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SPECTACULAR PAIN: VIOLENCE AND THE WHITE GAZE IN AMERICAN COMMEMORATIVE CULTURE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of PhD in History, by:

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Abstract

Using case studies that range from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century in literature, photography, performance, and museums, this thesis examines how the white gaze has shaped commemorative representations of slavery and racial violence. Through mapping how visual representational tropes have rendered the Black body in pain a passive receptacle of violence to accommodate an audiences' emotional engagement, I argue that the foundation of commemorative practice's focus lies within white western notions of pain, power, and the body, which ultimately risks obfuscating African American lived and historical experience. Fundamentally, this study also considers how Black authors, artists, and activists have worked to respond to and challenge these representations.

I begin with an explication of how anti-slavery authors and artists in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries perpetuated white modes of looking at Black pain, before proceeding to trace the thread of representations following slavery and abolition that focus primarily on Black pain to emotionally engage with audiences. I interrogate photographic representations of slavery and racial violence, including the famous image of "Gordon" and his scarred back, James Allen and John Littlefield's *Without Sanctuary* collection, and the work of African American photographer J.P. Ball. I also examine reenactment performances including Colonial Williamsburg's 1994 reenacted slave auction, Conner Prairie's 'Follow the North Star' programme, Dread Scott's 'Slave Rebellion Reenactment', and the Moore's Ford lynching reenactment.

This research draws from observational research conducted at key museum and memorial sites, including the Whitney Plantation (2014), the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (2016), and the Equal Justice Initiative's National Memorial to Peace and Justice and Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration (2018). As the most recently established sites, these institutions provide an illuminating record of how far commemorative practice has come, and hint at new directions for its future. Ultimately, I advocate for commemorative sites to establish and prioritise explicit connections between slavery, the foundation of the US, and the impact of racial violence on present-day racial inequality. To do so, I highlight the importance of how commemorative sites in the present can draw inspiration from Black embodied acts of counter-narrative production to re-humanise their historical representations of Black enslaved and Black suffering bodies and free them from the constraints of the white gaze.

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List of Abbreviations

(AASS) American Anti-Slavery Society

(AAIPD) African American Interpretations and Presentations Department

(ABHM) America's Black Holocaust Museum

(ASA) Anti-Slavery Almanac

(BMM) Black Museum Movement

(CdV) Carte de Visite

(EJI) Equal Justice Initiative

(ESP) Ex-Slave Project

(FWP) Federal Writer's Project

(NAACP) The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

(NMAH) National Museum of American History

(NMAAHC) National Museum of African American History and Culture

(NMPJ) National Memorial to Peace and Justice

(SCLC) Southern Christian Leadership Conference

(SPLC) Southern Poverty Law Center

(UDC) United Daughters of the Confederacy

(UTC) Uncle Tom's Cabin

(USHMM) United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

(VVM) Vietnam Veteran's Memorial

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Introduction

Violence and the White Gaze in American Commemorative Culture

The power of looking has always been essential in producing, upholding, and challenging dominant racial and gendered hierarchies established by the system of chattel slavery in the United States. White control and surveillance of Blackness (and representations of Blackness) in the antebellum period functioned to sustain the dominant racial hierarchies established by the system of chattel slavery in America.[1] Within this system, violence and visibility simultaneously operated as crime, punishment, and mode of suppression. Active resistance from enslaved people through physical force or violence was punishable by death. Violence was therefore the punishment for violence. The public display of such violence was furthermore central to the performance of white supremacist justice. As historian Saidiya Hartman argues, 'the exercise of power was inseparable from its display because domination depended upon demonstrations of the slaveholder's domination and the captive's abasement'.[2] In other words, visual displays of violence against Black Americans often reproduced and therefore reinforced slavery's racial hierarchy. Black subjugation, then, was dependent upon white supremacy's dominant visual rhetoric of racial violence.

Visual displays of violence against Black Americans were also used by anti-slavery authors and activists as part of a rhetoric of protest against slavery. Anti-slavery texts and images displayed the gruesome details of slave torture to reveal the horrors of American

[1] In accordance and solidarity with Black scholars, activists, and allies, I prefer to capitalise the word 'Black' as a proper noun to acknowledge the social construction of racial identity and African-descended people's struggle for acceptance and recognition as citizens. I do not capitalise 'white' due to its historical and continued signification of social domination and privilege.

[2] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 7.

slavery to mass audiences and garner support for the cause. As Teresa A. Goddu's examination of the American Anti-Slavery Society's (AASS) visual culture shows, although the society's aim was to 'elevate the character and condition of people of colour', its main focus was conversion to the cause, and the most effective—and, primarily, affective—mode of conversion was sentimental and emotional appeals through representations of pained Black bodies.[3] Yet, this literary and visual trade in depictions of Black pain meant that enslaved people were seen primarily as pained, distorted, dehumanised bodies rather than individuals capable of action. Despite the intention of anti-slavery authors and artists to elicit emotional engagement with the plight of enslaved people from their audiences, they often rehearsed white supremacy's dominant visual rhetoric of racial violence. Even as they were used to champion equality, then, representations of Black pain not only reinforced racial hierarchies but re-inscribed those hierarchies upon racialised bodies. This dominant visual perspective is what critical race theorists have termed "the white gaze", a privileged mode of looking that views Blackness from the perspective of white European ethnocentrism.[4]

The complexities inherent in representing Black pain to past and present public audiences, when such representations risk reinforcing subjugation, promoting sentimentalism, and prioritising white identity and selfhood, demand a critical and in-depth examination. If visual displays of violence against Black Americans reproduced and therefore reinforced slavery's racial hierarchy in the eighteenth century, what is the significance of

[3] Teresa A. Goddu, *Selling Antislavery*: *Abolition and Mass Media in Antebellum America* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), p. 12.

[4] African American authors and activists such as Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison popularised the term 'the white gaze' as they challenged notions of an assumed white audience and resisted racist stereotypes of Black Americans. Morrison explained in a 2015 *The New York Times Magazine* interview 'What I'm interested in is writing without the gaze, without the white gaze […] what interested me was the African-American experience throughout whichever time I spoke of. It was always about African-American culture and people — good, bad, indifferent, whatever — but that was, for me, the universe'. Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, 'The Radical Vision of Toni Morrison', *The New York Times Magazine* (8th April, 2015), <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/magazine/the-radical-vision-of-toni-morrison.html?module=inline> [accessed 08/08/2022].

continued displays of Black pain in American visual culture? What meanings are produced when this imagery is displayed in commemorative settings which are intended to honour and remember victims of racial violence in America? Does the oft-represented spectacle of Black pain simply rehearse the dehumanising and objectifying white gaze? Is it possible for representations of Black pain to challenge and resist the dehumanising and objectifying white gaze? These are the questions that guide this study.

In answering these questions, this thesis argues that visual representations of Black pain in American culture are haunted by white supremacy, despite their incorporation into a rhetoric of protest against racial violence. Using case studies that range from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century in art, literature, photography, performance, historical reenactments, and museums, I examine the vicissitudes of looking at Black pain in public spaces. I interrogate how representations of slavery and racial violence in American visual culture, despite being intended to emotionally engage audiences' sympathies with Black suffering, were controlled and defined by the white gaze. I further identify through my case studies how the white gaze has shaped commemorative practice when it comes to representing the history of slavery and racial violence in the present. By highlighting the thread of representations of racial violence following slavery and abolition in American visual culture, I reveal how commemorative sites often rely upon a visual cultural archive that perpetuates white modes of looking at Black pain.

Fundamentally, this thesis also highlights representations of Black resistance and empowerment in past and present American visual cultures. For, as long as the white gaze has covertly or brazenly portrayed Blackness as abased and subjugated, there have been those who have challenged, subverted, and resisted such representations. In the nineteenth century, Black authors, artists, and social activists adopted but also critiqued anti-slavery visual rhetoric by shifting and re-purposing dominant modes of sentimental representation to

challenge the white gaze. Formerly enslaved and free Black Americans worked to subvert popular tropes and methods in literature, illustration, photography, and performance to centre Black subjectivity, humanity, and activism. This work continues today, in a commemorative landscape saturated by the proliferation of images of Black pain in global visual media. I therefore emphasise the centrality of what Black Atlantic historian Alan Rice has called African American 'guerilla memory', as interventionist forms of resistance against white supremacist rhetoric.[5] This thesis thus demonstrates, through its exploration of Black embodied acts of counter-narrative production, how commemorative sites in the present can work to re-humanise their historical representations of Black enslaved and Black suffering bodies and free them from the constraints of the white gaze.

*

As a study of representations of slavery and racial violence at commemorative sites, this thesis draws upon scholarship from across African American studies, memory studies, and history. I label my case studies as 'commemorative sites', though not all of them are geographical spaces. My adoption of this term is inspired by Pierre Nora's 1984 *Les Lieux de Memoire*, which heralded a wave of scholarly engagement with history and memory that shaped the field of study to which this thesis contributes.[6] Nora investigated constructions of French national identity across 'sites' that included memorials and museums as well as public ceremonies and historical figures. His work vitally traced the 'perpetual reuse and misuse' of the past in the present to examine how identities were built, altered, solidified, and challenged over time through the creation of visual and symbolic sites of memory.[7] By examining how the white gaze has shaped American representations of the past in the present, this thesis also

[5] Alan Rice, *Building Memorials, Creating Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 16.
[6] Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Memoire: Vol. 1 La Republique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).
[7] Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. xxiv.

looks to reveal how racial identities have been built, altered, solidified and challenged at commemorative sites.

This study is grounded in works which emerged as part of the global memory boom that followed Nora's theorisations in the late twentieth century. For example, David Lownethal's 1985 *The Past is a Foreign Country,* argued similarly to Nora that societies constructed their own pasts to meet the demands of the present.[8] Lowenthal examined a range of cultural media including films, oral narratives, and art as well as case studies from neuroscience, psychology, law, and time-travel fiction to explore how sites of memory shape personal and national identity. In keeping with Nora and Lowenthal's approaches, the case studies in this thesis encompass a diverse array of commemorative sites and range from literature, art, photography, reenactment, performance, museum exhibits, and memorials to navigate the complexities inherent in how the past is re-presented in the present.

