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**TYRANNY LIVES IN THEORY: AN ANALYSIS OF RHETORICAL
RESISTANCE AND REBELLION IN *ANTIGONE* AND *INCIDENTS IN THE
LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL***

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ABSTRACT

TYRANNY LIVES IN THEORY: AN ANALYSIS OF RHETORICAL RESISTANCE AND REBELLION IN *ANTIGONE* AND *INCIDENTS OF A SLAVE GIRL*

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In this essay, I will study individuals in the black community by analyzing the paths to agency and power taken by those who unapologetically promote a truth outside the dialectically symmetrical language set forth in American law and have achieved economic independence from institutions designed by the state or people to protect the integrity of, and grant privilege to white language, culture, and history. I will begin my analysis with a discussion of the irreplaceability of the brother in Sophocles' *Antigone*. Following this discourse, I will go on to surveying the arrangement of the black family in Harriet Jacobs' *Incident in the Life of a Slave Girl* through a survey of the various characters, all of whom are slaves that desire and pursue freedom from the institution of slavery. This study is meant to highlight the kinship black people share in America through the experience of being black in America. Finally, we will conclude this essay by exploring two characters in the modern day that represent conceptual metaphors for black sovereignty from white rhetoric in the 21st century.

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INTRODUCTION

In this essay I aim to describe the means by which an individual, who has been historically left out of the network of authority and power, resolves to protect themselves and family against tyranny from those whose wills and interests are empowered, protected, and indebted to state structures and symbols they are either identified with or within. In large, this essay falls in line with a long and rich tradition of back studies in American academia. I believe that this essay also speaks to a connection among individuals who desire to be economic, by work or trade, and live ethically in their communities they share with the state that rhetorically expresses, indicts, and champions the inalienable right of its citizens. The state also reserves the power to provoke the privileges of citizenship to individuals not recognized by, or caught in the act of rebelling against, its sovereign language.¹ As it seems, rhetoric lies at the center of the relationship between individuals and the states that govern their rights and protect their economic interests.

So what is rhetoric? According to Kenneth Burke, the key term of rhetoric before the rise of the social sciences (anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, etc.) was persuasion. Following the emergence of the sciences, in Burke's attempt to reintroduce or advance rhetoric, the key term became identification. Whereas the former, gathered from his interpretation of Aristotle, stressed "persuasion as the purpose of rhetoric. Hence he surveys the resources of rhetoric, to the end that one might use the best means available

¹ Sovereignty is seemingly always attached to language. This language, at the same time, expresses and limits the powers of the individual or people it recognizes. The beauty of the US Constitution, and America, is in the sovereign language available to all the citizens of the United States.

for a given situation.”² Rhetoric today focuses on identification. Burke likens this to “when the politician seeks to identify himself with his audience.”³ Burke later writes, “But identification can also be an end, as when people earnestly yearn to identify themselves with some group or other.”⁴ My interests in the role of identification lies in its relevance to the subjugated agent who mourns or fears another due to their ability to justify unethical action based on the lack of access he or she has to sovereign language or natural law.

In this sense, the goal of rhetoric is seemingly the arrival of truth between distinguishable bodies. According to Burke, “For, if identification includes the realm of transcendence, it has, by the same token, brought us into the realm of transformation, or dialectic.”⁵ Dialectic is defined as a method of examining and discussing opposing ideas in order to find truth. According to Burke, “dialectical symmetry is at once the perfecting transcending of rhetoric.”⁶ What happens when the opposing sides are unable to arrive at a common truth, when the whole of the problems in one community are the result of its interaction with the state and the communities whose privileges, will, and interests are recognized in relation to the denial of its own? I say that rhetoric is a claim or artifact that distinguishes one person, place, or thing from the dialect of an oppressive institution or tyrant individual. Rhetoric is also just by nature. Meaning, it justifies the actions of one

² Kenneth Burke, “On Persuasion, identification, and Dialectic Symmetry,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 4, (2006): 333.

³ Kenneth Burke, “Rhetoric—Old and New,” *The Journal of General Education* 3, (1951): 203.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 204.

whose voice is not recognized in the general discourse of truth. Therefore, rhetoric is a medium used by one to declare or defend agencies that rebel or resist the order of an individual, people, or institution that the agent neither identifies with nor sees itself recognized by. At this point we can advance our discussion of rhetoric and dialectic into the field of sovereignty.

Scott Lyons, in “Rhetorical Sovereignty: What American-Indians Want from Writing,” reminds us that sovereignty is also rhetorical. In his article he defines sovereignty as “the right of a people to conduct its own affairs, in its own place, in its own way.”⁷ Lyons believes that for American Indians, “the highest hopes for literacy at this point rest upon a vision we might call rhetorical sovereignty.”⁸ In this essay, I will speak of sovereign power as something synonymous with, or belonging to, a people bounded by space in relation to the state and others. Robert Jackson lists a series of sovereign claims that are manifested through language. King Henry VII’s Act of Supremacy in 1534, “which gave the king and his successors supreme headship of the Church of England, and immunity from ‘foreign law’ and ‘foreign authorities’, particularly the laws and authority of the head of Christian Latendom, the pope.”⁹ King Charles was executed for ““an unlimited and tyrannical power to rule according to his Will, and to overthrow the Rights and Liberties of the people’.”¹⁰ All of these examples

⁷ Scott R. Lyons “Rhetorical Sovereignty: What do American Indians Want from Writing,” *College Composition and Communication* 51, (2000): 450.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 449.

⁹ Robert Jackson, *Sovereignty: The Evolution of an Idea* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007) 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

are declarations of sovereign authority from an imposing power, natural claims for a people to govern their own affairs, how they see fit.

Lyons pushes me to wonder what African Americans want from writing? I won't speculate on the answer to this question in this essay. I will say that *rhetorical sovereignty*, for black men and women in America, lies in their identification with, and loyalty to, the people in their community and the resistance from, or rebellion against, the sovereign language of a state that directly contributes to the pain and suffering of their people. According to Lyons, "Sovereignty is the guiding story in our pursuit of self-determination, the general strategy by which we aim to recover losses from the ravages of colonization; our lands, our languages, our cultures, our self-respect."¹¹ Modeling Lyons's discourse on rhetorical sovereignty for American Indians, I am brought to explore what African Americans want from writing. For Lyons, the claims made by American Indians have all been in the pursuit of his people "to survive and flourish as a people."¹² In his words, "For indigenous people everywhere, sovereignty is an ideal principle, the beacon by which we seek the paths to agency and power and community renewal."¹³ Although black people are not indigenous to America, the role of their community in the cultivation of the land and the circumstances of their labor residency call for advanced considerations from the supreme and merciful United States to compensate the truths surrounding the lives of those subjugated by state endowed tyranny.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Lyons describes a people as “a group of human beings united together by history, language, culture, or some combination therein—a community joined in union for a common purpose: the survival and flourishing of the people itself.”¹⁴ American chattel slavery marks the social distinguishing of a community of people, based on skin color, for the benefit and survival of another community of people, denying them access to law and/or justice outside the dialectic of the state. This distinction was one made by the white individuals who commanded positions of state or sovereign power. This is the legislature, the policeman, the businessman, the teacher, anyone who benefits from and supports the self-evident truths promised to them by the US Constitution. The slave’s will and economic interests were not recognized by white dialectic set forth in America.

After the conclusion of the Civil War, the black community was granted the protections of American citizenship. The black individual was married to the land and laws of their respective states. So far, the marriage has proven itself to be tenuous for the black community. After the ratification of the amendments that abolished slavery, established due process, and granted black men the right to vote, the southern states imposed a myriad of measures to further threaten the survival of the black family and the flourishing of their economic houses. I will study individuals in the black community by analyzing the paths to agency and power taken by those who unapologetically promote a truth outside the dialectically symmetrical language set forth in American law and have achieved economic independence from institutions designed by the state or people to protect the integrity of, and grant privilege to white language, culture, and history.

Kenneth Burke’s work in rhetoric, especially his interpretations of identification and dialect, shape the paradigm from which I have begun to describe the claims of

¹⁴ Ibid, 454.

sovereignty made by black people in America. I believe that the black community recognizes a history, distinct from other communities in the country yet, intimately connected to and threatened by the interests of white America. The dialectic of America is not symmetrical. This historical and present day fact justifies the will of any black individual who finds his or her truth outside the parameters of the generally accepted behaviors and laws set forth by the respective states. In order for us to understand my figures of resistance or rebellion, we must first understand the American dialectic that they oppose and the laws that disabled their agencies to ethical and/or economic life. We must also find the methods by which the political agents recognized in the black community identify with their audiences.

Scott Lyons' "What American Indians Want from Writing," notes the relationship between sovereignty and rhetoric. Taking Burke's analysis of rhetoric into consideration, I am likened to examine the how identification and sovereignty work hand in hand. Before an individual or peoples can make a claim to sovereignty they must first identify themselves, their cultures and languages, outside the general truth or dialect of an oppressive institution, left unprotected from the jurisdiction of tyrant agents. Lyons also introduces rhetorical sovereignty. This term will be used throughout the essay to describe individuals who identify themselves with an authority outside the all-powerful and merciful state.

George Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel's discourse on the consciousness and sub-consciousness are essential to my essay. I believe that between these two lie another consciousness. This consciousness is an awareness of the contradictions of consciousness based on the experiences of an individual and people like him or her. This second

consciousness lies above the confines of individual experience and are testimony to the asymmetrical dialectic of the general public. I liken this to a discussion of black consciousness in America. Black consciousness is the awareness of a history, culture, and truth particular to people of color. The consciousness is accessible by all black bodies and is also related to, in the sense of being molded within or against the generally accepted consciousness of American history.

Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim* sets forth a discussion of Creon and Antigone as mirroring one another. In this context, I want to describe Antigone's act as being made in response to Creon's actions. More plainly, Butler moves me to discuss the power that is produced by a subjugated individual in reaction to the abuse of power against the individual or the people the individual identifies with before the abusers. Power begets power. This paper focuses on the paths to power and agency taken by those who have experienced the peril of tyranny or abuse of authority.

W. E. B. Du Bois offers us a bridging voice from the latter years of slavery to the 21st century. I believe that his discussion on the progress of African Americans in the early 1900's displays the political environment for the free black body after slavery. In my argument, I want to use Du Bois' discourse on double consciousness to further push my discussion of kinship and family being the in-between for one's temperament towards or relationship with the state. Du Bois also offers us insight into the arrangement of the black family that includes mother, father, and child. This observation will further aid me in my conclusion of this analysis as I survey the possibilities for black progress in 2016.

Ethics are defined as moral principles that govern a person or group's behavior. Economics is the condition of a region or group as regards material prosperity. The house

represents an ethical sanctuary where individuals are free to govern their family how they see fit. I emphasize the family in this relationship because, through them, the precedent of sovereign-kin association can be found. The family is comprised of individuals that make up the economic potential of a home. Mother, father, and child, this is the holy trinity that the state is burdened to protect. Given all people are born of women, she is the producer of community. All children were housed in her womb. She is the first nurturer of boys and girls. Fatherhood is the ultimate test of a man's character. The responsibility of the father lies in his ability to protect his family and aid in the flourishing of his household. The state functions in a similar capacity for the families within their jurisdiction. The state must protect the individual rights of people while protecting their economic interest. The issue with this arrangement is the dominion that white men have undertaken as officials in the state. What is the outcome when the officials that command positions of power ignore the ethical rights of the citizens they serve? When power supersedes authority? Tyranny.

Charles Girard, while examining the language set forth by Norman Wilde, comments, "Rights, he contends, are possessed by an individual by virtue of the social function she fulfills."¹⁵ As I mentioned earlier, these functions are expressed ethically and economically. Girard continues with his description rights, "They are rather preconditions that make it possible for individuals to act as members of a social whole, thus contributing to the pursuit of a social whole."¹⁶ Girard tells us that Wilde does believe that rights are not wholly produced through social arrangement in the community.

¹⁵ Charles Girard, "On Norman Wilde's Meaning of Right," *Ethics* 125 (2015), 543.

¹⁶ *Ibid*

According to Girard, “Although their existence is conditioned by the existence of social institutions, rights are not created, but only recognized and enforced by social conventions and law.”¹⁷ The right of the individual superficially precedes any institution formed for its preservation. I say superficial, because the belief that individuals have natural rights still requires that institutions that shape ethical and economic order in America recognize those rights.

Girard believes, “Human beings form associations to pursue shared purposes, and their organizations gradually creates permanent social structure.”¹⁸ Ethical institutions begin with the home but also include other community-based enterprises like schools, hospitals, churches and bodies of human development. Economic institutions are more various in scope and size. The bigger the business, the more powerful the institution. Economic and ethical institutions are both born from the community, but carry very different functions. The ethical institutions focus on the development and consciousness of the human being. Economic institutions focus on capital, the selling of goods and services for profit and the material prosperity of community. The state, ideally, recognizes and promotes the rights of ethical beings, citizens, while managing industry.

The sovereign state is a political institution with the power and authority to rule over a community of people, with consideration of the natural rights of those people. State power and sovereign authority are distinct but connected in relation to their community. They are different in function, yet intimately connected. Jackson notes

¹⁷ Ibid, 545. A convention is a set of agreed, stipulated, or generally accepted standards, norms, social norms, or criteria, often taking the form of a custom.

¹⁸ Ibid, 543.

“sovereignty is a form of authority, and not a kind of power.”¹⁹ The distinction lies in one's license to take agency versus one's means to carry out an agency. Jackson writes, “Authority commands, power executes. Authority is a warrant or license - or authorization - to exercise power.” He goes on to further state the distinctions between authority and power. Authority is categorical and relational. You either have authority or you do not. He calls this “a discernible status or standing or position.”²⁰ Power, however, is relatable and non categorical. Jackson notes “Power is capability and capacity, strength or weakness, in regards to the policies or activities that a government or any other actor undertakes, in relation to other actors it is involved with.” In this way, power transcends government agency.

Power is physical and manifested economically.²¹ Look at the host of apparatus’ described as necessary by Jacksons to assert the authority of a sovereign:

I refer to civil administrations, military forces, police and other law enforcement agencies, intelligence agencies and other means of obtaining and employing vital and sometimes secret information, instruments of public communication and means of propaganda, agencies and techniques for calculating and collecting revenue, regulating the national currency, and managing the national economy, means of educating the population, providing welfare services and health care, and any other utilitarian means of enforcing law or implementing public policies.²²

¹⁹ Ibid, 31.

²⁰ Ibid, 31.

²¹ I should mention a song from The Lox that reminds me of this discourse of power as economics. The Chorus goes, “It’s the keys to life, Money, Power, and Respect. Watchu’ need in life, Money, Power, and Respect, When you eatin’ right, Money, Power, and Respect. Help you see at night. You’ll see the light.”

²² Jackson, 31.

At what point do we begin to ask who is paying for all of this? The answer to this question, in large, is the purely economic institution. As Jackson notes, “human rights or natural rights, to use the older term, were conceived by people who understood the state as an organization for safeguarding civil society.”²³ The state is charged with ensuring natural protections for its citizens and enforcing laws in the community. The costly nature of this agency entails my consideration of the state apparatus, or state power, as an economic institution. Our country's capacity to provide public services and enforce its laws comes from the revenue that is collected from its citizens. The state is therefore trusted to support the communities and provide a profitable community for its proprietors and workforce. What is the outcome when the state ignores its duty to support ethical communities in favor of pursuing economic interests? Tyranny.

At this point, I am prepared to begin the discussion on the particular focus of my project. I explore the ethical configuration of a community and the capacity of the state to provide and protect the citizens within its jurisdiction from foreign and domestic threats. I do believe that the unique experiences of subjugation shared by a people in their interaction with peculiar institutions that warrant tyrant like sovereign behavior. I am interested in how this kin relationship between state authority, sovereign power, and public truth is changed by the institution of slavery and the continued economic disenfranchisement of the black community. I will begin my analysis with a reading of Sophocles’ *Antigone*.

Antigone is set in a period prior to, and at the same represents the need for, democracy. In the most basic reading of the Greek drama, the play displays a society where the limits of individual right, state power, and sovereign authority are all determined by a single character,

²³ Jackson, 130.

Creon, who also plays the role of head in the House of Cadmus. Two characters in the play that I have a particular interest in are Antigone and Polynices. Polynices is present in the play only in absence. He is a character that must always be watched, who was left unburied after fighting for sovereign authority in Thebes with his brother Eteocles. Antigone is buried alive, disabled from disobedience and unable to tend to the needs of her family. Sophocles is introducing something very rich in this dramatization of the state-kin relation. Antigone and Polynices are the final representatives of the corrupted House of Cadmus.²⁴ In this sense, I read these characters as figures of subjugation. Although both of their attempts to escape this subjugation were unsuccessful, I believe that Sophocles introduces a means to look at these two characters through a contemporary lens relevant to my discussion. Antigone represents a resistance to sovereign authority. Polynices represents a figure that threatens the order of state power. My reading of this play is not meant to engender the paths to agency and power a subjugated people takes to resist or rebel against tyranny. My reading of *Antigone* introduces the abilities of a people to adapt and break from traditional limitations placed upon them when competing against powerful apparatuses of terror. I think that Antigone and Polynices work well as foundational characters in my allegorical representation of the means by which black individuals have been subjugated in America. The two characters share an experience and history that joins them by blood and plight. In Antigone's life and Polynices' death, I observe a social climate likened to the racial plights of the African-American. Antigone represents a claim to sovereignty that holds her tyrant accountable for his irreparable crimes, while at the same time lending itself to the mercy of a governing body that cause her plight in the first

²⁴ This sentence brings into account the plot of the Theban plays. I do not make the common mistake of reading these plays together as a single narrative. Instead I see each play as a take using the figures set forth in the infamous myth to address a particular political situation.

place. She is not pursuing the power of her ruler King, only arguing her individual right to tend to her family.

