lydia Kallipoliti recounts historical zoological events in her article, "Evolution of the Zoo: An Overview of Significant Zoological Developments Spanning from Biblical Times through to Contemporary Proposals." She describes the pre-modern zoos as such:

These aristocratic ménageries—including the Tower of London and the Vincennes Ménagerie—were founded and owned by said aristocrats whose primary intentions were not scientific or educational but rather illustrated their established power and wealth as it required both of those conditions to acquire exotic animals. By the late seventeenth century, ménageries had developed into places where wild animals were kept and trained for the purpose of exhibition. Animals were objectified—collected and displayed in a similar manner to the cabinet of curiosities of Renaissance Europe in which rulers and aristocrats would showcase their personal collections (3).

Kallipoliti's description of pre-modern zoos provides a basis upon which we are able to associate the first animal zoos. It is not until later, around the nineteenth century, that zookeepers begin displaying humans alongside animals. As Kallipoliti notes, the Age of Enlightenment largely influenced the changes to zoos and what became known as the "modern" zoos: "Thus the symbolic use of animals began to merge with notions of a well-ordered universe, leading to the collection of live specimens for study rather than amusement and ultimately to the development of the first scientifically established zoos of the modern world" (9). With this shift to science-focused zoos, it would not be long before zookeepers began expanding their search of "live specimens" to include humans.

In the late 1800's, cities such as Paris, Hamburg, Barcelona, and Milan were home to human zoos. Even some American cities, such as New York, hosted the human exhibits. M.B. David notes in the article "Deep Racism: The Forgotten History of Human Zoos," that some 200,000 to 300,000 people visited these zoos collectively. The human zoos consisted of public exhibits of mostly non-European people. These people were often considered different and unusual to what Europeans were used to seeing. As part of the exhibit, the humans on display would be placed inside a habitat. These constructed habitats often offered ideas of where these people might naturally exist.

Carl Hagenbeck, considered to be a German entrepreneur of human zoos, exhibited Nubian people in 1876. While working with a collaborator for the Nubian exhibit, Hagenbeck requested "wild beasts" be placed in the exhibit. Hagenbeck considered his exhibits of human beings to be "savages in a natural state" (Ames 27). Beginning in 1874, Hagenbeck critiqued and perfected zoo exhibits, for humans and animals alike. In one such show called "The Savages from the Land

of Fire,” Hagenbeck displayed a group of Kaweskars, people native to the Tierra del Fuego area of the South American Chilean Patagonia. Hagenbeck’s expedition captured the Kaweskars and displayed them to an audience of half a million visitors in Paris alone (“Europe’s ‘Human Zoos’”). Human zoos had gained so much popularity that the 1889 World’s Fair featured an exhibit with four hundred indigenous people (David).

By the early twentieth century, human zoos had sprung up across Germany. With big names like Hagenbeck, Germany helped human zoos, or “Peoples Show,” to gain popularity throughout the Western world. A Congolese pygmy called Ota Benga was displayed in a primate exhibit at the Bronx Zoo in New York City from 1906 until 1910. A plaque outside Benga’s exhibit labeled him as, “The Missing Link” (David). A zoo in France continued to display an Ivory Coast Village as part of an African safari up through 1994, as well as a London zoo including an exhibit depicting the earliest *Homo sapiens* in 2005 (David). In a document titled *The Human Zoo: Science’s Dirty Secret*, Channel Four Television Corporation investigates late nineteenth and early twentieth-century cultural practices regarding indigenous peoples. The document states, “Scientists were so fascinated by race that thousands of indigenous people from all over the world were put on display in human zoos in pseudo-scientific demonstrations of ‘racial difference’” (“The Human Zoo” 3). Though the concept of a zoo began with animals, it quickly incorporated human specimens. Just as the animals had been captured from their homelands and objectified for visitors to gawk at, the same ended up happening to people.

Perhaps the most famous story involving the human zoo is that of Saartjie Baartman. Baartman’s story describes the life of an indigenous woman captured for display in a human zoo. Baart-



Portrait of Saartjie Baartman, naked © British Museum

man was deceived by European explorers and kidnapped from her home. Like other performers, Baartman was taken because of her unusual appearance. Human zoos, and their audiences, thrived off of exotic specimens. If white Europeans had not seen something before, it was sure to be a hit at a freak show carnival. Baartman became known as “The Hottentot Venus,” and from that point on, she wouldn’t be known by any other name. Tortured and inspected, Baartman’s story is one of few historical accounts of human zoo captivity that was ever recorded.