Investigations into the relationship between history and memory in the late twentieth century initially developed in the field of Holocaust studies. James E. Young's *The Texture of Memory*, perhaps one of the most influential studies on Holocaust memorialisation, convincingly argued that commemorative sites 'take on lives of their own' as new meanings are recurringly generated and re-generated by audiences in the present.[9] Like Nora, Young contended that 'public memory is constructed, that understanding of events depends on memory's construction, and that there are worldly consequences in the kinds of historical understanding generated by memorials'.[10] This thesis adopts Young's approach by investigating the meanings generated for and by audiences at my chosen sites and reflecting

[8] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
[9] James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 3.
[10] Ibid., p. 15.

upon the worldly consequences commemorative representations of slavery and racial violence have in the present.

The abundance of scholarly engagement with Holocaust history and memory in the late twentieth century led to a renewed interest in the memory of other traumatic histories. As scholars, writers, and activists began to investigate how the US remembered slavery, they uncovered a deeply flawed and complex relationship that had so far yielded very few memorials, museums, or other commemorative sites. Though the Black Museum Movement of the 1960s and 1970s precipitated the establishment of a small handful of spaces that commemorated the history of slavery in the US, including the DuSable museum in Chicago, IL, the International Afro-American Museum in Detroit, MI, and the Anacostia Museum in Washington, D.C, these institutions were few in number and significantly under-resourced.[11] When Toni Morrison famously remarked in a 1989 interview that there were no sites in America where people could go 'to think about or not think about, to summon the presence of, or recollect the absences of slaves', she captured the essence of the contemporary commemorative landscape in which the history of slavery and racial violence had been marginalised in order to accommodate a national narrative that prioritised freedom, strength, and democracy.[12]

The 1990s consequently saw a wave of commemorative projects related to the history of slavery, including UNESCO's "Routes of Enslaved Peoples: Resistance, Liberty and Heritage" Project, which sought to 'break the silence' surrounding the history and legacies of slavery.[13] The Library of Congress, the National Museum of American History, and Colonial

[11] Derrick R. Brooms, 'Lest We Forget: Exhibiting (and Remembering) Slavery in African-American Museums', *Journal of African American Studies,* Vol. 15 (2011), p. 509.
[12] 'Bench By the Road Project', The Official Website of the Toni Morrison Society, <https://www.tonimorrisonsociety.org/bench.html> [accessed 30/08/2022].
[13] 'Routes of Enslaved Peoples', *UNESCO* Website, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/fostering-rights-inclusion/slaveroute#:~:text=Since%20its%20launch%20in%201994,abolition%20and%20the%20resistance%20it> [accessed 08/08/2022].

Williamsburg also introduced histories of slavery into their programmes and exhibits in the late 1980s and 1990s.[14] Historians, sociologists, geographers, and other memory studies scholars have since traced the 'perpetual reuse and misuse' of the history of slavery at sites of memory in the US.

Naturally, the memory of slavery and the Civil War received a lot of attention. Jim Cullen's 1995 monograph *The Civil War in Popular Culture: A Reusable Past* uncovered the transformation of Civil War history into a sacralised national myth which in turn shaped American collective memory of the war.[15] Early twenty-first-century studies such as David Blight's *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* published in 2001 and Will Kaufman's 2006 *The Civil War in American Culture* explored how white American identity was solidified through the segregation of Black and white memory of the causes and consequences of the Civil War, which manifested in various commemorative sites including symbols, memorials, films, literature, and virtual gaming.[16] Similarly, Kirk Savage's *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* examined how the history of the Civil War was told through public memorials.[17] Savage argued that, although 'race was not always discussed' as memorials to Civil War heroes were designed and created, 'it was always there, at the most basic level of visual representation, the human body'.[18] Through its focus on representations of Black pain, this thesis combines Blight, Kaufman, and Savage's findings to interrogate how racial identities

[14] Brooms, 'Lest We Forget', p. 509.
[15] Jim Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture: A Reusable Past* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).
[16] David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Will Kaufman, *The Civil War in American Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).
[17] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).
[18] Ibid., 209.

have been constructed, segregated, and solidified across a diverse array of commemorative sites through displays of Black bodily suffering.

Representations of slavery have been interrogated in museum spaces as well as monuments and memorials. David Butler's 2001 'Whitewashing Plantations: The Commodification of a Slave-Free Antebellum South' was among the first studies on representations of slavery at plantation museums.[19] Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small's *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*, which analysed 122 plantations across Louisiana, Georgia, and Virginia, followed closely behind.[20] Butler, Eichstedt, and Small found that southern plantation museums excluded the history of slavery in favour of providing more appealing and desirable heritage experiences for white visitors. These sites thus worked to construct and solidify white identities in the same way as the segregation of the history of the Civil War. My analysis of how plantation museums have navigated the difficulties inherent in representing racial violence is necessarily indebted to Butler, Eichstedt and Small's work on representational strategies and identity formation at plantation museum sites.

Representations of slavery at living history sites and in historical reenactments have received some attention from scholars, though not as much as those in museum and memorial studies. Eric Handler and Richard Gable's study on Colonial Williamsburg published in 1997 is an indispensable text which investigated how the site's historical programming blurred the lines between education and entertainment, nostalgic patriotism and revisionism. Handler and Gable conducted site visits, interviews with employees and visitors, and archival research across 1990-1991 to uncover the complex messages Colonial Williamsburg's visitors took

[19] David Butler, 'Whitewashing Plantations: The Commodification of a Slave-Free Antebellum South', *International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration*, 2:3 (2001): 163-175.
[20] Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).

away from the site. Their study concluded that representations of slavery were often sidelined due to white interpreters' fears of presenting a history that was 'undocumented' or that slave perspectives were 'sandwiched' between narratives that celebrated white historical figures.[21]

Patrick Hagopian's study 'Race and the Politics of Public History', published in Grey Gundaker's 1998 edited collection *Keep Your Head to the Sky: Interpreting African American Home Ground,* explored Colonial Williamsburg's 1994 reenactment of a slave auction. Hagopian's study posed questions that not only resonate with my own analysis of Colonial Williamsburg's reenactment but which also shape my analytical approach to other case studies in this thesis: 'What would protect the history displayed from trivialization, from being a mere curiosity, from being sentimentalized, from being rendered spectacular?'[22] My thesis recognises the urgency of these questions and applies them to other representations of slavery and racial violence in commemorative performances and exhibits that seek to educate and to entertain. I also situate my analysis of Colonial Williamsburg's reenacted slave auction alongside slavery reenactment performances from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century to highlight the influence of anti-slavery visual culture and shed further light on how the racial identities of participants and audience members complicate the narratives created at these sites in the present.

More recently, sociologists, anthropologists, and theatre studies scholars have published studies on reenactments and performances that take slavery and racial violence as their central subject matter. Performance studies scholar Scott Magelssen investigated audience experiences of Conner Prairie's 'Follow the North Star' Underground Railroad reenactment programme, whilst anthropologist Mark Auslander and art historian Dora Apel

[21] Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

[22] Patrick Hagopian, 'Race and the Politics of Public History in the United States', in Grey Gundaker (ed), *Keep Your Head to the Sky: Interpreting African American Home Ground* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1998), p. 282.

have explored reenactment performances of slave auctions and the Moore's Ford lynching reenactment.[23] Literature scholar Megan Eatman and Communication and Theatre Studies scholars Susan A. Owen and Peter Ehrenhaus have also brought literary and performance analysis techniques to the Moore's Ford reenactment.[24] My own analysis of the Moore's Ford lynching reenactment in Chapter Five of this thesis brings these multi-disciplinary discussions together with audience and participant accounts to consider how Moore's Ford navigates representing the violent murder of four African Americans in 1946 Georgia whilst resisting and challenging the white gaze.

Of course, public representations of lynching in American visual culture have their own history. Anti-lynching activists such as Ida B. Wells and cartoonists working in the Black press during the heyday of spectacle lynching at the turn of the twentieth century were the first to present, discuss, and commemorate victims of mob violence as early as 1892, the year that Wells published her pamphlet *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its Phases.* Wells argued that white southerners used falsified claims of rape to justify the murder of Black men. In 1895, Wells also published *The Red Record,* a longer pamphlet that documented the history of racial inequality from the end of the Civil War and provided detailed accounts of several lynchings taken primarily from white newspapers. In the mid twentieth century, Ralph

[23] Scott Magelssen, '"This Is a Drama. You Are Characters": The Tourist as Fugitive Slave in Conner Prairie's "Follow the North Star"', *Theatre Topics*, 16:1 (2006): 19-36; Dora Apel, 'Violence and Historical Reenactment: From the American Civil War to the Moore's Ford Lynching', in Jurgen Martschukat and Silvan Niedermeier Silvan (eds), *Violence and Visibility in Modern History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 241-261; Mark Auslander, 'Contesting the Roadways: The Moore's Ford Lynching Reenactment and a Confederate Flag Rally, July 25, 2015', *Southern Spaces* (19th August 2015), <https://southernspaces.org/2015/contesting-roadways-moores-ford-lynching-reenactment-and-confederate-flag-rally-july-25-2015/> [accessed 06/05/2020]; Auslander, '"Holding on to Those Who Can't Be Held": Reenacting a Lynching at Moore's Ford, Georgia', *Southern Spaces* (8th November, 2010), <https://southernspaces.org/2010/holding-those-who-cant-be-held-reenacting-lynching-moores-ford-georgia/> [accessed 06/05/2020]; Auslander, 'Touching the Past: Materializing Time in Traumatic "Living History" Reenactments', *Signs and Society,* 1:1 (2013): 161-183; Auslander, 'Driving into the Light: Traversing Life and Death in a Lynching Reenactment by African-Americans in a Multi-racial Setting', in David Lipset and Richard Handler (eds), *Vehicles: Cars, Canoes, and Other Metaphors of Moral Imagination* (New York: Berghahn, 2014): 178-194.

[24] Susan Owen and Peter Ehrenhaus, 'The Moore's Ford Lynching Reenactment: Affective Memory and Race Trauma', *Text and Performance Quarterly,* Vol. 34 (2014): 72-90; Megan Eatman, 'Loss and Lived Memory at the Moore's Ford Lynching Reenactment', *Advances in the History of Rhetoric,* 20:2 (2017): 153-66.

Ginzburg's *100 Years of Lynching* used a similar tactic, printing hundreds of newspaper reports on lynchings across the US.[25] W. Fitzhugh Brundage's *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*, published in 1993, was one of the first academic studies that extensively analysed lynchings.[26] Brundage demonstrated how lynching often varied across regions and argued that mob violence was a social ritual used to reaffirm white southern identity in the Reconstruction era.