American Independence vested each land owning white man the power to be a king of his own realm and participate in the democratic process. The Declaration of Independence demands that the colonies be recognized as independent states. Also rights and liberties of man would be constituted in the Bill of Rights. The citizen has authority over his God, his land, and the people who inhabit and work it. The American citizen's lord is his constitution. The artifact clearly expresses the functions and limitations of sovereign authority and state power. The American slave is not a citizen. The slave is the property of citizen. The slave was not recognized as man and was consequently left unprotected from the authority of sovereign agents or power of the state. Slavery plays out in three tiers. First, there was the slave economy itself. Which is comprised of a pool of slave traders and buyers, plantation owners and people who needed labor. Second was the state legislator who championed the slave trade and manipulated the language of America's self-evident truths to endorse the subjugation of living people. Last was the federal government who ignored the voices of black individuals everywhere born on this land. This is the story of Linda Brent, the pseudonym for Harriet Jacobs in her autobiography *Incidents in the Life of Slave Girl*. The slave was uprooted from her home in Africa, by trade or force, and implanted into fields (outside the homes) of the American estate. Children were separated from mothers and fathers and adopted by the worst kinds of human beings. The slave economy is the first industry of America. The plantation, more than any other economic institution in history, displays the state licensing of tyranny over "black" families by white families and their economic houses. I have placed black in quotation marks because I do not identify it as an indicator of race, rather a discernible social

distinction.²⁵ My goal with Jacobs is to introduce the making of a people through the shared experience of slave proprietorship and then show the paths to agency and power the individuals of black houses utilized while adapting to their circumstances.

I do not intend to end here; I will then look at works from W.E.B. Du Bois to analyze the progress of black individuals following the emancipation of slavery. After slavery was abolished, the African American citizen still endured a significant amount of torment. The black body had become able claim the individual rights promised to naturally born citizens but still faced racial discrimination and economic disenfranchisement. The black community became further distinguishable through the general mistreatment of their kind by state and sovereign apparatuses. The paths to power and agency were limited, and all relatable to the skillsets and opportunities available to the black agent. My observations only describe instances where subjects that had endured a fair amount of public defamation break free from those stereotypes and use their realities to project themselves into figures of sovereignty, free from white expectation or slander. I believe that these figures prove to be exceptional characters, products of a range of factors, attitudes, and circumstances that grew through the crack in general discourse of black progress. When we speak of black progress, can we think about the African-American drug dealer as a figure of economic independence? When we think of black rhetoric can we think about the narratives of the slave woman or the significant role she plays in the building and protecting of her community? Is she the figure who holds the key to black self-determination in relation to the public sphere?

²⁵ Recently, there has been a great deal of attention surrounding Raven Symone, the host of popular daytime talk show *The View* and former cast member in the *Cosby Show*, about the comments she made detailing her decision not to categorize herself by race. I want to be clear, this is not my intention. Although I do not endorse her views, I do see where she is coming from. It is my opinion that black is less about the geographic origin of a people and more to do with their common historical struggle.

CHAPTER ONE
ANTIGONE'S CLAIM: HEGEL'S ETHICAL ARRANGEMENT OF THE
FAMILY, THE AUTONOMOUS FUNCTION OF STATE SOVEREIGNTY, AND
FIGURES OF RESISTANCE

Too often we miss the point when drawing theory from literary artifacts. We see the names of famous characters, read their deeds and triumphs, and forget that they are creatures of the belly like we are today. I do believe that the history individuals share makes them a people. A peoples' right to independence from individuals who do not share, or acknowledge, their history is a natural right. No group of individuals' experience is more intimately connected than in the arrangement of the family. In this arrangement, each actor performs certain roles and functions based on a variety of factors like cultural ethics, circumstance, and the social norms of other families in their community. After a time, expectations are often placed upon individuals based on discernible characteristics like sex and age. Women are supposed to act a certain way or follow a certain decorum. Men also have their social expectations and responsibilities to the community, children too. When the family is corrupted, for one reason or another, and the experiences that they are forced to live through are unique in relation to other families that are also members of their communities, we witness the capacity of these subjugated actors to take paths to agency and power outside the expectations placed upon them by the general public.

Sophocles brings us into the corrupted house of Cadmus in *Antigone*. The entire family had died save two women, daughters of Oedipus, Ismene and Antigone. That being said, the new ruler of Thebes, Creon, is still tormenting their brother Polynices in death. Antigone tells Ismene that Creon has announced a new law concerning their

brother Polynices, ““No burial of any kind. No wailing, no public tears. Give him to the vultures, unwept, unburied, to be a sweet treasure for their sharp eyes and beaks.”²⁶ I believe that Creon’s decree also speaks to the power of law to affect certain families in a community more than others. In these cases, the voices of the families terrorized by these laws are unheard by the general public and ignored by state officials. For Antigone, her connection to Polynices is deeper than blood relation. He is one of the few persons left who understands what’s it like to be a member in the peculiar arrangement of her family. Creon’s law is an assassination of Polynices’ memory and, because he is dead, a strike against those connected to him by history.

I believe that facing this torment, this act of subjugation, actors from the terrorized class are motivated to seek agencies outside what’s expected of them by the general public. I believe that Ismene’s response speaks to these expectations on women in her particular social community. Urging Antigone to reconsider the path to agency she is conspiring to take, burying her brother against city ordinance, Ismene cries, “Oh no! Think carefully, my sister.”²⁷ After her cry, she began to share the history of their family. She shares, “Our father died in hatred and disgrace after gouging out his own two eyes for sins he’d seen in his own self.”²⁸ Sophocles is referring to and drawing from the Oedipus legend to set the discourse of the play. Ismene continues by speaking about her mother and sister Jocasta, “Next his mother and wife—she was both—destroyed herself in a knotted rope.” She shares the fate of her two brothers, the aforementioned Polynices

²⁶ Sophocles, *Theban Plays*, trans. Peter Meineck and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

and Eteocles. After the exile of their father, the two had made an arrangement to alternate the ruling of Thebes. After Eteocles failed to hand over his authority to his brother, civil war followed and as Ismene says, “our two brothers on one day killed each other in a terrible calamity, which they had created for each other.”²⁹

Ismene concludes the recollection of her family's history by stating the limitations available to them based on their gender. She states, “We have to keep in mind: We are women and we do not fight with men. We’re subject to them because they’re stronger, and we must obey this order, even if it hurts us more.”³⁰ This paper sets out to explore the paths to agency taken by people forced to submit to laws that hurt or affect them more than others. Bonnie Honing, in “Ismene’s Forced Choice: Sacrifice and Sorority in Sophocles’ *Antigone*,” writes:

Humanist and anti-humanists reception converge on their tendency to orient readers and spectators away from tragedy's political implications and toward an ethics, or what Nicole Loraux in *The Mourning Voice* calls (2002.26) an anti-politics of shared suffering or (for Lacanians) desire.³¹

Antigone and Ismene are both products of this shared suffering. I believe that Sophocles is making a distinction between the opposing reactions of people who belong to a

²⁹ Ibid.

In this arrangement I see a valuable connection to my observation to the arrangement of the black community today in many inner cities like the Southside of Chicago and southeast Washington DC. I see the black community as a family in relation to struggle in America. While many of our matured male figures have been victims of American society, our matured female figures have endured a considerable amount of public defamation of character. At the same time, the conflict between Antigone’s brothers screams some metaphorical connection with black on black crime in these inner city communities.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Bonnie Honing, “Ismene’s Forced Choice: Sacrifice and Sorority in Sophocles *Antigone*,” *Arethusa* (2001).

subjugated class. A distinction that is affirmed by Honing. As Honing comments, “Often neglected is tragedy's own exploration of the problem of political agency as action under conditions of (near) impossibility.”³² An actor facing these impossible conditions must possess an exceptional attitude or be prepared to take exceptional agency in order to move beyond their torment and for their people.

Antigone is the exceptional figure that seeks agency, even though she is faced with nearly impossible conditions. Antigone responds to her sister, “Go on and *be* the way you choose to be. I will bury him. I will have a noble death and lie with him, a dear sister with a dear brother. Call it a crime of reverence, but I must be good to those that are below.”³³ Looking at the play itself, without consideration of *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, it would be difficult for me to speak of the personal motivations of the characters in the play for the actions they choose. What can be speculated is the paths to agency and power these characters take in the interest of their people.³⁴ At the same time, I think that Sophocles was speaking to a divide amongst the people of a subjugated class. How can someone who is aware of the mistreatment of people like them, stand by while their enemy handcuffs them with laws in life and publicly shames them in death? As Ismene says, “We are alone.”³⁵ I believe that Antigone understands this. Knowing that

³² Ibid.

³³ Sophocles, 6.

³⁴ This may be speculation, but I cannot image the descendants of Thebes not sharing a peculiar relationship with the state in comparison to other families. I think that the occasion of incest in the Oedipus legend produces a group of people who are all brothers and sisters due to a queer union. Their experience strengthens the connection between them, especially when there is an antagonist that subjugates your family in life and terrorizes them in death.

Ismene and Antigone are aware that they are alone in their plight, the two characters display a choice that all people who belong to a subjugated class must decide to address or endure the political agencies of their tyrants.

I believe that both Antigone and Ismene constitute a sub-conscious dilemma that must be overcome before one can take the path to agency from tyranny. The exceptional figure sees inaction when your people are being terrorized as an unforgivable crime. This figure believes that it is better to be a criminal of the state, than a criminal to your people. In the final exchange before Antigone's act, she tells her sister, "So you just let me and my 'bad judgment' go to hell, nothing could happen to me that's half as bad as dying a coward's death."³⁶ Ismene maintains her disapproval, but her response shows us that she does understand her sister's ambitions, "Then follow your judgment, go. You've lost your mind, but you are holding to the love of your loved ones."³⁷ If Ismene's inactivity is due to her fear or recognition of her foe as a stronger power may be connected with her view of Creon as state power and therefore synonymous with the city. At first she says, "I'll obey the men in charge." Later she says, "By my very nature how could I possibly take arms against the city."³⁸ I think Antigone sees Thebes as her ally in truth. At the same time, the source of her torment is one man, Creon. He is not the city of Thebes. He is a mortal man who is using his position to terrorize her brother.

³⁵ Sophocles, 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

Tyranny Lives in Creon: Law, Order, and the People

In *Antigone*, sovereign authority and state power are naturally constitutive, meaning, the individual who occupies the position of king has the authority and power to make laws and execute criminals. It is access to power that you either have or you don't. Creon has this authority and holds this power. In his introduction into the play, he says "So now the throne and all the power in Thebes are mine."³⁹ He is creator of law and the agent of order. Creon speaks of the responsibilities and significance of his official position. He says, "No man has a mind that can be fully known, in character or judgment, till he rules and makes laws. Only then can he be tested in the public eye."⁴⁰ Creon holds an office that vests him the power to make laws in the interest of the state and his people. He acts on behalf of the state but his power is not autonomous. It is clear that Creon does answer to a group of individuals whose function is both political and economic.

In my reading of *Antigone*, the Chorus represents a constituency, essentially concerned with Creon's performance as a sovereign. They are the agents that test the character of Creon. As long as they accept his laws, there is seemingly no one else who could check his power. Before Antigone is captured, news travels back to Creon that someone has broken his law and buried Polynices. In reaction to this news, the Chorus, who is described as a counsel of elders in this translation, says, "you know, sir, as soon as I hear, it came to me: Somehow the gods are behind this piece of work."⁴¹ Creon's response suspects discord amongst this organization of men. At the same time, he

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Sophocles, 14.

seeming acknowledges the capacity of this economic class to undermine his agency. Creon says to the chorus leader, “but some men here have always champed, like surf, against my orders, and obeyed me, if at all, without cheer.”⁴² Thebes is not a democracy, but there are still voices outside that of Creon’s that are recognized as essential to the state.

These voices are intrinsically economic in my estimation, meaning that they can be bought and sold. As Creon exclaims, “They are the ones, I’m absolutely sure, who used bribes to lead our watchman astray, into this crime.”⁴³ What is more valuable for me is Creon’s focus on money being the power that this social body has agency to.

According to Creon:

Money is the nastiest weed ever to sprout in human soil. Money will ravage a city, tear men from their homes and send them into exile. Money teaches good minds to go bad; it is the source of every shameful human deed. Money points the way to wickedness, lets people know the full range of irreverence.⁴⁴

Ironically, money is not the source of Antigone’s crime. Her act is a crime of irreverence to Creon as much as it is a crime of reverence to Polynices.

Antigone’s path to agency is the outcome of her siding with her wronged people over their celebrated oppressor. Antigone is not represented in the economic and political body that encompasses the chorus in the play. She is tasked to find different means of being heard in her quest for social justice in the wake of the terrorizing laws brought into power by her tyrant.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 15.

I believe that the chorus hints at the capacity of this type of community renewal and leadership in the following soliloquy. The chorus professes, “He has the means to handle every need, never steps toward the future without the means. Except for Death: He’s got himself no relief from that, though he puts every mind to seeking cures for plagues that are hopeless.”⁴⁵ I believe that we can further dive into this community of a representative economic and political group who represent an entire people. I look at this body as being economically sovereign, a population of people with the freedom to acquire wealth and make contributions in service to the city. Creon manages the affairs of this social body while ensuring the protections of the people they represent.

The Ethics of Antigone: An Analysis of Contemporary Readings of Hegel

I liken the voices that make up this social body to the discourse of the public sphere. There has been a considerable amount of discussion surrounding G. W. F. Hegel’s reading of *Antigone*. I will use readings of Hegel by Robert Pippin, Victoria Burke, Stephen Houlgate, Molly Farneth, and Judith Butler to supplement my theories of consciousness in state-kin relation. Pippin begins his analysis of Hegel by laying out a description of terms essential to his theory. In his book, *Hegel on Self-consciousness*, he speaks of Hegel’s account in *Phenomenology of the Spirit* as being developed through the method of phenomenology or “the science of the experience of consciousness.”⁴⁶ He goes

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁶ Robert Pippin, *Hegel on Self-consciousness: Desire and Death in Phenomenology of Death* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 1.

on to describe Hegel's account of the *Geist*. A term he describes as a "form of *collective* like mindedness."⁴⁷

I believe that Pippin is hinting to a discussion of consciousness set forward in many discussions surrounding phenomenology. In "Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, and the Unconscious," Christopher McCann defines consciousness as an "awareness of the other (anything the self can be conscious 'of' in any way whatever), *together with* an awareness that the self is not itself what it is conscious 'of'."⁴⁸ The collective like-mindedness for me serves as a truth shared by a community through experience. I believe these truths connect a people in ways outside of personal experience. As Pippin writes, "Hegel treats the project of human self-knowledge as essentially a matter of what he calls Geist's "actuality," its historical and social development."⁴⁹ McCann describes self-consciousness as "awareness of the self *as if it were something other*."⁵⁰ I believe that self-consciousness is the verification or contradiction of the generally accepted truth through personal experience. When a person's awareness of their personal experience contradicts the general consciousness, an ethical conflict arises. As Pippin writes, the turn in Hegel's philosophy comes in his interpretation of self-consciousness as desire.

I understand McCann's interpretation of Hegel's consciousness and self-consciousness through the Burke's discussion of identity and dialectical symmetry. For

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁸ Christopher McCann, "Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, and the Unconscious," *Essentialist Analysis: Journal for the Society of Existentialist Analysis* (2015), 329.

⁴⁹ Pippin, 2.

⁵⁰ McCann, 329.

me, consciousness, like the dialectic, is a method to discuss and examine opposing ideas in order to find the truth. I liken Hegel's discussion of the consciousness to Burke's description of "another line of ascent," one that "involves the relations between the dialectics of identification and hierarchic structure in the social, or sociological, sense (society conceived as, roughly, a ladder, or pyramid, of interrelated roles)."⁵¹ Identity, in regard to this discussion, is likened to the self consciousness. What family represents in *Antigone* is a dialectic that bridges the identity of the individual and the state. More simply, the individual is able to identify with the state based on the state official's job to recognize the natural rights of his or her family and self. The state's act of suspending the rights of a family, or any group of people marked by a common quality, therefore, separates the identity of the people from the narrative of the state progress, creating a dialect above the self and below the state.

I am trying to say that consciousness and dialectic are largely similar in the sense that they speak to a truth amongst people who identify themselves through various symbols and structures. At the same time, there is a hierarchy in the dominating voice of the state. The state's inability to recognize, or succeed in silencing, the dialectics of the subjugated people who reside on its land from the general narrative of its progress marks a break in the rhetoric of the state and people who share kinship in struggle. Creon speaks on behalf of the state, therefore proclaims a general dialect of the people of Thebes. I see this in one exchange between Creon and Antigone. In the exchange, Creon says to Antigone, "Aren't you ashamed to have a mind apart from theirs?" referencing the people of Thebes. Antigone responds, "There no shame in having respect for a

⁵¹ Burke, 204.

brother.”⁵² If consciousness resembles the general dialectic of the opposing ideas in the state and self-consciousness as a phenomenological truth or awareness, the family represents a bridge between the two affected by the privilege or pain it receives from dealing with the state.

In Molly Farneth’s “Gender and the Ethical Given: Human and Divine Law in Hegel’s Reading of the Antigone,” she describes the distinction between shapes of spirit and shapes of consciousness in Hegel. Burke describes the shape of consciousness as a “conceptual scheme—the way a particular individual or group characterizes itself, the source of authority for its beliefs and norms, and its relationship to the world in which it finds itself.”⁵³ She parallels this description with the shape of spirit, “an embodied form of social life, including its norms and laws, social practices, and language.”⁵⁴ Farneth believes that Hegel’s work analyzes the ways that people, individual and communities, “ground the authority of their beliefs and norms.”⁵⁵ The spirit is the experience of a people under an authority of conscious being.

According to Farneth, “the first shape of spirit that Hegel describes in this chapter is the German *Sittlichkeit*, in which norms, laws, institutions, and practices, have the authority they do simply because they always had that unquestioned authority.”⁵⁶ I believe that the *Sittlichkeit* represents the self-evident truths of people. Farneth defines it

⁵² Sophocles, 23.

⁵³ Molly Farneth, “Gender and the Ethical Given: Human and Divine Law in Hegel’s Reading of the Antigone” *Journal of Religious Ethics* (2013), 644.