Born in the Eastern Cape of South Africa in 1789, Saartjie Baartman would be taken from her homeland and eventually brought to England to be displayed in a collection of human spectacles (Holmes). Baartman agreed to venture to London, reassured by an exotic animal dealer that she would gain fame and wealth. Human zoo exhibits often sent scouts to find recruits with aesthetic qualities “that either coin-

cided with the European beauty ideal or offered unexpected novelty” (David). Baartman lived in Europe from 1810 until 1815. She was placed on stage in London amongst other members of the human freak show. Displayed for her genetic condition, steatopygia, Baartman had protuberant buttocks and elongated labia (David). Clifton Crais, history professor at Emory University, writes “for a little extra, you could poke her with your fingers or a stick” (Qtd. in Firth). In *Searching for Sara Baartman*, Susan Firth notes: “Since her death, the Hottentot Venus has appeared in the writings of William Makepeace Thackeray, Victor Hugo, Charles Darwin, Stephen Jay Gould, even Barack Obama’s inaugural poet, Elizabeth Alexander. These days, activists and academics claim her as a symbol of Western exploitation and racism” (Firth). Baartman died in 1815 and continued to be displayed to the public (Davie). As recently as 1974, the remains of Baartman, along with her genitalia, were displayed in France’s Musée de l’Homme, which translates to Museum of Man. Ridiculed and pestered for five and a half years of her life, Baartman continued to be taunted after death. In 1994, President Nelson Mandela formally requested that Baartman’s remains be returned to Cape Town. Baartman was not returned to South Africa until 2002, 187 years after leaving for Europe (Davie).

Her story provides us with a glimpse into the life of a human zoo specimen. By understanding Baartman’s account, we can better relate to what is going on in *Exhibit B*. Baartman’s experience tells us that the nature of human zoos was one of cruelty, torture, and inhumanity. Her story helps me shape an analysis for Bailey’s exhibit by giving me an inkling of an idea about how these zoos worked. For someone like Bailey to re-create an environment like this, it not only creates a controversial endorsement of racism, but it also negates and dishonors any humanity that Baartman, and others like her, had left. To take non-white volunteers and place them into a historical depiction to the liking of what Baartman suffered is to strip these people of their humanity and makes them pawns in a game of objectification.



Brett Bailey with a performer from Exhibit B © Pascal Gely

As I was reading through the tour dates of *Exhibit B*, I began to look up the venues that would be hosting Bailey's show. I located web pages of four venues on the touring list. Of these four venues, two charged admission (Poitiers—TAP, Moscow—Museum of Modern Art) and two appeared to be free to the audience (Paris—Theatre Gerard Philipe de Saint-Denis, Edinburgh International Festival). Because we have been presented with venues that charge and venues that do not, we can address both sides of this matter and how it may complicate Bailey's installation. On one hand, we must consider what it means to have humans on display like animals and to charge an audience an admission fee to see these spectacles. While Bailey argues that he is attempting to make a point with his artistic abilities, we are left wondering how much compensation he could be making from admission fees, and further, whether or not his live displays are being paid justly, or at all, for their time. Is *Exhibit B* able to send a message about the horrible acts of racism and colonialism committed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries while still profiting from spectators, just as the original human zoo did? Knowing Baartman's history, are we able to comfortably allow Bailey to objectify actors—be it at their own will? We know that human zoos of the past charged an audience to view the humans on display. One may consider that Bailey has crossed a line by displaying his exhibit in a venue that charges admission. Can we then argue that admission-free venues showing *Exhibit B* are more successful in spreading awareness about the human zoo? If an audience sees that show, and has not spent money on it, are they more likely to see the atrocities of these historical acts? Or perhaps, because they have not invested money, they may care less about what the exhibit is trying to show? These questions help determine the lack of critique that *Exhibit B* provides.

Human zoos are not a modern-day practice because humans have realized the cruelty and objectification that takes place within these settings. Though Bailey promotes *Exhibit B* as an artistic journey through ethnological enlightenment, this show does not totally eliminate the racism involved. Bailey's *Exhibit B* does not properly critique historical racism and colonialism because he has not drawn a line thick enough between what happened in the past and what he is doing now. To an audience with little to no knowledge of European and American human zoos, *Exhibit B* simply looks like a racist white man decided to morph his superiority complex into a live display. Even for those who are fully aware of what happened regarding human zoos, Bailey's comparison comes too close to the real thing.