Memory scholars began to engage with lynching's visual archive in the early twenty-first century. Commemorative representations of lynching have received less attention from scholars than those of slavery and the civil war, yet there are several key texts which have been central to this study. Jacqueline Goldsby, Dora Apel, Jonathan Markovitz, and Sherrilyn Ifill have produced studies on representations of lynching in literature, memorials, photography, film, performance, and art.[27] These scholars focused on how white controlled representations of lynchings in popular visual media contributed to the dehumanisation and criminalisation of African American men. Recently, though, historians have shown that victims of lynchings also included Jews, Mexicans, and Latin Americans.[28] Furthermore, the lynchings of African American women, having been largely obscured from the beginning, have only recently received detailed and sustained scholarly attention. Julie Buckner

[25] Ralph Ginzberg, *100 Years of Lynching* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1962).
[26] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press).
[27] Jaqueline Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Sherrilyn A. Ifill, *On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the Twenty-First Century* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2007).
[28] Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West: 1850–1935* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2006); Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

Armstrong's study *Mary Turner and the Memory of Lynching* has carefully traced and uncovered the history and memory of one of the most well-known female lynching victims.[29]

More recently, Koritha Mitchell's *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* examined African American women's responses to lynchings in literature and domestic spaces.[30] Bringing together theatre and performance studies with the history and memory of lynching, Mitchell highlights the importance of Black theatre as an embodied practice that resisted the narrative of Black criminality created by lynching photographs. Mitchell's analysis of lynching plays, primarily written by Black women including Angelina Weld Grimke and Alice Dunbar Nelson, highlights the centrality of Black feminist thought in contemporary challenges to white supremacist representations of African American citizens in the twentieth century.

Indeed, Black feminist theories that focus on the inextricable connections between racial violence and representation underpin the entirety of this thesis. Saidiya Hartman's previously cited argument in *Scenes of Subjection* that 'representing power was essential to reproducing domination' has also been explored by Black feminist scholars including bell hooks and Hortense Spillers. hooks's *Black Looks: Race and Representation* examines the damaging effect of the white gaze in popular visual culture, primarily in film but also in literature, television, and music.[31] Criticising both the male-centered gaze and the white gaze as repressive modes of looking that objectify Black women, she highlights how the power of looking reifies racial and gendered hierarchies. hooks argues that popular forms of visual media create 'paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but

[29] Julie Buckner Armstrong, *Mary Turner and the Memory of Lynching* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011).
[30] Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012).
[31] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992).

denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualisation'.[32] In other words, white consumption of representations of Blackness—which often commodify, sexualise, and dehumanise Black subjects—displaces and eradicates Black subjectivity. White consumption of Black historical pain therefore reestablishes white supremacist understandings of race whilst strengthening traditional understandings of white subjectivity as the universal norm.

There are thus a set of risks that result from publicly re-presenting Black pain in commemorative settings that this thesis explores in further detail. First, that reducing Black people's experience of historical violence to representations of pained Black bodies risks perpetuating the power dynamic established by chattel slavery. If, as Hartman argues, representing power was essential to reproducing domination, it follows that representing powerlessness within that same hierarchical framework reinforces that same domination. Hartman's formulation that reducing the Black body to evidence of slavery 'reinforces the "thingly" quality of the captive body' and 'reproduces the hyperembodiness of the powerless' informs this study's approach to the problem of what it means to look at representations of Black pain in public commemorative spaces through the white gaze.[33]

Hortense Spillers's work similarly accounts for the ways that representing physical powerlessness may 'slide… into a more general powerlessness that resonates through various centres of human and social meaning'.[34] She identifies the 'flesh' in African American studies as the 'primary narrative' of embodiment, the 'zero degree of social conceptualisation' that is divested of gender, subjectivity, and, ultimately, humanity.[35] Her focus on how enslaved women were subjected to processes of objectification and sexualisation that simultaneously

[32] Ibid. Original emphasis.
[33] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* p. 19.
[34] Hortense Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book', *Diacritics*, 17:2 (1987), p. 67.
[35] Ibid.

de-subjectified Black women and reinforced the subjectivity of white enslavers works in conjunction with hooks's examination of the same processes in popular culture to demonstrate the longevity of the commodifying and dehumanizing white gaze.

My focus on representations of violence, then, in which power relations are reified by acts of physical torture against Black bodies, allows a deeper engagement with the risks that result from representing Black pain in commemorative settings. Where Hartman refuses to recall or examine scenes that exploit the 'shocking spectacle' of violence which haunts slavery's visual culture due to the racialised hierarchies perpetuated by white-centered engagements with Black enslaved suffering, this thesis takes the 'shocking spectacle' of violence as its focus. This focus allows me to explore how such representations have come to shape America's national historical narrative and to interrogate how audiences respond to them in the present.

Though Hartman's approach is intended as both a solution to the problem of perpetuating powerlessness and a challenge to the white gaze, it also means that her analysis fails to critically engage with a visual cultural archive that has had a profound impact upon how the US represents slavery in commemorative settings and popular culture. Furthermore, Hartman's refusal to represent spectacular violence fails to account for the potential of such representations to signify Black strength and resistance. Therefore, whilst I respect Hartman's decision and agree with the rationale behind her approach, this study takes representations of the 'shocking' spectacle of Black pain as its focus to highlight how the white gaze has shaped commemorative practice's representations of slavery and racial violence and how such representations may risk the commodification, desubjectification, and dehumanization that Hartman, hooks, and Spillers have identified.

To examine how the white gaze has shaped commemorative practice's approach to representing slavery and racial violence, I engage with the work of historians of anti-slavery visual culture and memory, including Marcus Wood, Karen Halttunen, and Carol Lasser. These scholars have demonstrated how anti-slavery authors and artists contributed to emerging literary and visual cultures to appeal to a primarily white audience in a way that perpetuated white modes of looking at Black pain. Wood's *Blind Memory* and *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography* both devote significant attention to representations of violence, exploring how the anti-slavery movement used pained Black bodies to establish a visual framework that presented enslaved people as passive objects as opposed to active subjects.[36]

Like Hartman, Wood demonstrates that the lines between power, pleasure, and pain, were far from distinct in anti-slavery culture. Though Wood's focus in *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography* is on English literature, his exploration of the emergence of Evangelicalism, Pornography, and the Cult of Sentimentality alongside Abolitionism offers detailed insight into the relationship between power, pleasure, and emotional engagement. Karen Halttunen's 1995 study 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture' provides a more detailed analysis of the relationship between pornography and anti-slavery representations of slavery.[37] Carol Lasser's later conceptualisation of the term 'voyeuristic abolitionism' thus captures the scopophilic nature of visual representations of enslaved bodies as a result of the sentimental and pornographic influences of antislavery discourses examined by Wood and Halttunen.[38] However, where Wood, Halttunen, and Lasser have analysed how power, pleasure, and pain were interwoven in British and American art and literature of the

[36] Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (Manchester: Routledge, 1999), and *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
[37] Karen Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture', *The American Historical Review*, 100:2 (1995): 303-334.
[38] Carol Lasser, 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Antislavery Rhetoric', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 28:1 (2008): 83-114.

nineteenth century, this study broadens the scope of these projects by pursuing the thread of representations of slavery and racial violence in commemorative practice since Emancipation and into the twenty-first century.

My study also considers how Black authors, artists, and activists have responded to and challenged these representations. Debra Walker King and Harvey Young have both explored how pain has been used by Black authors and activists in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries by analysing representations in oral histories, novels, films, television shows, plays, photography, sport, performance, and museum exhibitions. King draws from Spillers's work to argue that 'the Black body is always a memorial to African and African American historical pain', contending that US popular culture at once denies and colludes with 'a value-laden social hierarchy that commodifies the pained Black body'.[39] She argues that 'Black bodies have a history of being the most "visible" objects for pain's public consumption'.[40] King examines films including *Glory* (1989), *Rosewood* (1997), *The Green Mile* (1999), and *Jasper, Texas* (2003) to examine how American visual culture 'naturalise[s] the negative symbolic capital of Black bodies in pain'.[41] She further interrogates how Black authors and social activists such as Audre Lord, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and Ralph Ellison, have used representations of Black pain to resist and challenge 'both racist constructions of Black bodies in pain and America's everyday acceptance and simultaneous denial of white-nation sociodicy'.[42]

King's formulation of the Black body as a memorial to African American historical pain in American culture is echoed by Young's contention that 'Black bodies in the twenty-first century, continue to share in the experiences of their ancestors who were viewed as

[39] Debra Walker King, *African Americans and the Culture of Pain* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008), p. 6.
[40] Ibid., p. 15.
[41] Ibid., p. 18.
[42] Ibid.

"other"'.[43] '[T]he Black body', he says, 'whether on the auction block, the American plantation, hanged from a lightpole as part of a lynching ritual, attacked by police dogs within the civil rights era, or staged as a "criminal body" by contemporary law enforcement and judicial systems, is a body that has been forced into the public spotlight and given a compulsory visibility. *It has been made to be given to be seen'*.[44]

However, the only in-depth engagement with commemorative representations of the past in these two studies is Young's discussion of America's Black Holocaust Museum (ABHM). Dr James Cameron, a lynching survivor, opened the museum in Milwaukee, WI, in 1988 to commemorate the men, women, and children who were lynched in nineteenth-and twentieth-century America. Cameron's museum was unique, however, in that the star exhibit was—according to Young—Cameron himself.[45] The museum founder's retelling of the story of how he managed to escape the mob who lynched his two friends Abram Smith and Thomas Shipp in Marion, Indiana, in 1930, was embedded in the museum's tour. Cameron's role at the Black Holocaust museum as a literal body of evidence—a role Cameron played until his death in 2006—underscored how the Black body functions as a 'repository of Black memory and historical experience'.[46] Visitors to the ABHM, which was itself a rare late-twentieth-century example of an American museum dedicated solely to the commemoration of racial violence, experienced a 'special encounter with living history', according to today's virtual museum.[47] This idea of an experientially oriented encounter grew alongside the rise in popularity of historical performances and living history experiences across the US in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. Lisa Woolfork calls this mode of visitor experience 'bodily

[43] Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010), p. 4. Original emphasis.
[44] Ibid., p. 12. Emphasis added.
[45] The role of storyteller was, in later years, occupied by Cameron's grandson.
[46] Ibid., p. 25.
[47] 'About ABHM', America's Black Holocaust Museum, <https://www.abhmuseum.org/about/> [accessed 23/07/2021]. The physical ABHM site closed in 2008. The virtual 'America's Black Holocaust Museum' went live on 25th of February, 2012, the anniversary of Dr James Cameron's birthday.

epistemology', in which the body becomes a 'means [through which] to cultivate knowledge and understanding'.[48]

To further investigate the cultivation of knowledge and understanding at my chosen commemorative sites, this thesis incorporates, where possible, audience responses to commemorative representations of racial violence. I investigate audience response through multiple methods. I analyse written responses in the form of blog posts, social media posts, news articles, academic reviews, and tourist reviews. I also undertook observational research at several of my case study sites: the Whitney Plantation and Oak Alley Plantation in Louisiana and the Equal Justice Initiative's (EJI) National Memorial to Peace and Justice (NMPJ) and Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration in Montgomery, AL, in Autumn 2018; and the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) in Washington, D.C., in early 2020. Sourcing these materials and observing rather than intervening in audience engagement at these sites allowed me to analyse natural responses and examine how viewers interacted not only with visual representations of slavery and racial violence but with the spaces constructed around them.