⁵⁴ Farneth, 645.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 646.

as a “fully harmonious and non-alienated social order and self-understanding “that provides an appealing alternative to the fragmentation of modern life.”⁵⁷ This alternative proves to be what Farneth may describe as the driving force behind the discourse of *Antigone*, which is the distinction between divine and human law. She claims that divine law “is made actual and concrete in the institution of the family.” According to Hegel, the family is a natural ethical community. Farneth substantiates her reading by stating “the family, based in the household, is the site of the natural ethical community, which takes the divine laws as immediately given and authoritative for it.”⁵⁸ In this reading, I have begun to interpret the state as a generally conscious individual authority charged with protecting the divine rights of the family and ensuring the economic prosperity of the people under his protection for the good of the city.

I believe that Hegel’s account of implicit gender roles is a limitation of the time and space he is writing in. Farneth states that a division accompanies the relationship between the state and family between men and women. According to her, women “are related to their roles within the family, have obligations issuing from the divine law, the family and immediate or natural ethical community.” I do believe that women, as executive producer in the institution of a family, share a strong connection to divine law. At the same time, the absence of their presence in the political sphere is more so an outcome of patriarchal disenfranchisement. Farneth continues, “Men as citizens, have primary identities and obligations defined by human law, the polis, and the universal self conscious ethical community.”⁵⁹ This observation further lends itself to analysis of the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 647.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 648.

disenfranchisement of citizenship for women in the time Hegel was writing in. I believe that men and women both share identities and obligations set forth by the polis. The problem becomes the instance where the identities and obligations defined by the polis are in opposition to the rights of an individual or group's inalienable rights as members of a state. I believe that men, in Hegel's account, entail the economic and political community of a community. The polis represents the leaders of the community and women symbolize a community of politically and economically disenfranchised residents of the community.

Furthermore, the men represent the constituents of leadership likened to a public sphere. I look at this constituency as being embodied by the chorus and the watchman in the play. These agents have the power to undermine Creon's authority. Creon speaks to the capacity of the member in the chorus to "pull out the yoke of justice."⁶⁰ He is also suspicious of the watchman's role in the breaking of his law. I say this social, or rather civil body, is manifested economically because the character's path to agency or power is either due to authority, wealth, or disobedience. In "The Substance of Ethical Recognition: Hegel's Antigone and the Irreplaceability of the Brother," Victoria Burke describes the public sphere as "an arena of "hostile competition" by developing a theory of social cohesion in which individuals affirm their freedom through ethical bonds formed by conflict."⁶¹ Creon is a self-consciousness; the elders and watchmen represent self-consciousness as well. Burke argues that self-consciousness is not only desire but

⁵⁹ Idib.

⁶⁰ Sophocles, 18.

⁶¹ Victoria Burke, "The Substance of Ethical Recognition: Hegel's Antigone and the Irreplaceability of the Brother," *new German Critique* 118 (2013), 3.

also force. She argues “the relation between the two self-consciousnesses, seen as a relation between two forces, must have the form in which one or the other of the parties, has power over the other.”⁶² Burke continues that civil society is an arena of competing interests, a play of desiring forces in which there are always stronger and weaker parties. According to Burke, “As a force, the domination consciousness who wins the other’s recognition is able to assert his will.”⁶³ I believe that the men in *Antigone* all represent a community of competing forces where Creon is the dominant political actor due to the economic power of Thebes that he holds but does not own.

Early in the play, Ismene describes an implied powerlessness that her and her sister share in being women concerned about the affairs of men. Absent her father and both brothers, who is left that shares the same contempt for modern life as Antigone’s sister and dead brother who is also an actor in civil society? According to Stephen Houlgate, “human beings recognize and respect one another as free within communities, such as the estate or corporation in which they work and the state of which they are citizens.”⁶⁴ The watchman has the capacity to doctor his report. The Chorus has the power to bribe the watchman. Houlgate continues, “As a free being I have the right to own property or engage in work.”⁶⁵ As mentioned earlier, the sisters understand that they are all they have left. Neither of them is free in respect to the agency to cover up their deed or the economic power to bribe an official to fulfill a desire to right the wrong set

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Stephen Houlgate, “G.F.W. Hegel: Phenomenology of the Spirit” in *The Blackwell Guide to Continental Philosophy*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 9.

⁶⁵ Houlgate, 9.

forth by Creon and his substantial force. Antigone is a subject who is void of modern authority and economic power. Her path to agency and power is therefore an act of martyrdom that constitutes the desire of her spirit to appeal a shape of consciousness.

The substantiality of Creon's force is made clear in the unwillingness of forces that do compete in civil society to defend the crimes Creon has committed against his family. This observation is gathered in an exchange between Antigone and Creon. Antigone gloats, "What could be more glorious than giving my true brother his burial? All these men would tell you they're rejoicing over that, if you hadn't locked their tongues with fear."⁶⁶ She accuses him of silencing his constituents. Creon asks her if she is ashamed of her defection from the like-mindedness of her community. She responds, "There's no shame in having respect for a brother."⁶⁷ If Ismene, as stated by Peter Miller, "represents a stereotypical female."⁶⁸ Then Antigone's character represents the breaking of that stereotype through a path to agency or power that is outside the expectation of civil society.

Antigone's Claim: What Antigone Wants from Speech

At this point, I would like to examine the character Antigone and the motivations of her path to agency and power. I see her actions as protests, directed specifically at human capacity of the individual who wields the power within a state structure, rather than attack against the state itself. Her beef is with Creon and not Thebes, necessarily. In *Antigone's Claim*, Judith Butler argues, "Antigone is the occasion for a new field of the

⁶⁶ Sophocles, 23.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Peter Miller, "Destabilizing Haemon: Radically Reading Gender and Authority in Sophocles *Antigone*," *Texas Tech University Press* 14 (2014), 166.

human.” She believes that this “happens when the less than human speaks as human, when gender is displaced, and kinship founders on its own founding laws.”⁶⁹ I agree with Butler, I believe that Antigone represents the potential of an individual, regardless of gender, age, or social status, to act in the face of a tyrant that has terrorized her family. Her actions are void of economic positioning, she only wants to employ her right to bury her brother. In this regard, the subjugated human crashes all concepts of implicit roles people play in a larger community.

According to Butler, the *Sittlichkeit* is “the sphere of political participation but also of viable cultural norm.”⁷⁰ This relationship between state and kinship is gendered, the state representing a male force and kinship representing a female force. According to Butler, “Creon comes to represent an emergent ethical order and state authority based on principles of universality.” Antigone “represents kinship, the power of blood relations.”⁷¹ In this same context, I add, Antigone's brother represents an opposing emergent order, therefore making an enemy and threat to state authority. Creon's character seemingly interprets a coup against the head of state as a coup against the state itself. He states, “If someone goes too far and breaks the law, or tries to tell his masters what to do, He will have nothing but contempt from me.” Creon continues, “But when the city takes a leader, you must obey, whether his commands are trivial, right, or wrong.”⁷² Antigone represents the natural limitation of state authority. When the laws of the state break the divine laws of the household, an appeal must be made to the constituents of the state who judge the

⁶⁹ Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 82.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Sophocles, 31.

deeds of its leader. Creon ends his message, a conversation he is having with his son, “But reject one man ruling another, and that’s the worst. Anarchy tears up a city, divides a home, defeats an alliance with spears. But when people stay in line and obey, their lives and everything else is safe.”⁷³ I believe that this is true for the men and women who are represented in a civil society. For those are not represented, justice from tyranny is more terrorizing than anarchy in the city.

Butler speaks of the acts of Creon and Antigone as mirroring one another rather than opposing. In her words, “if the one represents kinship and the other state, they can perform this representation only by each becoming implicated in the idiom of the other.”⁷⁴ Antigone represents a resident of the state who is outside the public sphere. Butler argues that, “The slaves, women, and children, all those who were not property-holding males were not permitted into the public sphere in which the human was constituted through its linguistic deeds.”⁷⁵ The public sphere, “is called variably the community, government, and the state by Hegel,” the sphere “acquires its existence through *interfering* with the happiness of the family; thus, it creates for itself “an internal enemy.”⁷⁶ The sphere seemingly exists only to those who are outside of it. Antigone represents a negation in the like-mindedness of a community. Her voice displays the asymmetry of the state dialectic. According to Butler, “Kinship and slavery thus condition the public sphere of the human and remain outside of its terms.”⁷⁷ The inability

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Butler, 10.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 82.

⁷⁶ Butler, 35.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 82.

of the state to recognize the natural lives that constitute the humanity of an individual warrants an appeal of the individual or group in power to rule over their family.

Antigone's claim is one that both fields loyalty to the state and condemns the leader of the state apparatus.

Let's look to the exchange between Creon and Antigone. Creon asks Antigone if she was aware of the law that forbade the burial of her brother, the law that she disobeyed deliberately. Antigone responds, "What laws? I never heard it was Zeus who made that announcement. And it wasn't justice, either. The gods below didn't lay down this law for human use."⁷⁸ I am more interested in the line that she says after this, "And I never thought your announcements could give you—a mere human being—power to trample gods' unfailing, unwritten laws."⁷⁹ Her speech leads me to believe that her agency is against the individual who is the source of her family's tyranny. According to Butler, "She acts, she speaks, she becomes one for whom the speech act is a fatal crime, but this fatality exceeds her life and enters the discourse of intelligibility as its own promising fatality, the social form of its aberrant, unprecedented future."⁸⁰ Antigone's speech act is something unforeseeable by even Creon. In one excerpt from the play he says, "Now you. Hiding in my house like a snake, a coiled bloodsucker in the dark! And I never realized I was raising a pair of deadly, crazed revolutionaries!"⁸¹ This observation has led me to believe that Antigone's path to agency was categorically deceptive in the sense that the victim of her deed could not project her agency. Here I conclude this chapter by reading the character of Antigone as a figure outside the sphere of political participation and

⁷⁸ Sophocles, 21.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁰ Butler, 82.

⁸¹ Sophocles, 25.

economic power, who still resolves to discover a path to agency and power to escape the tyranny of a master beyond the intelligibility of civil society.

CHAPTER TWO

AMERICAN HORROR STORY: THE TERROR OF SLAVERY, RECOGNIZING BLACK DOMESTICITY, AND THE BORN SINNER

He resisted. Master and slave fought, and finally the master was thrown. Benjamin had cause to tremble, for he had thrown to the ground his master—one of the richest men in town. I anxiously awaited the result.⁸²

-Harriett A. Jacobs

But, O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely.⁸³

-Harriet A. Jacobs

In the previous chapter, Hegel explains the arrangement of ethical gender roles created in the housing of the family. Man's sovereign claim over the house leases him the power to establish order, but his order is limited by his ability to support his family and enforce the tenets of his order. He is still charged by the state, a community of men tasked to safeguard a community (men, women, and children) from tyranny or crime, to not abuse his power in regards of stripping of inalienable rights of recognized ethical subjects. The state protects the rights of families and encourages the economic and ethical functions of individuals within the household. These functions include but are not limited to the economic right to participate in the marketplace or submit his service to the will of the leader of an economic institution for wage and the ethical right to produce and develop children who will one day create new unions all in support of the state. The economic function is one traditionally found in men. The ethical function is one traditionally reserved for women.

⁸² Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the life of a slave a slave girl* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 24.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 69.

If the state is employed to ensure the ethical and economic functions of the house, and at the same time, protect the vessel of ethical spirit (the Mother) and her children from physical and economic abuse of authority, what rights and protections are offered to the subject outside this sovereign ethical community? As Jackson notes, “sovereign states are expected to be havens or sanctuaries where people can live out their lives free from threats and acts of plunder, predation, and brutalization.”⁸⁴ For individuals not recognized within this sanctuary, the sovereign state can manifest the very dread it moves to protect its citizens from. If the state is indeed a human organization, then the function of this institution is to the benefit of the people in whose image it was formed. For the unrecognized individuals, the state can appear to be a “metaphorical prison.”⁸⁵ There is no population in the history of the world where this observation is less relevant than for the American slave. The self-consciousness of the black American slave marks an experience so distinct from the citizens of America, because the authority of the slave master to claim dominion over the home represented an actual moral prison for the black individual and his or her desires.

The Birth of a Nation: Popular Sovereignty in America

The most fascinating result of American Independence is the shift in how we as political thinkers view sovereignty and how sovereign authority is dispersed amongst the people. As Jackson writes, “when the people are sovereign everybody is included and no one is excluded.”⁸⁶ If sovereign power is located in who has final say in all matters within its authority, then democracy disburses this will into discourse. Popular sovereignty, as

⁸⁴ Jackson, 130.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 131.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 94.

he defines it, is “the notion that the authority of the final word resides in the political will or consent of the people of an independent state.”⁸⁷ In the early life of America, every man was a sovereign in himself; every man is a king.⁸⁸

In the “Rights of Man,” Thomas Paine writes, “The nation is essentially the source of all sovereignty; nor can any INDIVIDUAL, or ANY BODY OF MEN, be entitled to any authority which is not expressly derived from it.”⁸⁹ Paine was responding to what he calls a “renovation to the natural rights of things” through the American and French Revolutions. Although this all sounds nice in theory, we are all aware of the grand contradictions of popular sovereignty in America. Jackson mentions these contradictions, however polite, “The expression ‘the people’ is an abstraction, not a concrete reality. The people are most of the same persons considered as a political community. The American people are all the members of a political community named the United States: its citizens.”⁹⁰

However, the slave was prohibited from citizenship, this political community. The ethical functions of the slave mother were ignored by the nation. The slave man was left outside the political sphere and his economic interests were not only ignored, but deterred by those who have claimed authority over his family, will, and body. Jackson says that the citizens of America are “recognized by their constitution and symbolized by their flag, the stars and stripes, which conveys the idea of their nation: *E pluribus unum*: out of

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ I am still drawing from the language, “landowning white men.”

⁸⁹ Thomas Paine,

⁹⁰ Jackson, 95.

many, one.”⁹¹ The reality of this symbolism is much different for the slave. The flag, the constitution, and the universal language of the constitution: what reason would the slave have not to utterly despise these things? They are symbols of subjugation and tyranny in her home. These are the symbols of emasculation for slave men. These are the symbols of burden for the slave mother, the woman forced to act as mother and father in supporting and developing children over which her tyrant claims ownership.

The master-slave dialectic has to be re-examined with consideration of American slavery and the long lasting impact it has had on black domesticity. The slave economy profited from the adoption and breeding of millions of African spirits, all while systematically inserting them into economic institutions that capitalized from their labor force in a nation that disregarded the prospect of mutual recognition and ethical will.⁹² The dialectic now identifies a discourse between sovereign and subject, absent any consideration of ethical function. The slave is an asset in the master’s economic interests. The slave who becomes economically independent, and enjoys the power and freedoms that come along with it, is a dual threat to the authority of his or her master. On one hand, they display the capacity to provide for themselves and their family, independent from the master. In the other, the economic slave becomes a figure of inspiration for others who are experiencing similar modes of subjugation. It is here that I begin my examination on the depths of subjugation slave men, women, and children experienced

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² In a song by Nas called “Dead Presidents,” the Queen MC writes “I want the dead presidents to represent me.” The language he employs utilizes a popular tool in hip-hop poetry, the double entendre. On one hand the rapper is saying that he wants to be represented by the wealth he acquires. The president is also another symbol, like the flag, and at the same time, a political actor, like the statesman. Nas wants to be represented by this figure of sovereign authority.

by the sovereign class of America; the terror, tyranny and trepidation of the chattel human.

The Terror of Slavery: The Subjugation of Black Consciousness by the White Master

Saidiya V. Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* describes the position of black individuals before and after the emancipation of slavery in America. Her contribution to my discourse marks a social distinction in the relationship between black domesticity and the American nation. Reading Hartman, I began to understand this relationship as the recognition of domesticity in America through a screen of whiteness. The luxuries afforded to the citizens of our country today are built on unpaid black labor.⁹³ European history has shown us the tyranny of men, the subjugation of subjects to the will of stronger forces. The people of the United States doomed an entire race of individuals to life as labor, rather than life as self. According to Hartman the slave shares a special relation with the white family in America. She comments, "The slave is the object or the ground that makes possible the existence of the bourgeoisie subject and, by negation or contradistinction, defines liberty, citizenship, and the enclosures of the social body."⁹⁴ Following the language of Edmund Morgan, Hartman writes "the

⁹³ This is as true as much now as it was then. The thirteenth amendment abolished involuntary servitude except in the case of punishment of crime. The criminal is the new slave. I say this as I type on my laptop at Towson University on a desk built at a nearby prison where inmates more than likely make significantly less than minimum wage

meaning and the guarantee of (white) equality depended upon the presence of slaves.”⁹⁵ In this context, economic and political prosperity for white families were intimately connected to the destruction of the black family. The authority given to the white family to economically dominate the black home and suspend the black family’s access to divine law marks a tyrannical presence in the black community.

Slavery, in the context of class, placed the black community beneath the line of ethics. The line of ethics set forth in the Bill of Rights, in theory, sought out to protect men, women and children from tyranny. Yet in America, prior to 1865, being white was a prerequisite for being treated ethically. Being white was the prerequisite for being recognized through the nation. Beneath this ethical line, the black slave family was left unprotected by divine law and subjugated to the will of a master.⁹⁶ As Hartman describes, “White men “were equal in not being slaves.” The slave is indisputably outside the normative terms of individuality to such a degree that the very exercise of agency is seen as a contravention of another’s unlimited rights to the object.”⁹⁷ Slavery is the first industry of America. Contrary to the founding principles of America, the philosophy of an elected and representative democracy, the plantation recalls the European modes of sovereignty from which the Founding Fathers were so earnest to distance themselves. America may have slain the king, but tyranny is still alive in the home of the Plantation

⁹⁴ Saidiya V Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (New York: Oxford Press University, 1997), 62.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ A part of me believes that the lineage of tyranny has transitioned from King to Master, then Master to Warden.

⁹⁷ Saidiya V Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* (New York: Oxford Press University, 1997), 62.

Master. No one could not tell the slave that there were no kings in America, for the Master held autonomous juridical, economic, and political power on his plantation. Slavery, through the mechanization of the subject, takes the form of absolute and supreme sovereignty for the master over HIS slave. The slave proves loyalty by means of abject obedience.