Though collections like *Exhibit B* provide the audience with informative scenes about slavery and racism, these pieces still objectify the actors performing within the art. By using actors to recreate nineteenth-century human zoos, Bailey is, in turn, exerting power over other humans. It also does not help matters that Bailey is not a man of color. To have a white man create exhibits of colonial slavery drudges up ideas of superiority that some would much rather leave in the past.

Equality has become more widespread in today's culture. We are much farther along as a species than we were in the times of the human zoo. Objectification is a sensitive subject and must be addressed in a sensitive and respectful manner. *Exhibit B* transports the audience back to centuries when racial intolerance was at large. Rather than painting a scene from a human zoo exhibit, or sculpting a statue of The Hottentot Venus, Bailey uses real, live people in an attempt to show his stance on racism and colonialism. Where that failed, however, is in his execution. Bailey's exhibit allows current spectators to place themselves in an actual human zoo. *Exhibit B* is no different than Hagenbeck's zoo. By understanding the cruel history of Saartjie Baartman, Hagenbeck's Nubian captives, Ota Benga, and other humans put on display, we gain

perspective about this modern recreation. Visitors obviously know that these people are not being held against their will, but the visitors are still doing the same thing that was done hundreds of years ago: observing humans in an unnatural state.

Since he began touring *Exhibit B* in 2013, Bailey's work has engaged many people in public critiques of historical human zoos. By examining the history of the human zoo, we can better understand the racial ties that Bailey's show carries along. We are able to recognize the underlying trend of superiority and objectification that allowed human zoos to thrive in the past. The story of Saartjie Baartman gives us evidence that the practice of human zoos involved people being captured and displayed like wild animals. By creating *Exhibit B*, Bailey has tried to spread awareness about the pseudo-scientific enlightenment that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but his exhibit does not totally eliminate racism. It seems that no matter how carefully recreations are handled, people still end up being objectified.

Ultimately, there are costs to recreating scenes of slavery. Our world already has a hard time honoring equality to all humans. No matter how good artistic intentions may be, any performance that objectifies other human beings is not worth the cost. Though we constantly strive to gain understanding of past events, it could be possible that our continuous efforts are not bringing us any closer. It does not matter how hard we try; we will never know what it is like to be in another person's situation. Bailey, and numerous others, attempt to bring understanding to viewers, but what is lost in the process? I believe it is time to approach historical slavery and colonialism in a new way. That could mean many things. It may involve us reevaluating how we think about these situations, or it could possibly encourage us to change how we teach future generations about these atrocities. Whatever the solution is, we have not yet reached it.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Bailey, Brett. *Civilizing the Natives: Herero prisoners cleaning Herero skulls for European museums*, 2014. Digital File. Copyright Brett Bailey.
- Bailey, Brett. *A Place in the Sun: quarters of an officer of the German Colonial Forces, Windhoek 1906*, 2014. Digital File. Copyright Brett Bailey.
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- Unknown. *Portrait of Saartjie Baartman, naked*, 1810. Digital File. Copyright British Museum.

Author Biographies

MORGAN APRILL is a senior English literature major at Ball State with minors in Spanish and professional writing. She has worked for the campus Writing Center as a tutor for the past two years. Morgan has also been a research fellow with Dr. Jennifer Grouling, the past director of the Writing Center, and with Spanish professor Dr. Elisabeth Kuriscak as a writing fellow for Spanish composition classes. They presented their work at last year's East Central Writing Centers Association conference at Miami University in Oxford, OH, and they plan to publish an article about their work and findings in the *The Writing Lab Newsletter* within the next year. She is currently the head of the publicity team for the *DLR* and was a member of the editorial team last year.

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BRYCE LONGENBERGER is a junior English literature major at Ball State University. After finishing a wonderful year on the *Digital Literature Review's* editorial team, he plans on returning for the third year of the *DLR*. After graduating with his bachelor of arts degree, he plans on pursuing a masters in Library and Information Science and would someday like to work in a public library.

ALEX SELVEY is graduating this semester from Ball State University with degrees in applied cultural anthropology and natural resources. He works with visiting international scholars at the Ball State Center for International Development. After graduation, Alex wants to find a career that focuses on the intersection of people and their environment and that works towards improving the interaction between the two. If nothing else, he will be content in any field that teaches him more about the world than he knew the day before.