My methodological approach is primarily guided by Michael Rothberg's formulation of memory as multi-directional: 'as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing'.[49] Rothberg contends that memory work should focus on 'both agents and sites of memory, and especially on their interaction with specific historical and political contexts of struggle and contention'.[50] Separable neither from history or representation, Rothberg writes, 'memory nonetheless captures simultaneously the individual, embodied, and lived

[48] Lisa Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p. 131.
[49] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 3.
[50] Ibid.

side *and* the collective, social and constructed side of our relations to the past'.[51] Thus, in identifying how anti-slavery representations of Black pain contributed to and rehearsed the dominant white gaze and proceeding to uncover how these representations have been borrowed, negotiated, and cross-referenced at commemorative sites in the present, this thesis reveals the multi-directionality of the memory of slavery and racial violence in American visual and commemorative culture. Furthermore, by incorporating reenactment and performance art as sites of memory and examining audience and visitor responses to my chosen case studies, this thesis takes both 'agents' and 'sites' of memory as its focus and simultaneously captures individual, embodied, collective, social, and constructed relationships to the past.

As with all studies that analyse audience response, there are some initial issues that must be considered. Firstly, one must always err on the side of caution when relying on what informants say about their own or others' emotional states; particularly when they involve violence or trauma, the effects of which are still a source of pain in the present. There must be room for the distortions and discrepancies that are, inevitably, either altered or lost in translation. Furthermore, though it may sound rather obvious to state that audiences in the present do not witness commemorations to racial violence in the same way historical subjects would have witnessed the real thing—for which reason an awareness of historical audiences is essential—it is crucial to remember that when witnessing these visual displays of violence individual audience members bring with them their own mnemonic tools and frameworks which will shape their interpretation of what is seen. In his investigation of the idealistic dimension of modern consumption, Colin Campbell called the consumer 'an artist of the imagination', someone who actively rearranges images from memory or their immediate

[51] Ibid., p. 4.

environment so as to render them more suitable to their needs.[52] The same must be said of any audience to visual stimulations, and it is vital that this is kept in mind when one is speaking of collective audience responses.[53]

Thus, though the scope of this project in timeframe and source material is vast, it reflects the dynamic and intricate nature of memory, which does not manifest primarily in any one form nor remain static in any historical moment, but which continually evolves, expands, and diversifies. It is my hope that the diversity of my case studies allows for an incorporation of many larger arguments around the importance of public representations of slavery and racial violence relating to how popular forms of visual commemorative representations came to be established, why they were popularised, and how they have been received by audiences.

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This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter One builds upon the work of Hartman, Halttunen, and Lasser to highlight how anti-slavery authors and artists in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries adopted and contributed to popular literary and visual cultural tropes to appeal to a primarily white audience in a way that perpetuated white modes of looking at Black pain.[54] It brings these scholars' work together to demonstrate how tropes established by pornography, gothic horror, and sentimentalism all contributed to a 'voyeuristic' anti-slavery visual culture that positioned pained Black bodies as sites and sights of pain under the white gaze. I argue that the masking of the impulse to eroticise, objectify, and dehumanise in the name of sympathetic and emotional engagement with the plight of enslaved people laid

[52] Colin Campbell, 'Consuming Goods and the Good of Consuming', *Critical Review*, 8:4 (1994), p. 510.
[53] Ibid.

the foundations for a commemorative and popular culture that paradoxically foregrounded spectacular representations of Black pain both to bolster white supremacy and challenge it.

This paradox remains the focus of the second chapter, which examines photographs taken by racial scientists, abolitionists, and African American activists in the nineteenth century to reveal how photography's dialectical nature created liminal spaces in which the white gaze could be reaffirmed or challenged. Drawing inspiration from Susan Sontag's *On Photography,* I highlight the inherently complex nature of the photographic medium as one that is subjected to constant shifts in interpretations and re-interpretations which are often at odds with one another. The images of Alfred, Jem, Fassena, Jack, Drana, Renty, and Delia taken in 1850 under the direction of biologist and geologist Louis Agassiz demonstrate the 'desirable and detestable' nature of Black pain as seen through the white gaze that the first chapter identifies in popular visual vocabularies. Furthermore, my examination of the *carte-de-visite* of Private Gordon's scarred back from 1864 highlights how white controlled representations of slavery risked the homogenisation of Black lived experience in favour of a redemptive narrative from slavery to freedom that will come back to haunt the discussion of the NMAAHC in the final chapter. The dialectical nature of photography and the opposing responses that representations of murdered Black Americans elicited also dominates my discussion of spectacle lynching in the second half of the chapter. I examine how white supremacists used lynching photographs and postcards to celebrate and justify the murder of Black citizens whilst Black activists subverted these representations to highlight white barbarity. My analysis of the work of J.P. Ball further demonstrates how Black photographers deconstructed dominant narratives of lynchings established by perpetrators and introduced narratives of life, loss, strength, and resistance into their visual representations of lynchings.

The introduction of narratives of strength and resistance in the face of slavery in the past and continued racial violence in the present is central to the following discussion of

slavery reenactments in Chapter Three. My analysis of Henry Ward Beecher's reenacted slave auctions in the 1830s provide further insight into how pornographic and sentimental literary tropes shaped anti-slavery tactics, which in turn influenced modern commemorative performances, including Colonial Williamsburg's 1994 reenacted slave auction and Conner Prairie's 'Follow the North Star' programme. I analyse the experiences of both Black and white participants of 'Follow the North Star' to highlight how the racial identities of participants and audience members complicate the narratives created at these sites. Yet, the chapter also identifies how performances such as a reenacted slave auction at Charleston in South Carolina in 1865 and performance artist Dread Scott's 'Slave Rebellion Reenactment' in November 2019 provided the opportunity for African Americans to participate in embodied acts of counter-narrative production that challenged the white gaze and white rhetorical control over representations of enslaved suffering. The Dread Scott reenactment in particular emphasises the importance of connecting the past to the present to move away from displays of spectacular violence that privilege white modes of looking at Black pain. In light of this finding, Chapter Four provides a critical examination of the Whitney Plantation's representations of slavery. When it opened its doors to the public in December 2014, the Whitney Plantation—as the first plantation museum dedicated solely to representing the history of slavery—was hailed as 'America's Auschwitz', a phrase first attributed to Mitch Landrieu, who was then Mayor of New Orleans.[55] I highlight where the site's reliance on visual tropes shaped by anti-slavery visual culture limits its potential to forge connections between slavery and present racial violence. My critical analysis is aided by observational research conducted in 2018 that provided exclusive insight into visitor responses elicited by Whitney's memorials and tour.

[55] Jared Keller, 'Inside America's Auschwitz', Smithsonian Magazine (4th April, 2016), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/inside-americas-auschwitz-180958647/> [accessed 10/05/2018].

My analysis of the Moore's Ford lynching reenactment in Chapter Five corroborates the findings in the third and fourth chapters. I argue that the power of the reenactment lies in the fact that the performance is representative not only of the lynchings of George and Mae Dorsey and Roger and Dorothy Malcom in 1946 but of victims of police brutality and white terrorism in the present. To analyse the reenactment itself, I draw from accounts by Babington, Owen and Ehrenhaus, and Auslander, who each attended—and, in Babington's case, participated in—the reenactments in 2006 and 2008 respectively.[56] Bringing together these audience and participant responses for the first time, I argue that Moore's Ford, despite its incorporation of spectacular violence, allows reenactors and spectators to work through historical trauma by occupying and performing within spaces of loss. I show that the decision made by organisers in recent years to dedicate Moore's Ford's to victims of police brutality and white terrorism including Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and the 'Charleston nine'—the nine African American victims of a white supremacist mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina on June 17, 2015—the reenactment wrenches the past forward to confront audiences in the present with the realities of racial violence in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, by incorporating the ritual removal of an unborn Black child from the Black mother's womb—a performative act that evokes, if not directly replicates, the lynching of Mary Turner in Lowndes County, GA, in 1918—the Moore's Ford reenactment fortifies connections between twentieth century lynchings and racial violence in the present.

The sixth and final chapter is a comparative study of the Smithsonian's NMAAHC in Washington, D.C, opened in September 2016, and the Equal Justice Initiative's Legacy Museum and the accompanying NMPJ, the first national memorial to the victims of lynching

[56] Owen and Ehrenhaus, 'The Moore's Ford Lynching Reenactment'; Auslander, 'Contesting the Roadways'; '"Holding on to Those Who Can't Be Held"'; Mary Babington, 'Moore's Ford: A Site and Space of Praxis', *Radical History Review* (2008): 32-34.

in the US, opened in Montgomery, AL, in April 2018. The chapter argues that these two institutions carry two distinct narratives which shape how their representations of violence are perceived: from slavery to freedom, and from slavery to mass incarceration. The former, whose main influence can be identified in the Black Museum Movement of the mid-twentieth century, emphasises uplift and progress through time. The NMAAHC ultimately instils a 'feel-good' narrative that celebrates African American contributions and achievements. The EJI is the opposite, drawing upon tropes used in Holocaust memorialisation and the commemoration of genocide to emphasise how slavery's evolution has left many African Americans incarcerated or dead. I use materials produced by both the NMAAHC and the EJI to guide visitors through each site, as well as reviews, articles, and lived responses recorded during observational research conducted in October 2018 (EJI) and early 2020 (NMAAHC). I ultimately show that, whereas the NMAAHC frames its representations of slavery and lynching as part of a 'dark' and turbulent past that is ultimately transcended by visitors as they move their way upwards through the museum, the EJI presents racial violence as a continuum in a way which foregrounds both the violence against Black bodies in the present as an evolution of the past and the strength of African American resistance, those who endured and continue to endure violence and inequality.