For the slave, claiming the right to privacy was disobedient and the pursuit of it was criminal. As Hartman comments, “After all, the rights of the self-possessed individual and the set of property relations that define liberty depend on, if not require, the black as will-less actant and sublime object.”⁹⁸ What privacy is needed for the will-less? But the slave is not a will-less being. The slave is capable of manifesting the economic, and sometimes ethical, aspirations of his or her will. Privacy for the slave amounts to insecurity for the master and his claim over the subject. As Hartman asks,

In this context, might not a rendezvous at an unauthorized dance, attending a secret meeting, or sneaking off to visit your companion suddenly come to appear as insurgent, or, at the very least, as quite dangerous, even when the “threats” posed are not articulated in the form of direct confrontation but expressed in quite different terms?⁹⁹

To escape this torment, and the overwhelming political power of the white master, the slave must purpose himself or herself to outthink or physically bury his master. His political power is vested to him through the sovereignty he enjoys because of his access to the protected rights expressed in the constitution. The claim to sovereign authority through the constitution is the medium of political distinction between master and slave.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 63.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

I believe that by locating the figures of freedom that resisted slave proprietorship in the south without capital, or precedent, we will discover the early configurations of sovereign figures that pursue proprietorship through rhetorical political or economically criminal agency. The figures of black freedom display an undeniable will to enjoy an objective liberty. Hartman continues, "If white independence, freedom, and equality were purchased with slave labor, then what possibilities or opportunities exist for the black captive vessel of white ideality?"¹⁰⁰ This is the crux of my analysis. Like Hartman, I too am interested in the shape "resistance or rebellion take when the force that oppresses them is virtually without limit." What shapes of resistance form "when terror resides within the parameters of the socially tolerable, when the innocuous and the insurgent meet an equal force of punishment, or when the clandestine and the surreptitious mark an infinite array of dangers?"¹⁰¹ If to challenge oppression directly entails actual criminal action, the slave that wishes to avoid (or is incapable of) this agency, must resolve themselves to indirect covert action to achieve justice in the wake of tyranny.

What about the slave whose situation allows them to be economic or take part or position in the marketplace? This slave is also taking agency against the system of subjugation, even if their experience is removed from the physical tyranny of institution. I see this agency as superficial for the slave. The slave is not capable of ownership and any profit that is made from the endeavor is subject to confiscation. Economic freedom is not actual freedom. The slave may have the means to purchase his freedom, but his actual freedom is dependent on the ability of the slave to persuade his master for the authority of this agency. Even this figure of sovereign resistance is subjected to staging its rebellion

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 63.

privately, for it is a crime in itself for the slave to aspire freedom. It is for this reason that the slave must remain under surveillance. The slave must remain obedient to their master's will and must not conspire to manifest his own will in spite of his oppressor.

Momma and Baby: Black Domesticity in Slavery

Harriet Jacobs' autobiography shows us the plight of the slave family, as well as the agencies available to those who set out to be free from it. I will look at Jacobs' organization of the slave family, highlighting the sudden and mysterious deaths of Linda Brent's parents. I will also describe how Linda, and other characters in the book connected to her through kinship and space, performs as characters of resistance and self-claimed rhetorical sovereignty. In her autobiographical effort, Harriet Jacobs, under the pseudonym Linda Brent, begins to describe the nature of her childhood growing up as a slave in Virginia. Her mother died when she was young. Her family included her father, brother, and grandmother. She writes of her family, "we all live together in a comfortable home; and though we are all slaves, I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to them for safekeeping, and liable to be demanded by them at any moment."¹⁰² It is here that Jacobs places the black individual into the ethical sphere of kinship. Her family, unlike most slaves, was all housed under the same home with moral principles depicted in her apologetic tone. Her family also carried an ambition for freedom that was seemingly passed down from her grandmother. Even with the relatively fair circumstances surrounding the early years of Linda's life, her family still lacked recognition through the constitution and nation. She was still a slave, her father

¹⁰² Jacobs, 5.

and brother too. Had Linda been allowed to stay in this favorable circumstance, she may have never been exposed to the horrors of slavery.

We will begin our analysis by examining how this change of circumstance affected Linda's realization of her slave status. After her mistress falls ill, Linda and her brother are sold to the Flint family. Ironically she had not learned of her place as a slave until she was sold. I say ironically because I entertain the notion of the mother being the first slave to proprietorship. Meaning, the slave woman's identification of herself as a slave is doubled by the awareness that the children she will one day carry will also be slaves. The industry of slavery flows thru the slave mother's womb.

Next I will begin to examine the men in her family to uncover the means by which they claim sovereignty from slave proprietorship. Jacobs documents the rebellious nature of the men in her family. In regards to her father, she describes him as having more "of the feelings of freeman than is common amongst slaves."¹⁰³ For the most part, the arrangement of this family is seemingly normal. Her father is a carpenter who has garnered a great deal of respect for his talents in the community. That being said, he is still subject to the peril of slavery. Although he spoils his children, he has no claim over them. She characterizes him as a "spirited boy," who "early detested the name of master and mistress."¹⁰⁴ What interests me most in this section is the impact of slavery on the recognition of black domesticity. After a dispute of loyalty where both his master and his father call William, his father scolds him. His father states, "You are my child!"¹⁰⁵ I see ethics as being born through the functions and roles of fathers, mothers and children.

¹⁰³ Jacobs, 10.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

This declaration displays the father's will to take possession of his family being disrupted by the dominion of white economic sovereignty.

Soon after the exchange between William and his father, Linda's paternal figure would die suddenly from unspecified causes. I believe that his absence in many ways functions symbolically as a void presence in the black household. Similar to the absence of the male figure in Antigone's family, this disruption in the family arrangement leads the other individuals of the household to take paths to agency that may be more expected of the missing member in the institution of the family.

I have chosen Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* because it seems as though her entire family shares and pursues sovereignty in some capacity. I believe that Aunt Martha is the vessel of this sovereign spirit that has been passed down from generation to generation. I believe that by studying the means in which her family manifests sovereignty in America, we can draw insights to analyze the current methods black people employ to escape the institutional modes of subjugation they experience today. Let's begin our analysis by studying Linda and her function as a figure of resistance.

Linda's Claim: A Woman's Resolve in the Wake of Tyranny

The figure of resistance pursues freedom through public appeal and political inclusion. Linda's inability to act on her own behalf in the political sphere leads her to pursue her freedom through various proxy-like figures, among them Mr. Sands.¹⁰⁶ I believe that Linda's function goes beyond her agencies of emancipation for herself and children. In an article by Novian Whitsitt, titled "Reading between the Lines: The Black

¹⁰⁶ A politician that Linda corroborates with in the book to ensure the freedom of her children.

Cultural Tradition of Masking in Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*,” the plausibility of Linda’s escape from her master’s perversion is challenged due to a social reality that is relevant and must be acknowledged. According to Whitsitt, “Jacob’s narrative repertoire is the black cultural tradition of “masking,” a technique of double meaning that allows the storyteller to make accessible a hidden message only to those readers attuned to the secretive signs embedded within the story.”¹⁰⁷ The prospect of Masking provides a very interesting contribution to our figure of resistance.

The figure of resistance must choose its agency against a medium of oppression with consideration of other members of the community. The most obvious of these members are family, but their consideration also includes the satisfaction and support of others who recognize her will. Jacobs’ audience is not accustomed to the harsh realities of slavery and the ethical conundrums the slave girl finds herself in at times. As Whitsitt notes, ““Masking” thus allows Jacobs to compose an acceptable explanation of events that will satisfy the majority of her immediate readers.”¹⁰⁸ Jacobs’ consciousness of her reality and the expectation of her consumer designate her work as less historical and more allegorical. Meaning, her account of the paths to agency and power that she takes on is less literal and more deceptive. Her words are not meant to serve as a rigorous recollection of events. Instead, Jacob’s is using her experiences to condemn the institution of slavery by the tyrants who support it, while considering the people who do not endorse the peculiar institution and are not in kinship with her through the slave experience. Linda, in this context, serves as a figure of self-consciousness or desire for

¹⁰⁷ Novian Whitsitt, “Reading between the Lines: *The Black Cultural Condition of Masking in Harriet Jacobs’s Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*” (*Frontier* 31 2010), 73.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Jacobs. Through her, you understand her nature and remain removed from the immoral details of her path to agency or power in pursuit of justice for her children.

As Whitsitt points out, “close scrutiny of the narrative reveals Jacobs to be a clever mediator of revealed and hidden information who encourages her readers to read against the text.”¹⁰⁹ In this sense, Linda in *Jacobs* is likened to Antigone in Sophocles; both characters function more effectively as representational figures that claim natural authority over a sovereign power. As Whitsitt, we must sense that through “the cues of her “double voice” and the reality of her sexual past, she loomed even larger as the embodiment of resourcefulness, intelligence, and guile.”¹¹⁰ It is from this argument that we begin to see Linda Brent for her literary function, as a child unprotected from the perverted will of an empowered master. She recognizes the source of her tyrant's power through the political authority and economic advantage he is granted as a white man in America. She cannot overpower her master, so she is forced to pursue her sovereign ambitions legally. The slave industry is dependent on the black self-conscious remaining will-less. She must disguise her will in order to achieve her goal.

Jacobs is responding to the immoral agencies she was forced to take following the sexual abuse from Dr. Flint that she omitted in her biography and her crisis of pregnancy. According to Whitsitt, “Brent had an affair with Sands, fully knowing that she was pregnant from Flint, and led Sands to believe that he was the actual father of the child.”¹¹¹ In the book, Jacobs writes, “I knew nothing would enrage Dr. Flint so much as to know that I favored another; and it was something to triumph over my tyrant even in that small

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Whilst*, 73.

way.”¹¹² This point is made more clearly in another quote from Jacobs, “I shuddered to think of being the mother of children that should be owned by my old tyrant. I knew that as a soon as a new fancy took him, his victims were sold as far off to get rid of them, especially if they had children.”¹¹³ Her consciousness of this peril motivates her to contrive a method to free herself and her children. She must resist the tyranny of her master; her actions fall short of rebellion. She does not use force to free herself from subjugation, rather the mind.

She is not forthright about the impartial details of her agency, and in some instances she seems apologetic for some of the immoral actions she employed. In the end, she is more aware of her plight than others, and states that the “slave ought not to be judged by the same standard of others.”¹¹⁴ I believe that Linda is saying something powerful, her talk of the standards by which individuals are judged and the peculiar position of the slave is dynamic. On the one hand they wish to enter the ethical world of America. In the other, they exist on the boundaries of ethics and can even be considered the foundation of the house the white family thrives in. As Whitsitt argues, “Jacobs makes it clear that Brent too aspired to reach the established standards for her sex, but the workings of slavery robbed her of sexual purity and domesticity.”¹¹⁵ Therefore, Jacobs prompted Brent to seek whatever means deemed necessary in the effort to free her children from the nearly impossible circumstance of slavery.

¹¹² Jacobs, 71.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹¹⁴ Jacobs, 60.

¹¹⁵ Whitsitt, 77.

It is here that we can begin to summarize Jacobs' contribution to our figure of resistance. Linda's agencies of resistance are quasi political in the sense that she is clearly pursuing recognition for herself and children legally in the nation that empowers her master through people who are recognized as members of the civil society in America. Jacobs writes, "I knew the law would decide that I was his property, and would probably still give his daughter a claim to my children; but I regarded such laws as the regulations of robbers, who had no rights that I was bound to respect."¹¹⁶ Her status of a slave, not unlike Antigone's status as a women in Thebes, prevents her from confronting her master directly. I call attention to a passage in the book, after the Fugitive Slave Law, where she says, "I dreaded the approach of summer, when snakes and slaveholders make their appearance. I was, in fact, a slave in New York, as subject to slave laws as I had been in a Slave State. Strange incongruity in a State called free!"¹¹⁷ Instead she looks to family friends and resources to make her claim to freedom. In this way, her freedom is not a threat to Dr. Flint's sovereign power to own slaves, only his authority over her body and the bodies of her children.

She is fighting for the freedom of her family. She cannot simply take what she wants; she must plan, execute, and remain a step ahead of her oppressor. Whitsitt sees Jacobs as offering "a new vision of womanhood, " one that projects an ideal of women as intellectually and emotionally equal, if not superior to men."¹¹⁸ This insight adds new prospect to our narrative of men as physically dominating and economic creatures. At the

¹¹⁶ Jacobs, 238

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 249.

¹¹⁸ Whitsitt.,78.

age of 14, Linda “resolved never to be conquered.”¹¹⁹ I am moved to remember that the consumer is master. And the consumer of slave labor is the master, a white man in America. But as Whitsitt writes, “she must survive.” He continues, “in truth, virtuous behavior is not contingent upon sexual discretion at all but upon self-respect derived from resisting oppression by any means necessary.”¹²⁰ Her rhetorical function in resistance is formulated through intellect and ethical consciousness. I believe that this is all consummated after her employer Mrs. Bruce buys her. Jacobs writes:

“The bill of sale!” Those words struck me like a blow. So I was *sold* at last! A human being sold in the free city of New York! The bill of sale is on record, and future generations will learn from it that women were articles of traffic in New York, late in the nineteenth century of the Christian religion.¹²¹

Although she never gets permanent custody of her children, she and her children died free. As Linda exclaims, “I and my children are now free! We are free from the power of slaveholders as are the white people of the north.”¹²² Realizing her success, I cannot ignore the shortcomings of Linda’s agency. She still had not quite become an economic actor. She never gathered the means to purchase a home where her children could grow up safely. It is through her economic failures that I continue this study.

By Any Means Necessary: The Rebellious Black Boy

By any means takes on entirely different prospect of sovereign agency for the men in Linda’s family. I am thinking about her brother William and uncle Benjamin.

¹¹⁹ Jacobs, 23.

¹²⁰ Whitsitt.,78.

¹²¹ Jacobs, 257.

¹²² Ibid., 259.

They are both strong enough to overwhelm their master but must remain cognizant of the lack of economic opportunities for a refugee slave boy. How many opportunities for work are available to the slave boy? His utility in the home, outside the plantation, is not as broad as his sisters. I only imagine that his presence in the household is more threatening as well. The slave boy must also understand that any act against his master will forever alienate him from his family. The black boy born into slavery must understand that no matter the cruelties of his master, rebellion against him is socially intolerable. If he is able to take his sovereignty, he is still tasked with the economic challenge of building a home to protect and providing for a family he has recognized as his own. This line of inquiry sets up perfectly my figure of rebellion. The subject who has acknowledged his sovereign will and might, yet waits until the opportunity presents itself for him to get away with his overt criminal deed. So what about William?

At first he is the victim of terrible slander and deception from his master, Dr. Flint's brother. William is later to be sold to Mr. Sands, a character who proves himself influential in Linda's political network. Chapter twenty-six, titled "Important era in My Brother's Life," details the process of his escape from his master. Mr. Sands had promised to give William his freedom in time. As we discussed earlier, there was no precedent to bind the verbal or written agreements between slaveholder and slave master. Ironically enough, Aunt Martha received a letter from Mr. Sands describing William as "a most faithful servant" and "valued friend."¹²³ There is no doubt that these words were reminiscent of Aunt Martha's time under her good mistress. She was once promised to be made free by her mistress for her loyal service and friendship. As Jacobs points out, "no promise or writing given to a slave is legally binding." She continues, "when my

¹²³ Ibid., 169.

grandmother lent her earrings to her mistress, she trusted solely to her honor. The honor of a slaveholder to a slave.”¹²⁴ This echo shows a tradition of white families acknowledging the human qualities of the black individual without recognizing the individual themselves as free. Eventually William would flee from the grasp of Mr. Sands, ignoring his promise to set him free. How would Mr. Sands have known William brought his criminal intentions with him on their journey to the north?

For William, a figure of rebellion at large, and Linda, a figure of resistance in waiting, the political processes of slavery are both daunting and unethical, every day he is tormented by the order of his service. The distinction between the two comes by way of the agencies they employ in freeing themselves from this tyranny. Jacobs speaks of this distinction:

I argued that we were growing older and stronger, and that perhaps we might, before long, be allowed to hire our own time, and then we could earn money to buy our freedom. William declared this was much easier to say than do; moreover, he did not intend to *buy* his freedom. We held daily controversies about this subject.¹²⁵

William’s ambition transcended his devotion to his family. William not only aspired to be free from the power of the slaveholder, he desired to be economic actor in American society. Both Linda and Aunt Martha were unaware that William would not return. Linda’s grandmother would receive a message on the day that he and Mr. Sands was reportedly headed back into town; it read, “William did not return with him; that the abolitionists had decoyed him away.”¹²⁶ Both Linda and her grandmother doubted that they would see William again. After reflection, Linda would go on to state her support of

¹²⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 170.

his decision. She writes, “I was too familiar with slavery not to know that promises made to slaves, though with kind intentions, and sincere at the time, depend upon many contingencies for their fulfillment.”¹²⁷ The figure of rebellion is not concerned with the censorship of his intentions, only the practicality of them. By any means, for the slave boy, encompasses a range of physical measures he can take to manifest his enterprising will.

It can also be said that William endured many of the hardships in the north as the black boy following the emancipation of slavery. He was not multi-talented in domestic settings like the women in his family. William did possess the enterprising spirit of his grandmother but his failure in business speaks to an issue that I believe many black men experience in business today.¹²⁸ His talent and reputation in commerce is disputable. In chapter 39, William sends a letter to Linda, drawing support for a reading room he is trying to start for black people. As Jacobs describes it, “He thought of opening an anti-slavery reading room in Rochester, and combining it the sale of some books and stationery; and he wanted me to unite with him.”¹²⁹ However, like many former slaves who emancipated themselves from slavery, he is unable to become an economic actor

¹²⁷ Ibid., 171.

¹²⁸ I do want to say that starting a successful business is tough in itself. As a black man the task is seemingly more difficult. I remember starting my first legal business, a pawnshop in Baltimore, MD. There were other places in my community where customers could go to sell their goods, but we received a great deal more attention from police detectives assigned to watching the shops for illegal activity. One day the police did a surprise inspection of my shop after a white woman reported that her daughter stole jewelry and sold it one of my associates. We didn't have the jewelry, but were penalized for minor violations (a missing receipt and not having copies of police reports). The penalty for these violations was 200,000 dollars or thirty-five years in prison. Long story short, I had to start over.