RAMONA SIMMONS, a sophomore criminal justice major at Ball State University, is a writer by choice and a cultural explorer by habit. After graduating, she hopes to move to Washington D.C.,

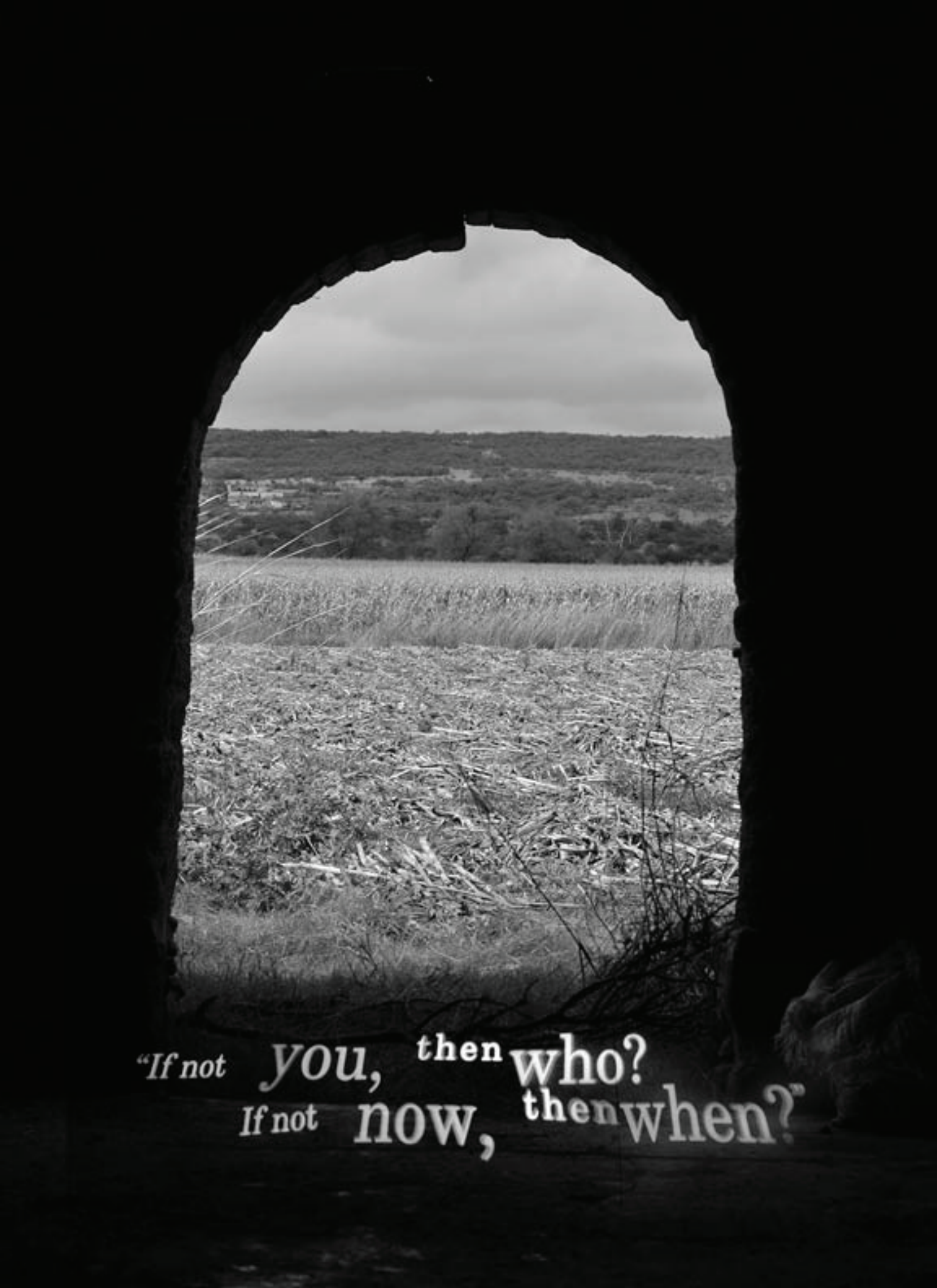
a justice system hub. Throughout her life, she plans to travel the world, serve justice, and help others' voices be heard.

ELISABETH WILKES is a senior majoring in English and creative writing. After graduation, she will be going on to receive her masters in Publishing Studies at University College London. During her year with the *DLR*, she served as a member on the publicity team.

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MADISON YEARY is a senior at Indiana University pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology and a Bachelor of Art degree in English with a concentration in Public and Professional Writing. Currently, Madison is part of the editorial board for the Hutton Honor's College's academic journal, *The Undergraduate Scholar*. Upon graduation in May, she plans to start her career as an editor at a small publishing company in Indianapolis.





*"If not you, then who?
If not now, then when?"*