This dissertation is a combined product of cultural, performance, and memory studies in that it interrogates both the visual vocabularies which set the framework for commemorative representations of slavery and racial violence and the response that these representations elicit from audiences. I aim to bring visual media and cultural memory together through my case studies to paint a broader picture than historical and social boundaries allow. In adopting a methodology inspired by the multidirectionality of memory, I can move across and between the vast landscapes of American history to draw connections between visual representations of Black suffering across and throughout the eighteenth,

nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, showing how commemorative practice also often negotiates, cross-references, and borrows from a dynamic historical visual culture that is at once historically grounded yet interminably mutable. This bigger-picture narrative is fundamentally important as historians excavate more data, texts, materials, and sites to meet the ever-increasing engagement with Black history. Even more immediate is the need to contextualise, interrogate, and critically examine visual representations of Black pain in visual media in the wake of the global *#BlackLivesMatter* protests and the highly publicised deaths of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020, Daunte White in 2021, and countless other victims of continued racial violence and inequality.

Chapter 1

A 'most terrible spectacle': Anti-slavery Visual Culture and the White Gaze

In this first chapter, I highlight how anti-slavery authors and artists adopted popular literary and visual cultural tropes shaped by the sentimentalist movement in Western Europe. I demonstrate how this adoption perpetuated racist visual hierarchies by using representations of Black pain to emotionally engage primarily white western audiences. I begin with an examination of how anti-slavery texts such as Hector St. John de Crevecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Year's Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796), Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), and Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) adopted popular tropes from sentimentalism, gothic horror, and pornography to contribute to what Carol Lasser has called 'voyeuristic abolitionism'.[1] In the final stages of this chapter, I turn my attention to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) to argue that Stowe's representations of enslaved women exemplifies how pained Black bodies were presented to at once horrify and enthral white audiences.[2]

The literary and cultural phenomenon of sentimentalism originated in eighteenth-century Europe with the cult of sensibility, a movement which heralded emotional response as a signifier of a civilised and virtuous nature. The movement was influenced by the Lockian psychology of sensation, the idea that all knowledge comes from sensory experience, as well

[1] Carol Lasser, 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Antislavery Rhetoric', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 28:1 (2008): 83-114.
[2] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* edited by Elizabeth Ammons for W.W Norton & Company (New York: Norton, 1994). Hereafter *UTC.*

as the moral-sense philosophies developed by Locke's followers. Moral-sense philosophy proposed that one's morality may be demonstrated and cultivated through emotional responses to one's experiences. Thus, moral-sense philosophy sutured Locke's psychology of sensation to sentimentality, irrevocably intertwining moral education with emotional experience. The belief that one's feelings were the most important intellectual and moral guide was therefore at the heart of the cult of sensibility, as heeding one's emotional response became the best way to lead a civil and virtuous existence. The "man of feeling"—an emotional individual whose capacity for compassionate response was his primary quality and who therefore allowed his feelings to guide his judgement—was thus heralded as the hero of the cult of sensibility.[3] For those who adhered to sentimentalist principles, the most effective way to exercise and demonstrate one's moral compassion was through a response to the suffering of others.

For this reason, representations of suffering abounded in sentimentalist literature. As historian Karen Halttunen writes, artworks produced by the sentimentalist movement offered 'tableau after tableau of pitiful suffering—scenes of poverty, imprisonment, slavery, the aftermath of war, tormented animals, women in distress—all aimed at arousing readers' spectatorial sympathy and thus enhancing (and demonstrating) their virtue'.[4] Spectatorial sympathy was thus by necessity 'a sentiment stirred primarily through sight'.[5] It called upon 'the powers of imagination' to encourage spectators to 'feel a likeness to the sufferer' put on show.[6] More importantly, it necessarily required the spectator to imagine how that suffering would make *them* feel before projecting that perceived experience back onto the body of the suffering other. Adam Smith, an eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher and political

[3] Karen Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture', *The American Historical Review*, 100:2 (1995), p. 303.
[4] Ibid., p. 303.
[5] Ibid., p. 305.
[6] Ibid., p. 307.

economist, described this process of engaging in spectatorial sympathy in his 1774 publication *The Theory of Moral Sentiments:*

> By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them…[7]

The concept from the outset was vulnerable to accusations that it was used primarily for the selfish reaffirmation of one's own sensitivity due to this process in which the spectator themselves become the subject of compassion. Smith addressed the claims of what he labelled a 'selfish principle' in the sixth edition of his text, published in 1790. His words are worth quoting in full:

> When I sympathize with your sorrow or your indignation, it may be pretended, indeed, that my emotion is founded in self-love, because it arises from bringing your case home to myself, from putting myself in your situation, and thence conceiving what I should feel in the like circumstances. But though sympathy is very properly said to arise from an *imaginary* change of situations with the persons principally concerned, yet this *imaginary* change is not supposed to happen to me in my own person and character, but in that of the person with whom I sympathize.[8]

Smith's words highlight the fundamental role of the imagination in sympathetic engagement. He claims that the imaginative capacity to project himself into another's situation is not evidence of selfishness but of self*less*ness, for the imaginary change he undertakes is not on behalf of himself but on another's. This is a vital distinction. According to Smith, as one is moved to feel sympathy in response to what they perceive as the suffering or pain of another, it is not necessarily the self that experiences the transformation. Individuals are seemingly not anchored to their own physical and emotional existence, but are able, via the imagination,

[7] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Or, An Essay Towards an Analysis of the Principles by which Men Naturally Judge Concerning the Conduct and Character, First of their Neighbours, and Afterwards of Themselves to which is Added, A Dissertation on the Origin of Languages* (Edinburgh, 1774), Fourth Edition, pp. 3-4.
[8] Ibid., p. 4.

to transcend the boundary between self and other in their experiences of another's suffering. They are able to feel what is not theirs.

This is precisely why proponents of the anti-slavery movement hoped that the sentimental rhetoric at the heart of their literary and visual strategy would do more than simply arouse compassionate feelings. Anti-slavery activists used sentimental rhetoric to instill in their audiences a desire to act, convert them to the anti-slavery cause, and compel them to actively campaign on behalf of the movement. Enslaved bodies became the primary vehicles of this representational strategy, as abolitionist tracts focused on depictions of violence on US plantations. Black bodies were thus offered up as sites and sights of spectacular pain for white consumption and emotional exploration. As we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, such visual displays of violence often reproduced and reinforced slavery's racial hierarchy. Hartman's assertion that visual demonstrations of slaveholder domination and captive abasement constituted an exercise of power and upheld white supremacy reveals the sentimentalist fascination with Black pain as paradoxical. Despite any good intentions behind anti-slavery representations of violence against Black enslaved people, the focus on pained Black bodies not only reaffirmed white domination through scenes of abasement as Hartman argues, but granted the right to look, feel, and act in response to such representations to the white spectator. The white gaze was thus firmly entrenched in anti-slavery's visual culture as Black bodies became tools to attract white spectators, elicit white sympathies, and encourage white activism.

No other fictional genre tapped into the sentimentalist cultural phenomenon of inviting readers to encounter horrific suffering as successfully as Gothic horror fiction. Epitomised by titles such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Gothic fiction typically described horrifying events such as murder and sexual assault and included terrifying tales of

the undead, spectral encounters, or demonic possession. For example, one of the most striking passages in Lewis's *The Monk* describes the supernatural appearance of the Bleeding Nun of the Castle of Lindenberg:

> I gazed upon the Spectre with horror too great to be described. My blood was frozen in my veins. I would have called for aid, but the sound expired, ere it could pass my lips. My nerves were bound up in impotence, and I remained in the same attitude inanimate as a Statue.[9]

Scenes such as this that describe a protagonist frozen with terror and unable to comprehend the horror of what they saw were a common literary trope in Gothic horror fiction. Literary scholars identify it as the "apotropaic" or "Medusa" effect, the latter named after the Gorgon in Greek mythology whose gaze could turn people to stone**.** English author Ann Radcliffe's contemporary criticism of Gothic horror referred to the Medusa effect when she argued that Gothic horror 'freezes, and nearly annihilates' the reader's soul.[10] Radcliffe argued Gothic horror was morally dangerous because any pleasure or excitement felt in response to such scenes would be morally suspect. Lewis's *The Monk,* for example, was saturated with violent and pornographic scenes of sex and sexual assault, and featured ghosts, demons, and eventually Satan himself. Thus, though readers were invited to vicariously experience the protagonist's suffering in his moment of terror, they were also enthralled by explicit and pornographic scenes. Lewis's audience were thus exposed and required to respond to a complex interweaving of horror, pleasure, and pain that had a distinctly sexual nature. In this light, Radcliffe's concern that any enjoyment or reward felt by readers of Gothic horror fiction must necessarily derive from a perverse or lascivious fascination with the suffering of others is an understandable one. Yet, audiences in the late eighteenth century continued to consume such stories, enthralled by the graphic descriptions of violence, sex, torture, and death that

[9] Matthew Lewis, *The Monk: A Romance*, The Second Edition (London: Printed for J. Bell, 1796), p. 61.
[10] Ann Radcliffe, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal,* 16:1 (1826), pp. 145-152, <https://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/English/melani/gothic/radcliffe1.html> [accessed 17/11/2021].

were previously taboo. *The Monk* was so popular amongst readers that the novel was published as four separate editions within its first three years.[11]