¹²⁹ Jacobs, 243.

like his former masters. As Jacobs writes, “the feeling was not general enough to support such an establishment.”¹³⁰ The various ventures he takes on in the north fail, but his ambition to become self-sufficient burns bright. What interests me in this reading of William’s economic pursuits is that where he seems to fail, his grandmother succeeds.

I’ll Always Love Aunt Martha: The Power of Economic Prosperity and Social Tolerability for the Subjugated Class

This discourse on American Indian sovereignty is being formed at the same time as Harriet A. Jacobs’ recollection of her experience as a slave in the 19th century. The white man came to the new world, and brought with him disease and gunpowder. The natives were powerless against the economic interests of European settlers. In the colonizing of America, many people were exported into America to tend to the plantations in the south. Years later, 1831 to be exact, the American Indian communities that had survived the European invasion and American expansion were recognized by his courts for their rhetorical claim to sovereignty. I believe that Jacobs is aware of the importance of being recognized by a supreme authority. Her children and grandchildren all have within them a will to be free, either by rebellion or resistance. I am reminded of a conversation between Linda and William. William’s resolve not to buy his freedom is birthed, partly by my estimation, by watching the rigor of his grandmother's rise to freedom. Jacobs describes an exchange between her grandmother and Dr. Flint, “When grandmother applied to him for payment, he said the estate was insolvent, and the law prohibited payment.”¹³¹ Although her mistress promised Aunt Martha her freedom, as a

¹³⁰ Ibid.

slave, she was not recognized as a citizen and had no legal or civil rights to something she was not in possession of, even her own free will. At the same time, the reality is that Aunt Martha's freedom and right to tend to her family is in the possession of someone other than herself. I look at her as a model of economic power because she pursues authority over her black body and the bodies of her family through the use of money.

It is the economic power of Linda's grandmother that allows Linda the opportunity to resist juridical and political oppression from her master, a citizen of America who is vested with the authority to own slaves. Aunt Martha is described as an "indispensable personage in the household."¹³² She was brought up in relatively fair conditions for a slave. Her mistress was very kind to her. This kindness was displayed through a business endeavor Aunt Martha was allowed to pursue. Aunt Martha would bake crackers for the community. Her mistress agreed to allow this endeavor, "provided she will clothe herself and her children with the profits."¹³³ Aunt Martha displays a self-sufficient figure of black sovereignty that fields conversation for similar models going into the 20th and 21st century. She is able to hide the indiscretions of her family in her house, protecting their wills of freedom. Linda and William are forced to hide their will and intentions from the master, which is different from Aunt Martha, whose entire rise has been out in the public eye. Aunt Martha's economic value and social utility allow her ambitions of freedom to be transparent in a community where such a thing, the will-full black body, pose a threat to the terrorizing institution of slavery. Her business, her

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³² *Jacobs*, 4.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

freedom, and her sovereignty are expressed openly amongst her peers. She has no need for hiding places because she is free and housed.

What Aunt Martha provides me with is a prototypical example of the individual that has achieved economic independence and legally freed herself from the slave station she was born into. Proprietorship in America grants the citizen the power to express authoritative order over their estate. The first community of the individual is the family. The formation of the home is an economic endeavor that aids the leaders of the home in protecting and developing future generations. In the home, families are free to live by the codes, customs, and culture of their parents, or grandparents choosing. This figure pushes the envelope of womanhood, repositioning the woman as a beacon of public intelligibility for oppressed people. Normally proprietorship of the home served as a right reserved for men. In the case of Aunt Martha, the men of her family had all died or fled the tyranny of slavery. Aunt Martha's path to economic power, courtesy of her late mistress, aids her on the path to agency of guardianship over her family. One thing is for certain, one would be hard pressed to separate the fatherless children from their economically independent and politically free grandmother in Linda's family arrangement. This is the one producer-product relationship that is most difficult to untether.

The woman who claims authority of the estate enjoys powers within the state that must be respected by the neighbors of her community. The arrangement of the family is established in the home, this is the foundation of spirit for the slave who desires freedom and prosperity for his or her family. Jacobs who admits, "I still long for a hearthstone of my own", made this point clear.¹³⁴ One may not be equal on the public streets, but they are equal in the confines of the private home. Think of Linda and her plight, being forced

¹³⁴ Ibid., 259.

to hide in a small garret in her grandmother's attic. Even when her tyrant comes to visit her she is shielded from his authority over her inside Aunt Martha's house. In the passage Jacobs writes, "The sound was too familiar to me, it had been too dreadful, for me not to recognize at once my old master."¹³⁵ After the men searched the house for evidence of Linda's residence, the reader rejoices in knowing they are unsuccessful. Her benefactor came and told Linda that she knew she heard her master's voice and that "there is nothing to fear."¹³⁶ The protections granted to children with the household of their parents, or grandparents show the significance of the home in the prospect of resisting state-sponsored subjugation.

Let's revisit the discourse set forth by Lyons on rhetorical sovereignty to further push our identification of Aunt Martha as a representational figure of this freedom of ethical authority over the home. I see her freedom from slavery as a testament of her public reputation and business talent, both allow her the access to resources to support her enslaved family's desires to be free. Her sovereign efforts are absent the desire to expand her authority or order beyond the home. This is the significance of the female head of the home. Aunt Martha, the mother, functions as an authoritative voice in her home and community. I believe that Aunt Martha, in a time where the slave was not politically constituted as Man, serves as a figure of competition and a shape of the black spirit. In the modern day, Lyons defines rhetorical sovereignty as the "inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit,

¹³⁵ Ibid., 133.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 134.

to decide the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse.”¹³⁷ I see the mother, and her goals and languages, as an inseparable factor of authority to the child, especially in the absence of the father figure. Who else is there to turn to in times of need? The child is first housed in the woman’s womb. The child is first fed from the woman’s breast. In a community where fathers are at a minimum, single mothers become the sole representative of the union that brought the child into being. This reality, while not fully limiting the potential of the mother, does leave her with special responsibilities for the child who has no other guidance for how to maneuver in world seemingly set against its well-being.

I see sovereign power as the possession of authority over a bounded space where a community of people displays a capacity to provide for and support themselves without support or dependence on other communities. The prospect of popular sovereignty in America, and the evidence of slavery, disbursed sovereignty into the homes of the individual through a constituted nation. Similar to Lyons’ observation of the Supreme Court decision in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, the rhetorically sovereign nation is “a distinct political society, separated by others, capable of managing its own affairs and governing itself.”¹³⁸ For the slave, a resident in America that does not enjoy the political freedoms claimed in the constitution by the nation, her emancipation contains many of the same factors. I believe that no character of this era embodies this figure of self-sufficiency more than the mother of black children. As Jacobs writes, “My grandmother lived to rejoice in my freedom.”¹³⁹ Aunt Martha’s position in her family is exceptional,

¹³⁷ Lyons, 450.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 451.

¹³⁹ Jacobs, 258.

she represents an emergent order and her independence afford her the opportunity to aid her peoples', her family, path to agency and power in the face of tyranny.

In "Figures of Orality: The Master, The Mistress, The Slave Mother in Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," Holly Blackford writes, "As all humans are born of women and find their first satisfaction of hunger and human touch in the female bosom, female bodies get metaphorically and economically associated with food production."¹⁴⁰ This observation is more prevalent amongst black slave women. According to Blackford, "Black women, by virtue of their place in the South as wet nurses, cooks, and "breeders," consistently face the literary trope of the black female body as food abundance."¹⁴¹ The interpretation of Aunt Martha as a food producer lends support to my notion of her as a representational figure of self-sufficiency and community sufficiency that is not economic. Following this pattern, I see Aunt Martha as a figure of independence. Not only does she enjoy the sovereignty from the rhetoric of slavery afforded to her in her freedom, her success in business provides her the means to support herself and family without the aid of white men or women. My use of Blackford lends itself more to my interpretation of aunt Martha as an emergent ethical order, but I maintain that these two are intimately connected for the survival of a politically subjugated and economically disenfranchised people. In this regard, she is a producer for her home and the homes in her community.

¹⁴⁰ Holly Blackford, "Figures of Orality: The Master, The Mistress, The Slave Mother in Harriet Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" *Papers of Language & Literature*, 37 (2001): 321.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 322.

Blackford cites Aunt Martha as an “icon of food power, the power to satiate the hunger of her children and community.”¹⁴² This presentation of Linda’s grandmother is likened to a community resource, like the local bakery or deli in your neighborhood. The recognition of Aunt Martha’s function in her community leave room for us to explore her exception from the general expectations of the slave in America. I am reminded of the scene where she tells Dr. Flint, ““Get out of my house! She exclaimed. “Go home, and take care of your wife and children, and you will have enough to do, without watching my family.””¹⁴³ Aunt Martha displays the authority she maintains inside her home and in her community. Look at the reaction she receives from her community when she is put on the slave block to be sold, ““Shame! Shame! Who is going to sell *you*, Aunt Martha? Don't stand there! That is no place for you.””¹⁴⁴ Her reputation for her invaluable service to the community socially distinguishes her from other slaves. Her integral role in the community allows her to perform agencies not often available to the slave or free black individual. As Blackford notes, “the grandmother holds in her hand the desired forbidden fruits of black mothering.” These forbidden fruits are the illegal and immoral agencies a black mother must take to aid and protect their children against the terrorizing forces that await them in their community.

The inspiration of this discourse, Stephanie Shaw writes, “even as they performed mothering tasks that reinforced the system of slavery, they also chipped away at institutional assumptions about dependency (cultural, material, and political) and thereby

¹⁴² Ibid., 323.

¹⁴³ Jacobs, 106.

¹⁴⁴ Jacobs, 13.

helped to prepare their children for freedom.”¹⁴⁵ Taking this into consideration, I begin to think about the implications for the child raised under the jurisprudence of the black mother. What contributions of cultural intelligibility have been passed down to them through the womb of the slave mother? Four years following the publishing of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, slavery was abolished in the South after years of civil war. What is to be said of black individuals following this northern victory? Many, like Hartman, see the period following the emancipation of slavery as the reconstruction of black subjugation. According to Hartman:

As a consequence of emancipation, black were incorporated into the narrative of the rights of man and citizen; by entry into the hallowed halls of humanity, and, at the same time, the unyielding and implacable fabrication of blackness as subordination continued under the aegis of formal equality.¹⁴⁶

This insight leads me to study the patterns of black freedom and the mediums of resistance to this pursuit. I am also interested in the reactions to these institutionalized modes of white resistance to black freedom by members of this community who are conscious of this resisting effort.

Like Hartman, I believe that the failures of reconstruction do not “deny the achievements made possible by the formal stipulation of equality.” Rather, as she says, these formal stipulations “highlight the fractures and limits of emancipation and the necessity of thinking about these limits in terms that do not simply traffic in the obviousness of common sense—the denial of basic rights, privileges, and entitlements to

¹⁴⁵ Stephanie Shaw, “*Mothering Under Slavery in the Antebellum South*” *Mothering, Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, (New York: Routledge Press, 1994) 237.

¹⁴⁶ Hartman, 119.

the formerly enslaved—and yet leave the framework of liberalism unexamined.”¹⁴⁷

Understanding the realities of these representations of slave life, what contemporary figures of sovereignty share kinship with the slave mother? Examining this connection, how can one project the potential of this character towards the prospect of an ethical substance made stronger by the history of slavery? As Hartman asks:

If race formerly determined who was “man” and who was chattel, whose property rights were protected or recognized and who was property, which consequently had the effect of making race itself a kind of property, with blackness as the mark of object status and whiteness licensing the proprietorship of self, then how did emancipation affect the status of race?¹⁴⁸

In the final chapter, we will highlight the transition in the subjugation of black people following the abolishment of slavery. We will also discuss how laws were used to reconstruct the subjugation of families across the United States.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Hartman, 119.

CHAPTER 3
***THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLKS: A STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
PROGRESS ENTERING THE 21st CENTURY, THE WAR ON DRUGS AND
THE BIRTH OF THE SECOND SOVEREIGN***

Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete? Proving nature's laws wrong, it learned to walk without having feet. Funny, it seems to by keeping its dreams; it learned to breathe fresh air. Long live the rose that grew from concrete when no one else even cared.¹⁴⁹

-Tupac Shakur

On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, a document that freed some three million black people from enslavement. Although slavery was not one the initial tenants of war for the Union entering the Civil War, the emancipation is best seen as the military tactic for a nation who feared losing labor less than losing the home. Following the Emancipation Proclamation, thousands of slaves traveled North of the border and joined the ranks of the Union Army. This executive order would ensure Union victory and an economic revolution of the nation's most corrupt and prosperous industries. The conclusion of the war led to a time of Reconstruction in the South. Millions of black men and women went from the fields of the South to the streets of the North. I am primarily interested in how the ethical spirit of the black family was formulated and in what ways slavery and emancipation affect the shift in recognizable authority of ethical order in the configuration of the black home.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Tupac Shakur, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1999), 3.

¹⁵⁰ What I have hoped to introduce to you, so far, is the distinction between the ethical orders of white and black houses in the United States. Sophocles was writing in Greek during a time where the exploits of tyrants were heavily scrutinized in the prospect of democracy. It is fair for us to say that the order of the white was established in the

Reconstruction, beginning in 1863, started with a proclamation of Union restoration in the South. In Lincoln's plan for reconstruction, amnesty would be offered, "If offered pardon, with certain exceptions, to any Confederate who would swear to support the Constitution and the Union."¹⁵¹ Congress responded with the Wade-Davis Bill, presenting stronger requirements for states to re-enter the Union. Lincoln would veto the bill, implementing his own plan in the process. Lincoln's death brought about a new plan for southern restoration. President Andrew Johnson who, like the Republican dominated Congress, expressed a fear that the "planter aristocracy" would return to power in the South, made a new proclamation, one that:

Disenfranchised all former military and civil officers of the Confederacy and all those who owned property worth \$20,000 or more and made their estates liable to confiscation. The obvious intent was to shift political control in the South from the old planter aristocracy to the small farmers and artisans, and it promised to accomplish a revolution in Southern society.¹⁵²

The outcome of this proclamation is disputable, as "the control of white over black, however, seemed to be restored, as each of the newly elected state legislatures enacted statutes severely limiting the freedom and rights of blacks."¹⁵³ It is here that we begin to see how laws were used to subjugate black families after slavery was abolished. Political actors used law to reconstruct environments where black individuals were subjected to

birth of democracy in America and the coming into power of the constitution. That being said, the subjugation of the black family and physical relentless attacks on the black male have constructed an alternative and opposing ethical structure in low income black communities compared to the structure white communities.

¹⁵¹ Reconstruction. Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th Edition, Q2 2015

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

conditions that limited the rights granted to them by the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments.

The Black Codes would mark the beginning of a tradition subjugating free black bodies by state authorities after the abolishment of slavery. Eric Foner, in his article “Freedom’s Dream Deferred,” writes, “To Republicans, the Black Codes seemed designed to use the power of the state to restore slavery in all but name, and Congress decided that Johnson’s policy needed to be changed.”¹⁵⁴ The black codes display the failures and shortcomings of Reconstruction. Although black individuals were recognized by the constitution, they were still economically disenfranchised. Foner states, “Unfortunately, despite the expansion of civil and political rights, these state governments failed to effectively address the economic plight of impoverished former slaves.”¹⁵⁵ The processes of subjugating free black bodies through state law continued with the infamous Jim Crow laws.

Jim Crow laws were a series of local and state laws across the southern states of America that segregated white and black individuals. As Foner writes:

Its pillars included racial segregation, the disenfranchisement of black voters, a severe cutback in public funding for black education, a rigidly segmented labor market in which most good jobs were reserved for whites and, at the system’s outer edge, extralegal violence.¹⁵⁶

The political actors in the southern states are not wholly responsible for the terror of Jim Crow. The Supreme Court agreed that these laws did not undermine the language set forth in the 14th Amendment. The supreme licensing of black subjugation in the south further proved the peril black individuals experienced in

¹⁵⁴ Eric Foner, “Freedom’s Dream Deferred,” *American History* 50 (2015): 45.

¹⁵⁵ Foner, 50.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

America, along with furthering a tradition of political empowerment and economic advantage for white families. The black codes and Jim Crow made clear the line of ethics set for in the interpretation of the Bill of Rights in ink.

The Color Line

It is here that we begin our study of how these orders have manifested actual struggle in the black community and the “color line,” a term coined by Frederick Douglass and reframed in W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folks*. *The Souls of Black Folks* provides a dynamic narrative on progress in the black community entering the 20th century. Du Bois was born in 1868, three years after slavery was abolished in the south. Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, Du Bois grew up in a racially integrated community more tolerant to black life. He did his undergraduate work at Fisk University, a historically black college in Nashville, Tennessee. It was here that Du Bois first came into contact with racism in the South. He received his second bachelor’s degree from Harvard University in 1890, where he was greatly influenced by William James. The following year he was granted a scholarship for the sociology graduate school at Harvard. Du Bois would become the first African American to receive a doctorate degree from Harvard University. But my interest in Du Bois goes beyond his achievements.

When it comes to the institution of Negro thought, I consider him the father. His book *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) delves deep into the conditions of black life in America post-Reconstruction. The black soul speaks to an identified community of people in kinship through the history of state subjugation and white privilege against and in relation to black life. The black dialectic contradicts the honors associated with America’s triumphs and exposes its

officials for the tyrant criminals they truly are. The black soul is the consciousness every man or woman has of the race dilemma in America. His patronage in the genre of black thought, for me, is supported by his notion of the plight of Negro scholarship. He writes:

The double-aimed struggle of the black artisan—on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde—could only result in making him a poor craftsman, for he had half a heart in either.¹⁵⁷

I understand this struggle; I too am conflicted by two ethics. On the one hand, I want to complete a well researched analysis of gender-based raced relations in America. I want this work to be recognized as a scholarly artifact. At the same time, I am committed to sharing the wisdom I have attained with people who I recognize as brothers and sisters of struggle born in communities similar to mine. These are my people, and at times, some of us have no regard for white words. But for those of us who are conscious of the ever growing glare of our white audiences, a mask is still required to effectively share discourse with the white family of privilege in this country. I believe that Du Bois is still speaking to the forms of socially tolerable resistance that black people resolve themselves to in the wake of tyranny in the United States. The black body had been recognized by the constitution, but the economic interest of the black human along with the customs and social norms of the black community were still not identified as intelligible, valid, or legitimate by the masses.