Authors of anti-slavery texts deftly seized upon contemporary appetites for horror. From the final decades of the eighteenth century, anti-slavery authors interwove their texts with rhetorical strands of sentimental fiction and Gothic horror to shock and enthral readers with the true horrors of slavery. For example, letter IX of Hector St. John de Crevecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer,* originally published in 1782, ends with a description of the barbaric torture of an enslaved individual near Charleston, SC. James, the narrator, describes a journey made on foot to the home of a planter, which was taken through woodland to avoid the blazing heat of the southern sun. There is first a disclaimer for the audience: 'The following scene will I hope account for these melancholy reflections, and apologize for the gloomy thoughts with which I have filled this letter: my mind is, and always has been, oppressed since I became a witness to it'.[12] The succeeding melancholic passages he refers to are those which reflect upon the horrors of plantation slavery. James laments over the cruel situation faced by enslaved people who were often denied the opportunity to form familial ties and to care for and safeguard their children. He lingers, too, over the harrowing details of their capture, exportation, sale, and torture, before proceeding to describe the following scene:

> I perceived a negro suspended in the cage, and left there to expire! I shudder when I recollect that the birds had already picked out his eyes; his cheek bones were bare; his arms had been attacked in several places, and his body seemed covered with a multitude of wounds. From the edges of the hollow sockets and from the lacerations with which he was disfigured, the blood slowly dropped, and tinged the ground beneath. No sooner were the birds flown, than swarms of insects covered the whole body of this unfortunate wretch, eager to feed on his mangled flesh and to drink his blood. I found myself suddenly arrested by the power of affright and terror; my nerves were convulsed; I trembled, I stood motionless, involuntarily contemplating the fate of this negro, in all it[sic] dismal latitude. The living spectre, though deprived of his eyes, could still distinctively hear, and in his uncouth dialect begged me to give him

[11] Louis Peck, *A Life of Matthew G. Lewis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 23-24.
[12] St John de Crevecoeur, 'Letter IX', *Letters from an American Farmer* (1798), published online by Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library's Avalon Project (2008), <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/letter_09.asp> [accessed 18/12/2018].

> some water to allay his thirst. Humanity herself would have recoiled back with horror…[13]

Crevecoeur presents us with a narrative laden with typical sentimental rhetorical devices. The description of this enslaved person's torture is filled with harrowing details of bodily pain and suffering to appeal to readers' emotions as they were invited as imaginary spectators to the scene James described. Readers are thus encouraged to become witnesses to enslaved suffering along with the narrator, and are prompted, by his early postulation, as to how they should respond. What is so pervasive in James's narrative, though, is the gruesome nature of his descriptions. Rather than encouraging audiences to sympathise with enslaved people for the conditions they were forcibly held under, Crevecoeur's representation of Black pain is solely and graphically physical. This is why Halttunen argues that anti-slavery reformers' tendency to appal and enthral audiences with such scenes proves 'less a matter of sentimental sympathy than of Gothic horror, revulsion, and disgust'.[14] When read alongside Lewis's passage from *The Monk,* the strikingly Gothic nature of Crevecoeur's writing is revealed. Where the eyes of the Bleeding Nun are 'lustreless and hollow', the eyes of Crevecoeur's wretch's are 'hollow sockets', pecked out by the birds circling overhead. The Nun's cheeks are 'bloodless', the enslaved prisoner's 'bare'. In a response typical of the Medusa effect, both witnesses are unable to move, think, or feel. Crevecoeur's protagonist was 'arrested by the power of affright and terror', while Lewis's character 'stared with horror too great to be described', his 'blood frozen in [his] veins' to the extent that his 'nerves were bound up in impotence' and he remained 'inanimate as a statue'. Indeed, Crevecoeur goes as far as to call his enslaved protagonist a 'living spectre'; the enslaved man thus becomes an inhuman and almost supernatural presence used to appal and enthral readers who identify with James's horror-struck response to the violent scene.

[13] Crevecoeur, 'Letter IX'.
[14] Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain', p. 326.

This amalgamation of sentimentality and gothic horror continued to permeate anti-slavery visual culture into the nineteenth century. In April 1838, the *Anti-Slavery Almanac* (*ASA*) published an illustration of an enslaved man named Paul, who is shown suspended from a tree. Birds tear at his eyes, face, and flesh (Figure 1). The accompanying text reads: 'The slave Paul had suffered so much in slavery, that he chose to encounter the hardships and perils of a runaway. He exposed himself, in gloomy forests, to cold and starvation, and finally hung himself, that he might not again fall into the hands of his tormentor'.

Figure 1.1. Illustration for April—Fourth Month, The American Anti-Slavery Almanac for 1838, N. Southard, Editor (Boston: Published by Isaac Knapp, Vol. I, No. 3).
<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/saxon/servlet/SaxonServlet> [accessed 17/08/2019].

The *ASA* takes the suffering so carefully detailed by Crevecoeur's writings and renders it visible to the reader on the page. The excruciating deaths experienced by both men are presented to audiences as visual evidence of slavery's cruelty. In both accounts, too, the Black body is the primary vehicle used to relay enslaved suffering: positioned at the centre of the *ASA's* depiction in the same way it is centred in Crevecoeur's narrative. In the image,

Paul wears a slave collar, with a trinity of bells used to track his movements when he was alive hanging above his lifeless corpse. The bells are, perhaps, a religious symbol, assigning Paul an almost holy status in their evocation of the Holy Trinity whilst they form a halo above his head. Indeed, their presence may indicate Paul's status as a martyr to the anti-slavery cause.

Yet, the accompanying text grants Paul a motive and agency that is absent from Crevecoeur's account. We learn of Paul's bravery and determination to run away, as well as the strength in his decision to take his own life rather than be returned to slavery. The *ASA* author felt enough kinship with Paul to explain his feelings and motives; he thereby wrote into existence an agent with whom readers could identify. Where the picture alone might otherwise have presented an image just as mute and inert as Crevecoeur's text creates, the *ASA* image and text present Paul as an individual who suffers and so chooses to act. The fact that Paul's final motivated act is to end his own life rather than risk being forcibly returned to his enslaver further accentuates the negation of personhood that predicated slavery.

African American authors in the late eighteenth century also drew from Gothic and sentimental techniques. Olaudah Equiano's 1789 *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* concludes its description of the Middle Passage with gruesome details of the conditions for those onboard. Equiano wrote that conditions were 'aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated', and continued to describe how the 'shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable'.[15] The captured women and children; sick, exhausted, their bodies failing, falling, and dying in the enclosed space of the ship, accompanied by the shrieks,

[15] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789), in *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, edited by Vincent Carretta, (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 80.

groans, and shallow breaths of the imprisoned, come together in a kind of sensorium of horror. Readers are encouraged to see, to hear, to smell, to *feel* what Equiano narrates. The claustrophobic heat, the weight of chains, the air thick with disease and death, is palpable. Like Crevecoeur, Equiano refers to the 'inconceivable', unspeakable nature of the horrors of slavery. Together with the *ASA* image, all are also scenes which use the pained body as their primary vehicle of communication.

Another eighteenth-century text that foregrounded the gruesome tribulations of the enslaved body was John Gabriel Stedman's 1790 *Narrative of a Five Year's Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*. The original text is ambiguous over its stance on slavery as a result of Stedman's being sent to Surinam as a mercenary for the Dutch army to quell a reported slave rebellion, but it was later taken up by abolitionists due to its descriptions of violence against enslaved people. Like the earlier texts we have encountered, Stedman's text was 'situated in the intersection of [the] diverse late eighteenth-century discourses of sentimentality, Gothic horror, and pornography'.[16] As the first illustrated book that dealt with enslaved torture systematically—William Blake, the Romantic poet and artist, created engravings to accompany Stedman's *Narrative*—the narrative also had significant influence on anti-slavery visual culture.

As Susan Sontag explores in her essay *The Pornographic Imagination,* pornography boomed in Western Europe in the late eighteenth century, the same time as Gothic horror fiction.[17] Halttunen reveals the connections between these cultural phenomena and sentimentalism when she highlights that the 'growing predilection for scenarios of suffering was…becoming increasingly central to pornography', in the form of 'flagellation mania', a

[16] Mario Klarer, 'Humanitarian Pornography: John Gabriel Stedman's Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolting Negroes of Surinam', *New Literary History*, 36:4 (2005), p.581.
[17] Susan Sontag, *The Pornographic Imagination,* in *A Susan Sontag Reader* (1982), pp. 206-207.

preoccupation with scenes that involved scourging, flogging, or whipping.[18] Though pornography had first entered Anglo-American culture in the 1750s through translations of French and Italian texts, the flagellation mania that would be labelled as the 'English vice' by the end of the eighteenth century contributed to the western eroticisation of pain in visual culture. That the sadistic proclivities both of sentimentalist and pornographic representations of pain are evident in Stedman's text and Blake's engravings is, in light of this, not surprising. Yet, their effect on the representation of enslaved subjects in the text is worth considering in further detail.

Stedman's description and Blake's accompanying engraving of the 'Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave' is the most pornographically explicit in the narrative. The enslaved woman is immediately identified as an 'object' of horror, and the following description of her torture reveals the influence of Gothic horror on the text. Stedman writes:

> The first object which attracted my compassion during a visit to a neighbouring estate, was a beautiful Samboe girl of about eighteen, tied up by both arms to a tree, as naked as she came into the world, and lacerated in such a shocking manner by the whips of two negro-drivers, that she was from her neck to her ancles literally dyed over with blood. It was after she had received two hundred lashes that I perceived her, with her head hanging downwards, a most affecting spectacle.[19]

That the enslaved woman is described as 'a most affecting spectacle', 'lacerated' and 'literally dyed over with blood', situates the text once again in the intersection of sentimentality and Gothic horror. The narrator informs readers that the young girl's punishment had been due to her refusal 'to submit to the loathsome embraces of her detestable executioner', and that, '[p]rompted by his jealousy and revenge, [the overseer] called this the punishment of disobedience, and she was thus flead [sic] alive'.[20] The young woman is consequently cast as

[18] Halttunen, 'Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain', p. 315.
[19] John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative, of a five years' expedition; against the revolted negroes of Surinam: in Guiana, on the wild coast of South America; from the year 1772, to 1777* (London, 1796), published by *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (2021), p. 325. Hereafter *Narrative.*
[20] Ibid, pp. 325-326.

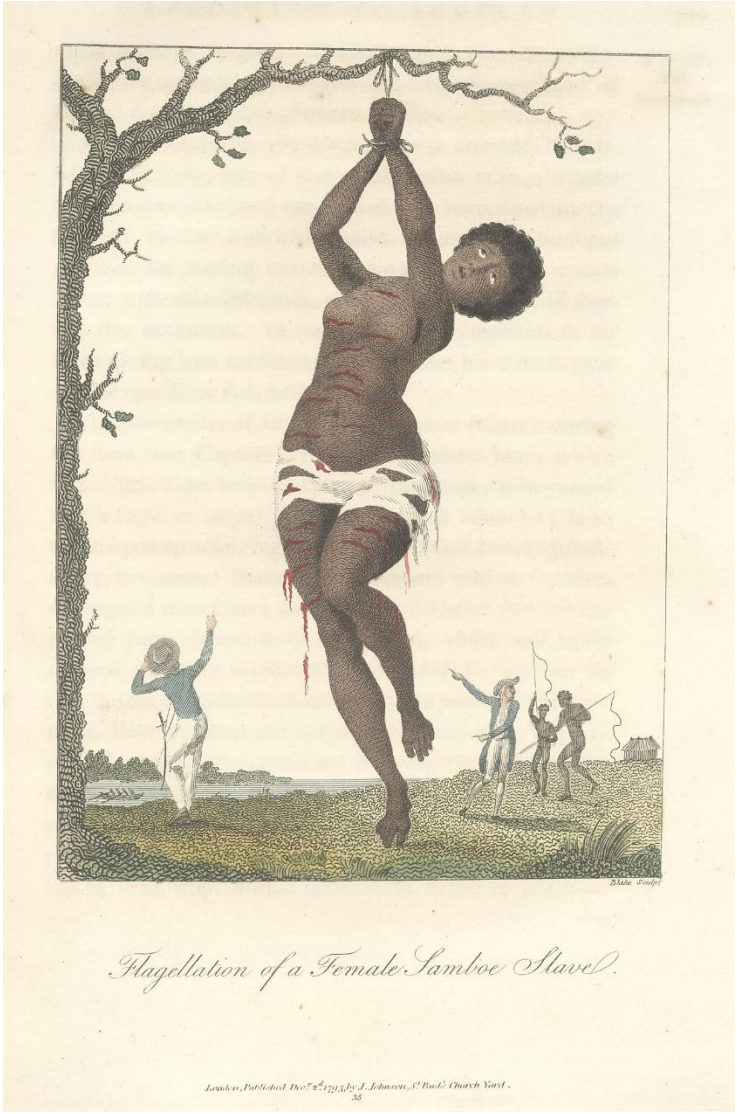
the typical sentimental and Romantic heroine, whose virtuousness is not only at risk and in need of defending but is the ultimate cause of her distress. Stedman's sympathetic response to this spectacle of suffering—in line with his role as the typical "man of feeling"—results in him asking the overseer to cease the torture. This, however, leads the overseer to redouble his punishment, 'to prevent all strangers from interfering with his government'. 'Thus', says Stedman, 'I had no other remedy but to run to my boat, and leave the detestable monster, like a beast of prey, to enjoy his bloody feast, till he was Glutted'.[21] Like Creveceour's wretch whose flesh and blood were devoured by insects and birds, the enslaved woman is feasted upon by the beast-like overseer. Yet, she is also consumed by Stedman's gaze and the gaze of his reader, who is provided with a graphic portrayal of the scene through Stedman's writing and Blake's accompanying engraving.

The pornographic elements in this representation are once again most striking. The enslaved woman is described as young, 'truly beautiful', and 'as naked as she came into the world'. Stedman's language invites readers to survey the entirety of the woman's unclothed, tortured body, which is soaked in blood 'from her neck to her ancles'. This gaze is mirrored by Blake's engraving, in which the woman's naked body is foregrounded, though a few scraps of cloth cover her genitalia. As described in Stedman's text, she is covered in lacerations that drip with bright red blood. Her hands are tied at the wrists to a tree branch that appears too thin and fragile to support the woman's weight. Instead, the delicately-twisting branches and scattered green leaves, symbols of maternal life, nature, and growth, emphasise her femininity. Furthermore, the enslaved woman is suspended in an almost balletic position, balancing delicately on the tips of her toes. Everything about her in Blake's image defies physics whilst emphasising physical femininity. She is portrayed as delicate, powerless, and violated. Blake's illustration thus heightens the sentimental, Gothic, and pornographic

[21] Stedman, *Narrative*, p. 326.

elements of Stedman's text by displaying the suffering Black body as at once detestable and desirable in its suffering.

Figure 1.2. William Blake, 'Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave' (1796), *British Library Collections,* <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/john-stedmans-narrative-of-a-five-years-expedition-against-the-revolted-negroes-of-surinam-with-engravings-by-william-blake#> [accessed 16/12/2020].



Significantly, the viewer's gaze upon the enslaved woman's body is not challenged. The other figures in Blake's engraving, two white overseers and two Black enslaved men shown to be holding the whips that have presumably inflicted the wounds upon the enslaved woman's flesh, do not pay any attention to the enslaved woman and do not look at or respond to her suffering. Stedman is the one who sees the torture, is horrified by it, and attempts to

stop it. The white author once again acts as the "man of feeling", and demonstrates the ideal response of a white, antislavery, liberal audience. He is the vicarious witness, the moral authority and the guide for his readers, who are encouraged to respond in a similar way. Yet, the overseer, who inflicts the torture, also has the power to look and to act. His decision to redouble his violence against the enslaved woman as a result of Stedman's intervention is, though portrayed as unjustly cruel, also an exercise in power over his enslaved property. Even the two enslaved men who hold the whips are an extension of this power. They do not have the power to defy their master's instructions without risking the same violence themselves, and so become the tools through which he can inflict his violence. As a result, the sentimentalist and pornographic tropes in Stedman's *Narrative* and Blake's image provide an aggressively voyeuristic encounter in which viewers are invited not only to identify with Stedman's response to the enslaved woman's suffering but also with the cruelty of the overseer, who is assigned characteristics and endowed with the power to make decisions and act on them. This power and identification is not extended to the enslaved woman herself. She remains passive, suspended, and visibly helpless, her body bloodied by the whips. Her eyes, cast heavenwards, do not meet the gaze of any of her viewers. The 'Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave' thus also evokes the sensational scourging that was flourishing in pornography whilst eroticising enslaved suffering and objectifying the body of the young Black enslaved woman.

The representation of enslaved people as silent, suffering bodies characterised what Lasser has called voyeuristic abolitionism, a phrase used to highlight the scopophilic nature of visual representations of enslaved bodies.[22] Voyeuristic abolitionism flourished in the nineteenth century, influenced by texts like Stedman's and Crevecoeur's. By the end of the

[22] Lasser, 'Voyeuristic Abolitionism'.

1830s, an estimated four-hundred-thousand depictions of slavery were in circulation.[23] By 1840, the *ASA* had 1650 auxiliaries and was disseminating 725,000 copies of its publications annually.[24] The suffering bodies of the enslaved were thus established as the most effective tools through which to relate the horrors of slavery. Though narrators would often begin their writings by denying any intention to appal or "harrow up" their readers—or, indeed, label what they were about to go on and describe as indescribable and incomprehensible—the majority would proceed to focus heavily on the most gruesome and grotesque tortures to feed the white western appetite for horror. For example, in 1839, Theodore Dwight Weld's *American Slavery As It Is*, a series of pamphlets with titles such as *Scenes of Oppression in the Refined Circles of the South* and *Picture of Slavery in the United States of America*—within which a fascination with the 'sexual sins' of slavery constituted an important part—found substantial popularity amongst northern audiences.[25]

It was not long before voyeuristic abolitionist publications attracted the interest of audiences outside of the US. A compilation of tracts 'calculated to increase a feeling of sympathy for that [enslaved] portion of suffering humanity', titled *Five Hundred Thousand Strokes for Freedom,* was published in London in 1853. The tracts bore titles such as *Slave Branding, Murder of an Infant,* and *Hunting Slaves with Blood Hounds.*[26] Even the catastrophe of war could not abate the tide. By 1865 over one hundred ex-slaves had published first-hand testimonies that detailed the cruelties forced upon them by the institution of slavery. Though it is vital to note that these first-hand testimonies provided space for African American authors to tell their own stories and emphasise their strength, humanity, and agency, white abolitionist publishers often preceded these narratives with their own

[23] Martha J. Cutter, *The Illustrated Slave: Empathy, Graphic Narrative, and the Visual Culture of the Transatlantic Abolition Movement, 1800-1852* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2017), p. 90, p. 12.
[24] Goddu, *Selling AntiSlavery*, p. 10.
[25] Cutter, *The Illustrated Slave*, p. 90.
[26] Elizabeth B. Clark, '"The Sacred Rights of the Weak": Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America', *The Journal of American History*, 82:2 (1995), p. 466.

explications to verify the accuracy and reliability of Black authors' accounts. This form of white control over Black narratives meant that white editors reserved for themselves the function of devising a strategic and political anti-slavery programme, whilst Black authored narratives had the sole function of testimony.