I say that the order of white civil substance manifests itself in language and expectation because lives are distinguished by well-formulated gender roles, which are all

¹⁵⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (New York: Dover Publications, 1903) 3.

affected by the ethical and economic order of white men who interpret written law.¹⁵⁸

The purpose of a law is not so much to tell you what you can do, but rather to inform a people of what they cannot do, the limitations of their acts. Laws come attached with promised consequences, guaranteed from a state authority or recognizable and immediate individual or institutional economic power.¹⁵⁹ Du Bois is bringing attention to a series of state laws that protect the interest of white homes and institutions, while reserving these natural rights of black bodies in American society. Meanwhile these laws are similar to the rhetoric that has been used historically in the United States to politically disenfranchise women and economically place them at a disadvantage. Alys Weinbaum states that there has been a considerable amount of data collected in regards to the “intersection of racism, sexism, and capitalism.”¹⁶⁰ I see these things as interrelated in the sense that the black individual was no longer a slave; he had been recognized in the constitution through the 13th amendment. At the same time Reconstruction after slavery is seemingly the reconstruction of slavery into a covert and institutional system that plays out socially in the engagement of black people in a nation. I see this social subjugation

¹⁵⁸ What can you prove in the court of law? An institution bounded by the rhetoric pronounced and amended in the United States Constitution that protect the individual rights of naturally born citizens in America.

¹⁵⁹ Growing up, my friends and I were just as conscious, if not more, of the orders of surrounding neighborhood dudes in our projects. There was a certain way you had to carry yourself around certain people around my way. It was a respect thing and any act of disrespect was deemed deliberate. I know a lot of black boys that were killed for no reason, just a suspicion of robbery, snitching, or something likes that. But, at the same time, is this any different than the order of white communities during the birth of our nation. I will say this, at least the police had to prove you did it. Or what about the job place, I myself have been a victim of being fired for no reason. I have been told to tone it down on more than one occasion by black and white people. TONE WHAT DOWN?

¹⁶⁰ Alys Weinbaum, “Gendering the General Strike: W.E.B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* and Black Feminism’s “Propaganda of History,”” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 112:3 Summer 2013, 437

existing for former slaves in general and double for women slaves. It is my goal to survey this data, coupled with reflections from my own experience with being black in America, to introduce a new paradigm of race thought as we situate ourselves in the 21st century.

It is here that we begin our focus on the black child's flight from ethical to economic, complete sovereign recognition in the United States. The black body had gained the illusory protections of its nation's constitution. I call these protections illusory because of the lack of justice provided to the thousands of black bodies hung from trees by men in white masks, the millions who experienced some prejudice in the workplace and in the community. It was now time to seek the economic power necessary to be respected as equal in a country that was founded on the pursuit of capital. This flight entails the idealization of an alternative and opposing individual and institutional economic possibility for orders that protect the sanctity of black interests. *The Souls of Black Folks* is a collection of essays by Du Bois that eloquently describes a double consciousness that exists for the black body in the United States. He realizes this second consciousness after giving a visiting card to a white girl in a schoolhouse. The girl would deny his card and it was there that "it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others."¹⁶¹ His difference from his peers was not his implicit nature, he acknowledges his "heart and life and longing," but he is aware that he is "shut out of their world by a vast veil." This veil, a race condition, directly influences how natural laws matriculate through the houses in the United States. Now let's survey the essays, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" and "Of the Passing of a First-born Son," from Du Bois in order to extract the recognized souls of economic desire for black people in America post-slavery.

¹⁶¹ Du Bois, 2.

Dear Momma: The Indispensable Southern Black Girl¹⁶²

Du Bois was very conscious of the plight of black women and would not fail to mention the particular conditions of their being as leaders of the family and keepers of the community.¹⁶³ Du Bois writes:

Two centuries of legal defilement of Negro women had stamped upon his race, meant not only the loss of ancient African chastity, but also the hereditary weight of a mass of corruption from white adulterers, threatening almost obliteration of the Negro home.¹⁶⁴

It is my hope that the feminine figure of black consciousness is as resilient as our first character that strikes a resemblance with our concept of interrogation, Linda Brent's grandmother, Aunt Martha. The southern black girl must have been quite resilient to endure the gender and racial based torment she was introduced to early in life and in adulthood. Through Aunt Martha, I see the possibility for black

¹⁶² Oddly enough, I do not see a way for me to discuss the black man's involvement in the crack economy without first describing the significance of the mother in the black home. I am reminded of the chorus from Tupac's song, "Dear Mama":

Lady...
Don't cha know we love ya? Sweet lady
Dear Mama
Place no one above ya, sweet lady
You are appreciated
Don't cha know we love ya

The black woman, though she has endured a terrible plight, is not the enemy of the white businessman. This is the reason why so many black children were born in homes without fathers. There were not many father figures in my community; most had left by ritual, crime, or death. No one understands the fate of the black man in America more than the black woman.

¹⁶³ There has been much attention paid recently to the contributions of black women in the direct action phase of the civil rights movement. Many of the organizations that fought for racial equality operated from churches where women played a significant role in the day-to-day tasks of community outreach. A woman, Ella Baker, ran even Martin Luther King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

¹⁶⁴ Du Bois, 2.

children to prosper and be nurtured under the roof of a strong, independent, intelligent, caring figure, a figure who does not need men or the institutions they create to expand their influence. She is unafraid of order and unwavering in the protection of her children. With or without the assistance of a father figure, a mother will do all she can to provide a safe environment for her children to live and develop.

If my argument stands to reposition the black woman as the leading authority in the home, then Weinbaum's study on gender in the aftermath of slavery is a good place to begin. She cites two periods in the "history of racial capitalism during which women's reproductive labor power and reproductive products have been engineered for profit."¹⁶⁵ The first period ranges throughout four hundred years of slavery in America. The second, and what Weinbaum calls the current phase, is the age of biocapitalism and starts in the 1970s, extending into the 21st Century. Weinbaum uses this to describe a process that she has observed as spanning over the last 40 years of "the human reproductive body, in a robust material sense, has been increasingly exploited in a manner that has precedent in chattel slavery and its culture of enslaved reproduction." I too have found my literary pursuits to be aligned with Weinbaum's, "the principle economic system predicated on women's productive and reproductive labor" and the "women's work in the fields and on their reproduction of human, biological commodities."¹⁶⁶ As mentioned earlier, the arrangement of order manifests itself as man's claim of authority over women and children in his home. You take the

¹⁶⁵ Weinbaum,, 437.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

man away from this equation, and we begin to recognize the potential of a feminine order.

What slavery was successful at doing, is creating a socially discernable community outside the arrangement of husband and wife or man and woman; this is the distinction between white and black. The black body is a social being. The tragedy of black subjugation overshadows the women codes, a long-standing conflict between the woman citizen and male order manifested through laws and economic force. Both black and women citizens in America have experienced subjugation of individual rights. In addition to this subjugation, black citizens more so, they had to deal with state and local apparatus' of power that materialize the order organized by white property holding men outlined in the laws that handcuff the authority and agencies that one has over him or herself.

Within the black communities, especially in impoverished black communities, where the presence of adult male figure in positions of influence (fathers, teachers, businessmen, etc.) is scant, I see a shift in the order of the household. Beyond that, I see a special connection between black mothers and their children, especially with the boy.¹⁶⁷ I believe that the nature of this relationship is alluded to in the essay "Of the Passing of the First -Born" in *Souls of Black Folks*. In the essay, Du Bois reflects on the death of his first born son. The language leads one to draw new insights on the relationship between man, woman, child, and race in America. Du Bois begins the essay with someone

¹⁶⁷ I think the connection is partly made of the mother's ambition to reach or get through the boy troubled by his corrupted environment and lack of male guidance. Jay-Z, in a song called "December 4th" (his birthday) writes, "My momma couldn't beat me hard enough to match the pain of my pops not seeing me so.."

telling him, “unto you a child is born.”¹⁶⁸ It is clear that he is alluding to a minimum contact required by the man in childbirth.¹⁶⁹ He confesses, “I did not love it then; it seemed like a ludicrous thing to love; but her I loved, my girl-mother, she whom now I saw unfolding like the glory of the morning—the transfigured woman.”¹⁷⁰ This transfigured woman is the model for the capacity of the woman in the household, specifically the impoverished black community. In these communities, similar to Linda’s family, there is often an absence of men in the arrangement of the family. The mother’s significance is enhanced in this circumstance, and she is tasked with a singular responsibility to provide and protect her offspring. Du Bois’s attention to the woman in his fairly ordinary family arrangement warrants me to consider the implications of this ideal institution of the family when altered.

Du Bois says, “Her own life built and molded itself upon the child, he tinged her every dream and idealized her every effort.”¹⁷¹ As I read this excerpt, I am cautioned to consider the sexist implications of relying on a notion of gender-based limitation, the belief that women inherently give over their identities in the development of children. This is not my intent, but as I have witnessed in my own family and community that many women have been forced to sacrifice and rearrange their aspirations based on having to raise children all by themselves.

¹⁶⁸ Du Bois, 127.

¹⁶⁹ I have borrowed the term “minimal contacts from a supreme court verdict in the *International Shoe* case.

¹⁷⁰ Du Bois 127.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

This is especially true when said child is born into circumstances where his physicality and appearance will more than likely make him more vulnerable to torment. In the case of the black boy, I think Du Bois points to the vulnerability when he says, “within the veil he was born.” Du Bois continues, “to a hope not hopeless but unhelpful, and seeing with those bright wondering eyes that peer into the soul a land whose freedom to us a mockery and whose liberty a lie.”¹⁷² Du Bois is speaking to the environment of racial subjugation that is prevalent in his time and mine.

Coupling this observation with Weinbaum’s description of black feminism draws for interesting analysis. According to Weinbaum:

Black feminism also imagines an alternative future. Indeed, through an examination of the scale and scope, material and psychic, of women’s reproductive exploitation, black feminism animates the struggles for freedom from reproductive bondage that slave women fought and, in the process, suggests how such struggles might yet inform a response to present conditions.¹⁷³

With this in mind, could one imagine the economic potential for the woman born independent of the order of white men and the temperament of the son born to such a woman? If the black male figure has been traditionally viewed by white political and economic actors in America as one of rebellious potential, then what can be said about the black boy whose spirit of rebellion still fosters within due to his subjugated existence but whose development through life is captained by the black woman, a figure of resolve and resistance in reaction to this same plight? I am also concerned primarily with the implications for black boys and girls in America who have followed the tutelage of their

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Weinbaum, 438.

mother and resent the order and authority of any man who plays a part (state apparatus: police officers, educators, etc.) or who sat helpless or absent during the hardships of his childhood. This child represents an alternative order, one outside the general shape of consciousness pronounced in America's founding documents, for he or she is liable to choose his or her own self interest over the requirements of the family. Will the child resist or rebel?

There is an implied significance to our analysis of the black mother rather than the black girl or woman.¹⁷⁴ The mother figure represents a self-consciousness whose allegiance and will is dedicated to, but not wholly composed of, someone other than herself. The city is not her lifeboat, her children are. The prizes and opportunities available to others and not her do not shape her identity. She recognizes herself through her reproductive talent, establishing her identity through the care and providing of her child. I mean this in the most glorious of ways. Imagine the passion that Creon expressed for his responsibilities to the city. For the single black mother, the home is a city and her children are her people. Her laws and actions will determine the outcomes of their lives. This is less a limitation and more a responsibility. So let's take this opportunity to reframe rhetorical sovereignty after the emancipation of Slavery. Due to Antigone's position in her corrupted family, she is ejected from her home. It is here that she begins to express her grievance using a language that manipulates the force of Creon's law. In our

¹⁷⁴ In a poem titled, *Family Tree*, Tupac likens the mother to a tree in the forest. Shakur writes:

I find greatness in the tree
That grows against all odds
It blossoms in darkness
And gives birth to promising pods.

discussion of Jacobs and black souls, we start to see rhetorical sovereignty through the economic and political failures of reconstruction for the black community.

We witness the process of white words being used to define and subjugate black bodies that have been recognized by the constitution, yet remain an outcast. Think back to Antigone and how her identity and obligations are screened through male voices that are effective enough to stop her sister from breaking Creon's law. Now imagine if law constituted these limitations? The black mother and the child that does not respect authority live on the boundaries of rhetorical sovereignty. Rhetorical sovereignty, displayed through my characterization of resisting and rebellious metaphorical figures, thus becomes the recognition of a double reality, this double consciousness. It is the reality that, although my claims to self-sovereignty are valid, I am no longer subjugated to the physical tyranny of white men, rather the tyranny of white words. The recognition from the black mother of the various ways white words degrade black esteem, how language can subjugate the body, offers her the necessary acumen to manipulate the force of law much like Antigone in chapter one.

The most fascinating attribute of this relationship black man and woman stands as the level of equal recognition at the heart of this arrangement. To reference Jacobs once more, "There are no bonds so strong as those which are formed by suffering together."¹⁷⁵ So far, I have spoken of two metaphorical figures conceptualized through the phenomenon of subjugated social life as a black man and transfigured woman. Despite gender, both black men and women are conscious of the color line. It is for this reason that I look at them as siblings through struggle. The color line is ironically a term framed by Du Bois in the midst of his child's death. He laments, "An evil omen was golden hair

¹⁷⁵ Jacobs, 218.

in my life...And thus in the Land of the Color-line I saw, as it fell across my baby, the shadow of the Veil.”¹⁷⁶ The Veil can be identified as an indicator of the particular relationship black families have with America. This Veil permeates the double consciousness and ensures the prospect of white resistance to black economic and cultural prosperity. Du Bois thinks that he should be comforted by the idea that his son had never experienced the Color-line in his youth, but he remains conflicted, for his son is the evidence of the Veil’s existence. The Color line in America has made all black people brothers and sisters of struggle comparable to the same modes of recognition found in Hegel’s description of the irreplaceability of the brother from the sister who understands his pain. At the same time, for the mother who aims to protect her children regardless of the way of things, with a general mistrust and lack of fear for the economic and political forces of white propertied men, would seeming share some interest in the rebellious economic figure that has been to war with the state.

Of Our Spiritual Strivings: W.E.B. Du Bois Study of Sovereign Leadership in the Newly Formed Black Home

Although there was much progress made in Reconstruction, blacks were still economically disenfranchised. As Ferruccio Gambino writes, “one learned that during the Reconstruction African American workers sought to join with white trade unions and were rejected.”¹⁷⁷ Gambino believes that Du Bois put an end to all the conversation of difference between entities of labor and being black. Gambino states that, “Black people, then, made up the segment most proven and experienced of the working class against the

¹⁷⁶ Du Bois, 128.

¹⁷⁷ Ferruccio Gambino, “Reading *Black Reconstruction* on the Eve of 1968,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 112:3, summer 2013, 532.

structure of the State.” In the same essence, he cites human labor as the “great majority of mankind, on whose bent and broken backs rest today the founding stones of modern history.”¹⁷⁸ Yet the former slave was not granted any economic concessions for their contributions. In the words of Du Bois, “To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships.”¹⁷⁹ So there we have it, a synopsis of the conditions of black lives leading into the 21st century.

The strongest element of Du Bois’ work may be his construction of double consciousness, a double aim which he virtually sees as an inescapable plight of the black social being in the United States, especially the black boy.¹⁸⁰ Fair enough, there is plenty of historical evidence to support this observation. The numerous lynchings across the country and the order of Jim Crow laws made it visibly clear that being black does matter in America. It matters because that's how they know whom to watch. The “they,” may align with a character that we discussed earlier in the essay on our examination of

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 534.

¹⁷⁹ Du Bois, 5.

¹⁸⁰ It should be noted that “the black boys” are meant to identify a reality that arrived to a community of foreigners who were uprooted from their homes and implanted into the crop fields of America’s planter aristocracy, then thrown out into the streets of economic and rhetorical subjugation to fend for themselves. In my best Raven Symone impression, we were not born black we were made black. The economic disparities between low income and middle class education systems that lead to the underdevelopment of children who will grow into adults expected to compete in a global market, the past four decades of racially motivated sentencing mandates for drug crimes and the increased dependency of black mothers on government assistance have been the outcomes of rhetorical and economic disposition of black children in America. The states and their laws combined with the federal government and their agencies have colluded to ensure that the white market remains impregnable by black consciousness.

Antigone, the Watchman. Today this character walks around in black boots and drives sedans equipped with sirens and lights; they are always watching.¹⁸¹

Du Bois contemplates over how best to attain the prizes reserved for white families who parents were allowed in the free social market. He aspired to hold these prizes. He also acknowledges that this was not the ambition of all black boys.¹⁸² He notes:

With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast in my own house?¹⁸³

Here we see a distinction between the agencies available to black self-consciousness following reconstruction. First, you have the black boy who aspires to gain the things white boys have ample access to. This is the Negro who believes he can pass as white, or exempt himself from the race condition by shielding the remnants of cultural normality synonymous with the black community through aligning with or scholarship in relation to white order. I am referencing a development in our figure of rebellion. This figure rebels against white order to attain white objects. His rebellion is not necessarily against the white institution; it more so lies in the black exception

¹⁸¹ I can't help but think about the 2 Chainz song, "Fed's Watching." In the chorus he repeats, "I'm be fresh as hell if the Feds watching." The thing that bothers me most about policeman, the thing that I actually enjoy about the watchman, is this stuff about honor and public service. Would you walk around treating people like some of you do, if you weren't authorized by the state to carry, and use if necessary, a firing weapon? Or would you patrol around in cars all day watching us for no reason if the state did not pay you? Your honor did not bring you here, your check did.

¹⁸² The free social markets cite a network of medium industries in America.

¹⁸³ Du Bois, 2.

Second, you have the black boys who are ignorant or impartial in regard to the cultural norms, intelligibility, and interests white people desire.¹⁸⁴ White reality forms but remains outside the purview of the day-to-day trials and tribulations they experience. Their interaction with the privileged class is usually through a state apparatus or economic institution. This group is in direct objection of these political and economic actors of racial condition and seek the economic means to live a life free from white impression, and in some cases, impress on them. This group is not oblivious to white hegemony, but at the same time remain indifferent to the particulars of white culture viewing their agents through a screen of white privilege.

The third actor is one of social resistance. This figure resists against white order to obtain black objectives. His rebellion is not necessarily against the white institution; it more so lies in the black exception. This figure's methods varies but is most commonly seen in the configuration of scholar, artists, or educator who promotes black consciousness. This scholar injects black consciousness into the discourse of American culture, with the source of this consciousness resonating through the houses of black families who are all connected or related in struggle. As Du Bois claims, "this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."¹⁸⁵ The black male who recognizes his double consciousness is tasked to find a means of materializing his desires. At the same time, "He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has message for the

¹⁸⁴ The proverbial thugs, likened this subject to the gangsters of prohibition.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

world.”¹⁸⁶ The black scholar, who has realized the condition of his race in civil society, aims only to navigate through life as an American and a Negro without moral contempt from neighbors and in business.

Du Bois writes that this black boy only wishes to be a “co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius.”¹⁸⁷ In this sense, the black scholar seeks a seat at the table of cultural intelligibility without having to sacrifice his experience due to the lack of understanding of his. This pursuit is intrinsically social, one implicit in the nature of the subject whose self-consciousness identifies a second consciousness relating to his skin color being the center of how he engages with others. At the same what outlets are available to the black scholar and poet that allow the unapologetic confession of his experience without the consideration of a white audience. So what of this double consciousness? Why bother with this intimate pursuit of dual recognition? As Du Bois writes:

This waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideals, has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand people, —has sent the often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed to make them feel ashamed of themselves.¹⁸⁸

This is the spirit of recognition for black self-consciousness. His plight warrants a wish to seek recognition in another while elevating the culture of his home.

So why do we bother with this aim, the pursuit of white recognition? No one can deny that a lot has changed since the time Du Bois is writing in. At the same time, there are many things that have not. The black citizen in America, especially those who reside

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

in inner city projects, remains a subject vulnerable to subjugation because of the color of his skin. The color line is still visible in America. However I am not concerned with the concession white America has granted the black community after removing the shackles from their wrist and ankles. My focus lies in the agencies black people employ in the advancement of their own interests and the expression of their own voices in the sphere of cultural intelligibility through mediums that don't require the tradition of masking or catering to a white audience. Or is it something else that makes us mask our spirit, possibly fear, dread that the agency of our unapologetic use of economic force will fall on the wrong side of state bureaucracy and corporate interest? As Du Bois argues, “The holocaust of war, the terrors of the Klu Klux Klan, the lies of carpet-baggers, the disorganization of industry, and the contradictory advice of friends and foes, left the bewildered serf with no watchword beyond the old cry of freedom.”¹⁸⁹ After the home was recognized by the constitution of America and the first family, there was still no prototype for economic force for the Negro. The black boy had come to realize that if true sovereignty were to be attained it would be gained through the economics of his own household.

Remember, in our analysis of Aunt Martha, it was her iconic status in the community and synonymy with food power that freed her from slave proprietorship and afforded her the opportunity to advance the freedoms of her slave children and grandchildren. It was not her utility of language or lust for privilege. But if we do decide to combat the authority of white words, without the expressed focus on building the black economy, then we should be prepared for the possibility of the ineffectiveness of our claim in relation to the power of white political and economic tyrant. It is in this way that

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 4.

rhetorical sovereignty from state authority and economic independence is only fully realized when coupled with one another.

Du Bois may have forewarned us about the implications of this negotiation of recognition in the event that these efforts prove futile. He writes:

If, however, the vistas disclosed as yet no goal, no resting, little but flattery and criticism, the journey at least gave leisure for reflection and self examination; it changed the child of Emancipation to the youth with dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, and self-respect.¹⁹⁰

Du Bois believed that the black child would recognize a new reality. This would be the black child who is constituted in the home of an emergent ethical order whose conscious desires differ from the communities of white families in the same area. The African American did not realize his freedom in the truths declared by America's forefathers in the Declaration of Independence. Actually, that freedom is a reminder of the near century of enslavement that follows it. The black experience, black freedom, is truly rooted in the civil rights amendments to the constitution. I believe that this reality transcends his deliberation of double consciousness. In this view, the black boy now resolves himself to achieve true sovereignty by any means necessary. He will begin to see himself, like Du Bois, in "some faint revelation of his power, of his mission."¹⁹¹ What is the objective of this mission? The indicator of black progress lies in the ability of the black body to share his culture without sacrificing his blackness. According to Du Bois, "he must be himself, and not another."¹⁹² The black body must be able to lead a life free from concern of the judgments of his oppressor. Meaning, his path to agency

¹⁹⁰ Du Bois, 5.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

and power is intrinsically different from his white colleague even though his status as a citizen is the same in the eyes of the US Constitution. He must reflect on the conditions of his home and people.

Earlier in this essay, I cited Hegel for describing the free man as property owning self-consciousness. According to Du Bois, the black boy “felt his poverty; without a cent, without a home, without land, without tools, or savings, he had entered into competition with rich, landed, skilled neighbors.”¹⁹³ I see no ethical explanation to justify the lack of economic aid withheld from the black boy after abolition of slavery. Especially in consideration of all the money poured into the South for restoration of land, how is the black family not compensated for their pains and sufferings? In Foner’s recollection of the Reconstruction era he speaks of reparations for former slaves. He writes, “Their quest for land—the famous 40 acres and a mule—to provide an economic foundation for their new freedom was not fulfilled.”¹⁹⁴ In 2016, many still lack the economic foundation needed to capitalize on the luxury of being an American citizen. The conversation of reparations in America is still happening and remains to be avoided by political actors in state and federal governments. The perpetual economic disenfranchisement in the black community is as prevalent an issue in some black communities today as it was after the failure of reconstruction.

It is the equivalent of kidnapping a child from another home, subjugating the infant to the order of your home, and at the moment where you become liable for getting this tormented child educated or employed, you leave it high and dry

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Foner, 50.

out in the cold streets to fend for itself. But we are not animals, we are seeds. Plant us in the concrete streets and watch us grow through the cracks in the concrete. The black boy is aware of his impartiality to white custom and order. This sentiment goes beyond the rhetoric of laws and the implied idiom of race relations, Du Bois believes that it exists in life, business, and the humanities.¹⁹⁵ In other words, law, economics, and ethics are the ingredients for the concrete of America's subjugation of the black flower. In the words of Du Bois, "a concrete test of the underlying principle of our great republic is the Negro Problem."¹⁹⁶ I liken this to Creon's discussion of his laws being tested in the public eye. The Negro had newly become a member of the public sphere.

I will now introduce two concepts of black consciousness molded by and opposed to white ethical order. I see these concepts as approaching a history of subjugation and practice of silencing black consciousness through economic and linguistic means. Du Bois explains this pursuit, as "the spirit striving of the freedmen's son is the travail of souls whose burden is almost beyond the measure of their strength."¹⁹⁷ These figures are not asking for reparations or dependent on government assistance agencies. They are not wholly concerned with public perception and are more interested in self-promotion and elevating the intelligibility of the culture in which they were raised. According to Du Bois, the strivings of the negro spirit are motivated by the those "who bear it in the name of

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

The irony of a black humanities major writing about black life and the prospect of black business in the American *Sittlichkeit*

¹⁹⁶ Du Bois, 7.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

an historic race, in the name of this the land of their fathers' fathers and in the name of human opportunity.”¹⁹⁸ It is my hope that these conceptual figures aid the “public in responding to pertinent and pressing questions.”¹⁹⁹ The first conceptual figure of black consciousness is inspired by the relationship between the state and the economic black boy. The second is based on the image of the black mother in the black community. She is more than an economic actor; she is the vessel of intelligibility for her community. She is intimate with the details of her community, negative and positive, and an ideal representative voice of black culture. It is my hope to present an alteration in the ethical arrangement of self-conscious spirit due to the economic attacks on black men and the handcuffing of black woman who raise their child, with the presence of the father replaced by economic government assistance. The time has come to focus on how these interactions with state authority affect the economic circumstance of the black child in America. Du Bois is masterful in his efforts. I only wish that he had lived long enough to comment on the transformation of the black home following his death and the invention of crack cocaine.

Hustler's Ambition: A Study of the Rebellious Boy's Economic Endeavors and the Mother's Guiding Hand

The nature of this conversation identifies the evolution of the black boy as both a resisting and rebellious figure, his presence points to the blatant underdevelopment of black men in America. I would say, borrowing from the

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Foner, 7.

language in the Willie Lynch letter, that the destruction of adult men lay at the center of black subjugation. The only thing worse than a white man calling you the n word is any man calling you boy.²⁰⁰ The boy figure in this analysis describes an intimate relationship between mothers and their sons. The son is dependent on his mother but cognizant that he will one day have to leave and provide for himself and family. In the process, providing her all the prizes and economic freedoms she was never able to enjoy while tending to his needs. This is not to undermine the prowess of the black mother figure. She is the embodiment of resistance against tyranny. She endures, she has cunning, she is resilient and she carries the burdens of many in her agency, including the black boy who is punished for being overtly willful.

In a study on child maltreatment in black homes led by women, Amie Shuck states “female-headed families are believed to be more vulnerable to poverty than other types of families.”²⁰¹ Shuck continues, “The results suggested that the worst outcomes were for youth who had multiple risk factors including caregivers with few resources and living in high-risk neighborhoods.”²⁰² Shuck’s research focuses on the relationship between female led families, poverty, and public housing. In her words:

The concentration of poverty may also be important. Families in poverty that also reside in impoverished communities may face multiple challenges, forced not only to cope with their own poverty

²⁰⁰ My father would always tell me that I would not become a man until I have children of my own and my own place to rest my head. Until then, I was a slick boy living in his mamma’s house.

²⁰¹ Amie Shuck, “Explaining Black-White Disparity in Maltreatment: Poverty, Female-Headed Families, and Urbanization,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67(2005), 544.

²⁰² Idib.

but also the difficulties of residing in an economically deprived community.²⁰³

I am interested in the mother and child who manage to grow beyond this circumstance. If our figures are born from this circumstance what knowledge and agencies can they provide the unhelpful born into these same circumstances? Like Antigone, I believe that these figures manifest themselves rhetorically. Like Aunt Martha, and William, I believe that these figure also manifests themselves economically.

The boys born in these circumstances who are vulnerable to the dangers of this situation are tasked to find a means to make it out of this situation and not leave their families behind in the process. This marks a difference between the slave boy and the free black boy. The slave boy's agency to escape normally included the abandonment of his family. The freed black boy shows a capacity to be family oriented and economically motivated. Unfortunately, there are not many economic opportunities available to the black boy who wishes to elevate himself and his family from the perils of their circumstance. The latter end of the twentieth century offered him a way through the availability of crack-cocaine and the economic power available to him from distributing the drug. However, many laws made the distribution of this drug a criminal offense with harsh penalties that included extensive sentencing mandates. The best available means for the boy to help his family escape their turmoil now promised the departure of the boy from his family and the suspension of recognition granted to him by the thirteenth and fourteenth amendments.

²⁰³ Ibid., 544.

You Ready Bey, Let's Go Get Em: The War Against the Economic Boy From Humble Beginnings

I find no problem with the protection of black families being founded on the principles set forth by the selling of crack-cocaine. The thoughts gathered from this representation of the drug problem in America generally supported a belief that drugs were destroying the low-income neighborhoods predominantly populated by black people. To this end I can agree. However, we must pay attention to the equally damaging effects of drug enforcement on the black community. Anyone who has ever known someone with an addiction would agree that the dependence one's body develops for narcotics like cocaine, heroine, crack and even alcohol is a sickness.²⁰⁴ Many people just want to escape reality. Unfortunately, the amount of money dedicated for treatment for these victims of drug abuse pales in comparison to the funds allocated towards policing the drug trade.²⁰⁵ This observation has led many to believe that the urgency of America's attention to the drug problem in the nation possessed a hidden agenda aimed towards the subjugation of the black community.

In 1971, President Nixon proclaimed drug abuse to be "public enemy number one in the United States."²⁰⁶ What would follow is a nationwide initiative in America that is still going on today, called the War on Drugs. In the period prior to Nixon's resignation, the government allocated more money towards treatment than law enforcement. Even then the foundation was being laid for a full-scale mobilization of resources to be

²⁰⁴ Chenjeri Kumanyika, "Policing and the "War on Black Bodies"," *College Literature* 43 (2001), 254.

²⁰⁵ Kumanyika, 254.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

dedicated towards policing the actors in the drug trade. In January 1972, the Office of Drug Prevention Law Enforcement was founded. The result was an organization that operates federal and local task forces in an effort to confront the drug trade on the streets of these poor communities. In July 1963, Nixon would create the DEA, a super drug agency of sorts, composed of officers from the Bureau of Narcotics and dangerous drugs, the CIA, ODALE, and customs. This would be one of Nixon's last contributions to America as president. The term "drug prevention" shifted away from getting treatment for those in need of help with the pain of addiction, towards the incarceration and monitoring of those born in the same conditions as the addict, ensuring that no attempts to capitalize from the economic opportunity of selling drugs go without some eventual consequence.

In an article titled "Drug Policy and Reform: The War on Drugs and Prison Growth," John F. Pfaff writes, "Decades of stable incarceration ended suddenly in the mid-1970s, as the U.S. prison population soared from about 300,000 to 1.6 million inmates, and the incarceration rate from 100 per 100,000 to over 500 per 100,000."²⁰⁷ The reasoning behind this growth in the prison population seemingly shares a connection with the War on Drugs. Recently, public officials who worked intimately with Reagan have come out to speak against the agenda of his campaign. Among these officials is Nixon's Chief Domestic Officer John Ehrlichman. According to Ehrlichman, the drug war had two enemies, "the anti-war left and Black people."²⁰⁸ For what purpose did it serve to vilify these communities of people? According to Ehrlichman:

²⁰⁷ John Pfaff, "Drug Policy and Reform: The War on Drugs and Prison," *Harvard Journal on Legislation* 52 (2015), 173.

You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or Black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and Blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.²⁰⁹

There is more than enough evidence to support these claims. Speaking from personal experience, as a black man who has lived in both impoverished and middle class communities, the police presence and function is much more imposing in the prior. My interest is the former Chief Domestic Officer's description of these criminals as leaders in the community.

The drug-trade is a game to many of the guys I grew up with, a game of life and death. The drug dealer is born from the slums where drugs are destroying the neighborhoods therefore; he may be seen as a boy doing what he has to do to make it. Many could say that their communities were destroying themselves. It is fair to say that black drug dealers also recognize the drug war as another example of white words justifying or authorizing the subjugation black bodies. Many are born into public housing in communities that lack an abundance of economic opportunities. The drug dealer who remains alive and out of jail therefore operates as a figure of rebellion against economic and state forces. Meaning, he understands the limitations of his chosen path to economic power. His disobedience of state law is less a disrespect to state authority and more the

²⁰⁸ Walter Bond, "Richard Nixon's 'War on Drugs' was government sanctioned terror on Black people," *Indianapolis Recorder*, April 01, 2016, <http://infoweb.newsbank.com/resources/doc/nb/news/15BFA762DEBDC428?p=AWNB>

²⁰⁹ Bond.

readily available means to escape his nearly impossible circumstance. As it seems, the war on drugs best serves as a new process of economic subjection for black men for the white capitalist whose interest is licensed by state authority. Was this a coincidence or was it an intended outcome? The thirteenth amendment abolished involuntary servitude with the exception of punishment by law. Through this loophole we witness the matriculation of the capitalist tyrant as he repositions himself from master to warden. The prison industry is a multi billion-dollar industry that benefits from the incarceration of criminals. The relationships these men share with laws seem economically motivated.

Meanwhile, our reading of *Antigone* uncovers the use of language to manipulate law. Jacobs reinforces this agency through a masking technique popular in black cultural tradition. Through sharing her experiences of resistance, Jacobs promotes a culture shaped under the heel of a foreign order. In order to locate this culture, one must recognize the boot that hovers over it. Linda's position as black mother and Jacobs' position as public figure intertwine in the production of a new order, separate and distinct from the standards cast down by white families. Jacobs' depiction of Aunt Martha displays an alternative ethical arrangement of mutual recognition. In this arrangement the role of the woman as the head of household due to a consciousness of the various methods of physical, economic, and political subjugations of black men due to the immediate threat they pose to white proprietorship.²¹⁰ The capacity to accept the male, tarnished publically but rebelliously willful, marks a new discourse for our figures of sovereignty. The black boy and transfigured woman are mother and son in nature, but

²¹⁰ I'm thinking about the story of Nat Turner. The black male represents an adverse danger that I argue is only present due to the continued attacks on his will, life, and family.

brother and sister in struggle.²¹¹ These figures are capable of equal recognition through the consciousness of their social circumstance. At the same time, the boy raised by his mother alone and the woman who understands the struggle are also capable of mutual recognition and forming a new family without the limitations of the gender roles pronounced by Hegel in the *Sittlichkeit*. My next discussion will conclude our investigation with a provisional look at Beyoncé as the actualization of the southern mother and her rebelliously economic husband Jay-Z.²¹²

The interaction between these two displays a capacity of man and woman to share the responsibility of order, recognizing one another as equal in the construction of the household and the family. Much of our discourse spawns from a recent single released by Beyoncé Knowles titled “Formation.” She released the song a day before she was slated to perform at the National Football League’s 50th Super Bowl Halftime Show with Coldplay and Bruno Mars. I am equally motivated by the career of her husband, drug

²¹¹ I am reminded of the excerpt from Frances Cress Welsing’s book *Isis Papers* at the beginning of John Singleton’s movie *Baby Boy*. In the excerpt, she describes the relationship between black boys and their mothers. She goes through a series of slang that support her observation. The main character, Jody, narrates, “She has a theory about the black man in America. She says because of the system of racism in this country, the black man is meant to think of himself as a baby. A not yet fully formed being, which has not yet realized his full potential. To support her claim, she offers the following: First off, what does a black man call his woman? Mama. Secondly, what does a black man call his closest acquaintances? His boys. And finally, what does a black man call his place of residence? The crib.”

²¹² I love hip-hop music. The transparency of it alone captivates me. I grew up in the culture and understand its terms. Every boy, and some girls, in my neighborhood had lyrics somewhere. We all wanted to be rappers, tell our story. It wasn’t easy for any of us growing up but we always felt in our hearts, if only they knew my story. With everything going on in the country today, black boys being murdered in the streets by men with oaths to protect and serve, the time has come for someone to tell their story.

dealer turned CEO, Jay-Z, and his proverbial blueprint for the other boys who wish to become economically sovereign without the permission of white voices.

Beyoncé's performance expressed rhetorically an issue distinct and particular to the black community. I believe the source of this issue lies in our previous discussion of double consciousness. The distinction between heroes in the recognition of black and white people is grounded in different historical characters. For many, the sight of the Black Panther visualized a terrorizing threat to the nation. That being said, black people could complain about the same thing every time they see former slave owner George Washington's face on the one-dollar bill. Like Jacobs, Beyoncé had to also be aware of the diverse audience that would immediately receive her message who may not fully understand the condition of black people in America. Coldplay headlined the show with Bruno Mars and Beyoncé. Beyoncé took the field and stole the show. The beat dropped and the sound of a voice that means serious business echoes, "I just might be the next Bill Gates in the making." She is dressed in an all-black leotard, with a military jacket over top. Her background dancers are outfitted in all-black dancing uniforms, with Afro hairstyles and berets. She was commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Black Panther Party, an organization that embodied an overt threat to the mechanisms of economic disempowerment in black communities by wealthy white men and their policemen.²¹³ She is a threat, but one born and supported by Pepsi, the multi billion dollar company that sponsored the show. Her beauty, talent, and public perception made her an ideal candidate for halftime show for Pepsi and the NFL. The stage they provided her turned

²¹³ The show immediately reminded me of Afeni Shakur, the mother of Tupac Shakur who also was a member of the party. Beyoncé's performance was seemingly a public announcement that the black woman has taken her place as the forthright leader of the black family and community.

into a medium where the Rhythm & Blues singer would deliver a statement that both celebrated, unapologetically, an ally political organization (The Black Panthers) and promote a single from her album that proudly shared traditions rooted from her southern birthplace in Texas; particulars like keeping hot sauce in her bag or liking her daughter's hair in an Afro and her husband's big nose. The significance of this relationship between Beyoncé and these corporations is her utilization of associations with white businessman to promote her agenda. Much like Linda and Mr. Sands, these female figures are seen as less threatening than their male counterparts like Beyoncé's husband.²¹⁴

Beyoncé continues "Okay ladies, now let's get in formation." The crowd erupts, and they were not alone. Everyone had something to say about her performance. Twitter and Instagram went crazy. The timing of all this was deliberate and pragmatic. Beyoncé, who currently has one album left on lucrative deal with Sony Records, is seemingly using this opportunity as a launch pad into a new stage of her career. Her efforts are well crafted to say the least, she released the video for the single she performed just a day before the show, announcing a world tour after her set was complete. Although many have made their arguments, one thing is for certain, in her best impersonation of Jacobs, Beyoncé is not playing the victim, and she is on attack.²¹⁵ The Daily Show's Jessica Williams points out, "The point is, Beyoncé is black and this song is her message."²¹⁶

²¹⁴ But they will support Bruno Mars. This is the negro/nigga distinction I mentioned earlier in full effect.

²¹⁵ Beyoncé is subject to two forms of criticism or criminalization. One the one hand, some may ask, "how dare she get on public tv and show support for an organization synonymous with the support of economic force by black people? In the other, one might see her use of the Black Panther Party to support or validate her own personal agenda as a show of disrespect.

Those who support Beyoncé, eloquently write, “When black women affirm Blackness/Black womanhood, they are attacked and silenced.”²¹⁷ Although Beyoncé has received some criticisms about her performance, it remains evident that she will not be silenced. This is in large part due to her economic independence. She does not rely solely on any one individual or group to sustain her lifestyle. Her economic independence affords her the opportunity to make her sovereign claims free from penalty or financial consequences.

New York Times staff writer, Jenna Wortham sees the pop star as exploring, or advancing, themes of "capitalism, ignoring haters, black beauty, racial pride and family," and this is the environment I want to place my argument within.²¹⁸ Echoing Wesley Morris, a *New York Times* critic at large whose thoughts on Beyoncé were included in conversation with Wortham and a third critic, John Carcamanica, I too wonder the implications of the economic and gifted transfigured woman and the leadership of her people.²¹⁹ This seems especially challenging when her wealth is to the credit of an audience where many suffer economic disenfranchisement. As a public figure, Beyoncé is expected to act a certain way. As a woman this expectation is even more strenuously imposed. Her inability to hold herself to these foreign standards enable her the capacity to operate and compete in the white man’s world free from the limitation of his ethical

²¹⁶ Matt Wilstein, “The Daily Show’s Jessica Williams Shuts Down Beyoncé’s Super Bowl Haters,”

²¹⁷ Eventbrite Anti-Anti Beyoncé Halftime performance.

²¹⁸ John Carcamanica, Wesley Morris, and Jenna Wortham, “Beyoncé information’: Entertainer, Activist, Both?” *The New York Times*, February 6, 2016.

²¹⁹ I want to cite characters in literature that match this description, I am thinking about the character Dido in *The Aeneid* particularly.

order.²²⁰ Beyoncé's performance could argue that when the black body is fed up with the rule and structures of its superiors, it decides to create a structure of its own, setting his or her own expectations for themselves and others.

But still, how can black life excel beyond the perils of industrial white subjugation and not be branded a sell-out? How can self-emancipated life that has seemingly attained freedom and sovereignty remain connected to the powerless? What prevents the economic woman from dominating others like the white male has done historically or abandoning her responsibilities to develop the subjugated black children of America? The answer is simple, family. Beyoncé represents the woman who is able to break from the stereotypes of black women and reverse them with her own narrative. So what is it to be said of the African American who not only declares self-sovereignty, but also becomes a master over the freedoms of houses connected through kinship and economics? What guide does the black girl have access to? Also, what mediums of mass appeal does Jay-Z have available to him? Is he as indebted to Beyoncé as she is to him?

Here is where I introduce a figure I liken to Linda's father, the carpenter who died mysteriously. What possibilities would have been readily available to Linda had she had her economically savvy grandmother and strong willed business minded father in the household? I do not know. What I do know, is that Jay-Z gives us insight into what the characterization of this character might be. Linda's father, like her brother, is a slave with the attitude of free men. These male figures of subjugation provide outlines for the potential return of the black father into the home. I see the crack economy as an abstract and structural possibility of unapologetic economic order for the other black boys in the

²²⁰ Let's consider Linda again. She uses deception and challenges her masters belief that she has to beld to the same expectations as free women.

United States. Men like Big Meech and the Black Mafia Family, Rayful Edmonds, and Azie Faison, boys born beneath the concrete of tyranny, jumped after the opportunity to extend their order and live like kings. Rightfully so, we have begun to shift, not entirely, our perspective of the war on drugs from economic abuse of the community towards calculated enslavement of the black male subject then we have finally entered into a space where the men who resist the consequences of the drug trade can be analyzed for the wisdom garnered in their capitalist pursuits.

In the 1990's, hip-hop music was on the verge of entering into the gangsta rap era. This era would become notorious for its connection to talented black males who were raised in the crack economy. Unlike other industries, the crack economy provided equitable opportunity for those who were raised in the streets of inner city community projects.²²¹ By and large, life for the incarcerated black boy still mirrored a standard established in slavery. A process where his talents were exploited for the economic profit of someone else. Even for the black boy who avoided jail in the 80s and 90s, his life may be more comparable to life in the north following Emancipation. The crack economy offered many of these boys, raised by the streets, the opportunity to pursue a capitalist endeavor. An opportunity that until this day, seems more readily available to white communities empowered by state and social privilege. The phenomenon of crack gave black boys the chance to become masters, captains of industry.

In the crack game, a man is rewarded for his ability to “whip” cocaine into crack rock for profit. In the gangster era of the rap game, men who shared this experience profited from recording the trials and tribulations, pains and gains, of drug culture. Today

²²¹ I have to quote a line from Jay-Z's “Minority Report.” He writes, “You know why they call a project a project? Because it's a project, an experiment, we're in it only as objects.”

there are many examples of the rapper/CEO who got his economic foundation through the distribution of narcotics.²²² As figures, these artists represent the clashing of resistance and rebellion. The very nature of their coming into economic stability is due to the conscious breaking of law. The ability of these men displays a capacity to mask their actions, revealing a utility that is traditionally synonymous with the agencies of women like Harriet Jacobs. On the one hand, if he is able to adequately tell the story of his struggle and entertain the listener, he is functioning much like Antigone, Jacobs, and Beyoncé. On the other, he is a war veteran. A survivor of one of the most expensive enforcement initiatives in American history. One article published in the *University of Chicago Law Review* states that America spends fifteen billion dollars annually on drug enforcement. This statistic is complimented by the thirty-three billion dollars allocated to state and local institutions for the same purpose.²²³ The figure who is able to survive an institution with unlimited resources that seeks to put him in a cage and use his experiences to create a legitimate economic institution to provide for his family, employing other boys who come from similar upbringings as him gives hope to a community that has been subjected to the tyranny of white political and economic institutions for too long.

Hip-Hop music represents an outlet for children, whose path to economic power would normally be the drug trade, to enter into a legitimate profession that has an unlimited ceiling for economic success. Hip-hop and the drug trade overlap a lot in

²²² Jay-Z, Birdman, Young Jeezy, Rick Ross, and etc.

²²³ Eric Blumenson and Eva Nilsen, "Policing for Profit: The Drug War's Hidden Economic Agenda," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 65 (1998), 37.

culture, yet music is void of many of the dangers associated with distributing narcotics.²²⁴

In “Hip-Hop Studies in Black,” Tyron Woods and P. Saucier write:

In the case of hip hop studies, we are using “a changing same” to denote how the anti-Black world continually finds new ways, across an astonishing diversity of political, economic, and cultural conjunctures, to consume and use blackness in manners that extend the interlocutory life of the captive black body for the coherence and morality of the “human” community (Wynter 2002).²²⁵

It is in my opinion that Hip-Hop music is so intimately connected with the impoverished black community from where it was birthed, it serves as a vessel of further understanding certain norms and expectations of the black community. Half the battle with studying hip-hop in a scholarly setting, stated eloquently in the article, is “that it is being used in a very old and tired manner wholly consistent with the ways in which black culture has always been a source of sustenance for nonblack society.”²²⁶ It seems as though the criticisms of the art form itself have acted to condemn an institution where social tolerability is replaced by profit and the aim of black consciousness remains unadulterated by the prospect of white judgment.

Since the beginning, hip-hop artists have stressed the importance of ownership over what they produce. Let’s reference a line from popular hip hop artist Jay-Z, otherwise known as Shawn Carter, in his song “No Hook” on the album titled *American Gangsta*:

Own boss, own your masters,
slaves, the mentality I carry with me to this very day.

²²⁴ Jay-Z writes, “Hustlers? That’s if you still living, get on down.”

²²⁵ P. Saucier and Tyrion Woods, “Hip-Hop Studies in Black,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 36 (2014), 269.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 270.

Fuck rich, let's get wealthy.
Who else gon feed we?²²⁷

There is a reason why music is the ideal beacon for the drug dealer, turned rapper and CEO. According to Woods and Saucier, “Almost every account of hip-hop privileges the role of economic restructuring in the post civil rights period.”²²⁸ The foundation of this economically rhetorical paradigm may be related to the training of the matriarch. At the same time, the mentality had manifested itself in music for the black artist decades prior to the creation of hip hop music. Record labels like Motown, and later Def Jam, provided an example of juridical ownership over the economic potential of an object created through their economic institutions. What rap represents, is the heartfelt expression of young boys, most of them scarred with the realities of growing up without guidance in a community where economic opportunity to provide is far and few.²²⁹ For this boy, all he has is his family led by his mother.

Before her death, Donda West, mother of hip-hop star Kanye West, wrote a book titled *Raising Kanye: Life Lessons from the Mother of a Rising Star*. In the book she speaks on the wisdoms. In an interview by Brenda Greene, mother of popular rapper Talib Kwali, she speaks of an “informal network” of mothers who published books detailing the experiences of raising sons that would become figures in hip-hop. In the interview West states that her true “gift” was “understanding the importance of embracing your

²²⁷ Jay-Z, *American Gangster*, New York: Roc-a-fella Records, 2010.

²²⁸ Ibid,

²²⁹ My issue with many of those who critique Hip-Hop music, is the obvious recognition that these scholars never stepped foot in rap studio session. They watch music videos and listen carefully to lyrics but are not intimate with the culture of hip-hop industry.

culture and loving yourself.”²³⁰ At one point in the interview Greene asks, “Where do you think it comes from?” She was speaking of Kanye’s talent for producing, writing and performing music. West responds by saying, “Like you’ve said to me before, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”²³¹ Rap has displayed a possible intimate relationship between the black mother and boy. The black mother, in this regard, claims a significant role in the abilities of their rebellious kids raised under their emergent order. One that should not be overlooked in our analysis of black progress in America in the twenty-first century.

The gangsta rap era was a period championed by two essential artists, Biggie Smalls and Tupac Shakur. Lost in their legacy, is the role of their respective black owned record labels, Bad Boy Records and Death Row. Ironically, both names of these record labels intensify my recognition of the black male as the first public enemy of America. Both labels were seeded in the crack industry; at the same time, a black man who could adequately display a talent for telling people his story led neither label. It wasn’t until Jay-Z’s release of *Reasonable Doubt* through his label Roc-a-fella records with Dame Dash, that we see the phenomenon of a master born from the field of the object he produces. In this singular instance the slave owned the plantation. In a song titled, “December 4th,” Jay-Z reiterates the status of his childhood, he was “a kid torn apart once his pops disappeared.” He says that his mother could not beat him enough to dismiss the pain he felt after the disappearance of his father. In the same song, Jay-Z takes accountability for everything that has happened in his life. He is also grateful for the

²³⁰ Brenda Greene, “In the Beginning was the Word...” *Black Issues Book Review* 20.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

opportunities hip-hop and drug dealing have given him to appreciate his mother who compliments the song with recollections of her son's behavior in the household. At one point on the track Jay-Z writes:

Plus I hit my momma with cash from a show that I had
Supposedly, knowing nobody paid Jaz wack ass
I'm getting ahead of myself; by the way, I could rap
But that came second to me moving this crack.

Jay-Z displays acumen in the rap industry that was undoubtedly founded in his history with crack cocaine. What I believe Jay-Z represents more than anything, is what happens when one applies the economic culture of American capitalism with the guile of the black mother. Let's not forget, Jay-Z is still black and male. Certain opportunities for growth in the white man's world will simply not be afforded to him because he is still a threat. In order to advance his interests, the black man must be willing to put faith in his female counterpart. Her exception from national demonization allows her to maneuver in her community relatively free compared to her brother of her race.

This partnership between two equally recognized subjects is the source of a new possibility for ethical structure in the home. I believe that this discourse transcends the race problem in America. In a world where communities have been subjugated due to which god they worship or the color of their skin, it is up to that community to remove their own means of subjugation in order to form a united front against those that oppress them. Men and women, the ancient old gender crisis, must be resolved once in for all in order to appropriately address the new social distinctions being cast down upon communities all over the world and in America.

CONCLUSION

SIBLINGS IN STRUGGLE, PARTNER'S IN PROMISE

Anyone who has ever lost a loved one due to police brutality or violence in the inner city understands the importance of unity in pursuit of justice for our fallen and better conditions for future generations. The Carter-Knowles family represent a family arrangement where man and woman can be recognized as equals. Beyoncé and Jay-Z are partners in life, yet siblings of struggle. Jay-Z, the former drug dealer, is the matured image of the rebellious and economic black boy that survived the War on Drugs. Beyoncé, among many things, represents the southern black girl of today. Her value transcends the doubled expectations and standards of race and gender in America. Motherhood has seemingly made her more influential to the masses. I do not know the internal workings of their marriage or parenting methods. As public figures, the two allow me to explore the promising implications for the equal recognition of man and woman in a society where both have suffered and survived through various scenes of subjugation to achieve the level of success in America that the two have achieved.

To the communities of black people who still suffer from economic and legal disenfranchisement in impoverished inner city homes, allow these words to serve as evidence of your utility and potential. You have not only the power to survive your circumstance but the ability to use the skills and knowledge you garner in the process to create a better a circumstance for yourself and your peoples. I know this struggle. I have felt the omnipresence of hopelessness growing up in the inner city. At the same time, I also know the resolve, talent, and intellect of my people. I see the potential and progress of my community.

Our progress is not limited to entertainers and drug dealers. What these models do provide us with, are proof that we can make it without selling out our people or sacrificing the integrity of where we come from. You do not have to change who you are to fit into society. I beg you to promote yourself, in all of your urban lure, into the world and embrace the reactions, positive and negative, of those who see your beauty. For too long we have let fear prevent us from being our unapologetic selves. It is in my hope, if not in this essay then in the next, that my writing inspires the fearlessness needed to overwhelm the forces that wish to strip us of our dignity as individuals and rights as citizens.

As I learned following the murder of my close friend, we all have to make a decision. We will either ignore the crimes against the people who share our history or, like Antigone, regardless of the power and authority of those who terrorize our communities, we can fight. We can choose to place our best foot forward in order to protect our children from the oppressive institutions that will threaten their transcendence into adulthood. We can become more familiar with the beauty of black people and our history. If we do not fight for our own freedoms, then who will? Today, like yesterday, and with the rise of the morning sun, I choose to fight! Will you fight with me?

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