Still, the sentimentalist, Gothic, and pornographic tropes found in early anti-slavery tracts also found their way into these African American authored texts. Frederick Douglass's 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave,* for example, begins by presenting graphic details of sexual violence and torture committed against Douglass's Aunt Hester by his first enslaver, Captain Anthony. Douglass writes that he was often 'awakened at the dawn of day by [Hester's] most heart-rending shrieks'.[27] Anthony would tie Hester 'to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood'. Douglass continues that, '[n]o words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose'.[28] Recalling the first time that he saw Anthony torture Hester, Douglass wrote that he 'never shall forget it whilst [he] remember[ed] any thing…It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle', he said, one that left him with feelings he could only wish to 'commit to paper'.[29]

In labelling Hester's suffering 'a most terrible spectacle', Douglass conforms to the popular anti-slavery literary discourses of his day that used pained Black bodies to shock audiences with horrific violence and inspire outrage and a desire to act. Yet, Douglass's focus on the details of Hester's torture objectifies and pornifies her pain. His text leaves no room for Hester to speak or act for herself, other than the 'heart-rending shrieks' described in his

[27] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), Special Bicentennial Edition (London: G&D Media, 2019), p. 19.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

narrative. He labels Hester a ‘gory victim’, akin to Crevecoeur’s ‘wretch’, and writes that she was whipped ‘relentlessly upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood’, a phrase which evokes both Stedman’s description of the Samboe girl ‘literally dyed over with blood’ and the “flagellation mania” central to contemporary pornography. Douglass continues to relay details of his Aunt’s torture at Anthony’s hands:

> Before he commenced whipping Aunt Hester, he took her into the kitchen, and stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck, shoulders, and back, entirely naked. He then told her to cross her hands, calling her at the same time a d—-d b—-h. After crossing her hands, he tied them with a strong rope, and led her to a stool under a large hook in the joist, put in for the purpose. He made her get upon the stool, and tied her hands to the hook. She now stood fair for his infernal purpose. Her arms were stretched up at their full length, so that she stood upon the ends of her toes. He then said to her, "Now, you d—-d b—-h, I'll learn you how to disobey my orders!" and after rolling up his sleeves, he commenced to lay on the heavy cowskin, and soon the warm, red blood (amid heart-rending shrieks from her, and horrid oaths from him) came dripping to the floor.[30]

Like the enslaved woman in Stedman’s *Narrative,* Hester is suspended. She is stripped naked from the waist up, her body exposed for Anthony’s ‘infernal purpose’ as her arms are fully extended, tied above her head to the hook in the ceiling. Douglass’s detailed attention to this positioning of Hester’s body, her exposed nakedness, her helplessness as she balances delicately ‘upon the ends of her toes’, invokes Blake’s ‘Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave’. Hester is also ‘lacerated’ by the whip until, as Douglass recites, ‘the warm, red blood… came dripping to the floor’. There is no accompanying image of Hester’s torture, but it is not difficult to imagine, following the similarities in descriptions, that it may have looked like Blake’s illustration. Blood can even be seen dripping to the floor from the wounds on Blake’s ‘Samboe girl’s body. The crucibilic nature of anti-slavery discourse is revealed in how these various representations fed into and evoked one another and were consistently being shaped by contemporary literary and cultural phenomena. The production of many of the most famous visual representations of slavery thus came from this dynamic interweaving

[30] Ibid., p. 20.

of white western social and cultural discourse, at the centre of which was the complex partnering of sentimentalist ideals alongside a sadistic fascination with graphic depictions of bodily pain.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (*UTC*), the most enduring anti-slavery text and best-selling novel of the nineteenth century, similarly drew from well-established sentimental and literary tropes.[31] Martha Cutter argues *UTC* is so 'stitched into the tapestry of US visual culture' precisely because of its successful espousal with popular cultural movements.[32] However, much like the anti-slavery discourse we have encountered so far, Cutter argues that Black agency in *UTC* **'**is detached from the enslaved body' and that it is 'the figurative white body' that is granted the power to relieve pain, 'feel rightly', and demand 'an end to slavery'.[33] This final section of the chapter will turn its attention to Stowe's representation of enslaved people, particularly enslaved women, in the setting of the slave auction. Though this form of suffering was not always as graphic as the texts and images previously discussed, sentimental and sensational popular literary tropes still shaped these representations of the violence inflicted by the forced separation, transportation, imprisonment, inspection, and sale of enslaved people. My focus on the representations of enslaved women in this section is also a deliberate decision, as a comparative examination of how enslaved women's bodies were presented to appeal to white audiences' desires reveals the continuities and complex reincarnations which can be traced throughout texts such as Stedman's and Stowe's.

Stowe embraced sentimentalism most strikingly in her novel with the character of Eliza, who flees the Shelby plantation when she finds out that her enslaver plans to sell her

[31] '*Uncle Tom's Cabin*: A 19th-Century Bestseller', *The University of Alabama* <http://bindings.lib.ua.edu/gallery/uncletom.html> [accessed 07/12/2021].
[32] Cutter, *The Illustrated Slave*, p. 227.
[33] Ibid., p. 183.

son. The scene in which Eliza crosses the Ohio river riding rafts of ice is one of the most famous scenes in the novel, and in anti-slavery visual culture since.[34] Significantly, Eliza is also what Cutter calls one of the 'near-white bodies' in the novel.[35] She is introduced as having 'rich, full, dark eye[s]', with 'long lashes', and 'ripples of silky black hair'.[36] When the slave trader Haley first sees Eliza, Stowe describes how:

> The brown of her complexion gave way on the cheek to a perceptible flush, which deepened as she saw the gaze of the strange man fixed upon her in bold and undisguised admiration. Her dress was of the neatest possible fit, and set off to advantage her finely moulded shape; a delicately formed hand and a trim foot and ankle were items of appearance that did not escape the quick eye of the trader, well used to run up at a glance the points of a fine female article.[37]

Alone, Stowe's description of Eliza is betrayingly sentimental. Eliza is beautiful, modest, and silent beneath the gaze of the white slave trader. As with Stedman and Blake's Samboe girl, and with Douglass's Aunt Hester, our first introduction to Eliza focuses on her physicality. She does not speak or resist the slave trader's lascivious gaze. Indeed, Stowe's description of Eliza evokes Stedman's portrayal of another enslaved woman in his *Narrative.* Joanna, a 'Mulatto Maid' and daughter of a 'respectable Gentleman named Kruythoff'—one of four children Kruythoff fathered with 'an enslaved woman called Cery'—is presented in the *Narrative* primarily as an alluring and exotic object.[38] The violations resulting from Stedman's pursual of Joanna, the sexual encounters that follow, and the child Joanna bears whilst Stedman is in Surinam were notably undisclosed by the author. In fact, the birth of Stedman's child is an event that remains absent from his original text. The later fabrication of Joanna and Stedman's relationship as a sentimental romance in the nineteenth century—

[34] See Lauren Berlant, 'Poor Eliza', from Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008): 635-668; Amy Hughes, 'The Fugitive Slave: Eliza's Flight in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*', in *Spectacles of Reform: Theater and Activism in Nineteenth Century America* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015): 86-118; Martha Cutter, 'Epilogue: The End of Empathy, or Slavery Revisited via Twentieth-and Twenty-First Century Artworks', in Martha Cutter, *The Illustrated Slave* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2017): 224-237.
[35] Cutter, *An Illustrated Slave,* p. 191.
[36] *UTC,* p. 4.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Stedman, *Narrative,* p. 88.

evident, for example, in abolitionist author and women's rights activist Lydia Maria Child's 1838 edition of the text titled *Narrative of Joanna, an Emancipated Slave of Surinam (From Stedman's Narrative of a Five Year's Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam)*—drew their inspiration primarily from Stedman's following description of her as a beautiful and devoted maid:

> …she was possessed of the most elegant shape that nature can exhibit, moving her well-formed limbs with more than common gracefulness. Her face was full of native modesty, and the most distinguished sweetness; her eyes, as black as ebony, were large and full of expression, bespeaking the goodness of her heart; with cheeks through which glowed, in spite of the darkness of her complexion, a beautiful tinge of vermillion, when gazed upon. Her nose was perfectly well formed, rather small; her lips a little prominent, which, when she spoke, discovered two regular rows of teeth, as white as mountain snow; her hair was a dark brown inclining to black, forming a beautiful globe of small ringlets, ornamented with flowers and gold spangles. Round her neck, her arms, and her ancles, she wore gold chains, rings and medals: while a shawl of India muslin, the end of which was negligently thrown over her polished shoulders, gracefully covered part of her lovely bosom, a petticoat of rich chintz alone completed her apparel. Bare-headed and bare-footed, she shone with double lustre, as she carried in her delicate hand a beaver hat, the crown trimmed round with silver. The figure and appearance of this charming creature could not but attract my particular attention …[39]

[39] Stedman, *Narrative*, p. 87.

Figure 1.3. William Blake, *Joanna*, an illustration to John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796), *British Library Collections Online*, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/john-stedmans-narrative-of-a-five-years-expedition-against-the-revolted-negroes-of-surinam-with-engravings-by-william-blake> [accessed 05/01/2022].

Blake's engraving reflects Stedman's description of Joanna as a desirable and exotic figure, capturing the details of her attire and appearance. Joanna stands with an exposed breast, one hand resting on her hip to open the front of her body to the viewer's gaze. Her neck, wrists, and ankles are bejewelled. The vermillion flush to Joanna's cheek is also visible. Her exotic femininity is symbolised by the native flora and fauna at her bare feet, which link Joanna's flesh directly to the natural world around her. For an audience fascinated and curious about the Black enslaved residents of South America, Blake's illustrations provided an opportunity to gaze, unchallenged, upon the Black female body, and invited viewers to share Stedman's attraction to Joanna, to not help but notice the 'fine Creature' on display in his narrative.

Yet, in the same way as Eliza's representation in *UTC*, Joanna's desirability in both text and image is owing in large part to the fact that she is described as beautiful, demure, and almost white. Eliza's eyes are 'rich', 'full', and 'dark', whilst Joanna's are similarly 'Ebony' coloured, 'large and full of expression'. Just as Eliza's 'brown complexion' gives way 'to a perceptible flush' under the slave trader's gaze, Joanna's complexion, described by Stedman as 'Olive', glows 'a beautiful tinge of vermillion when gazed upon'. Eliza's figure is described as 'finely moulded', whilst Joanna's is 'most elegant' and 'well-formed'. Eliza's ripples of 'silky black hair' match Joanna's decorated dark hair in delicate ringlets. Haley's fascination with Eliza's 'delicately formed hand' and 'trim' feet and ankles mirror Stedman's attention to Joanna's neck, arms, and ankles, her bare feet and 'polished' shoulder. Stowe's reader is invited to follow the gaze of the white slave trader on Eliza's body from head to toe in the same way that Stedman's reader follows his gaze upon Joanna. Both enslaved women are thus treated primarily as desirable and passive objects at the mercy of white agents. Just enough license is given to roaming contemporary imaginations, then, with descriptions of blushing cheeks and silky-smooth hair, to transform these women into sentimentalist figures

of sympathy. To engage the sympathies imputed to a white audience, enslaved women's bodies were assigned qualities that are aimed to appeal to a white audience's desires and protectiveness, the latter of which may mask the impulse of the former. Often showing the female body as exposed and vulnerable, these images accommodated the lascivious gaze of an implicitly male audience who could ogle the bodies of enslaved women whilst simultaneously morally condemning the women's exploitation.

This can be seen in other aspects of nineteenth-century American culture. Hiram Powers' *Greek Slave,* one of the best-known American sculptures of the nineteenth century, was completed less than ten years before Stowe's publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Modelled on the Ancient Greek sculpture the *Venus of Knidos,* Powers' slave represented a Greek woman captured and enslaved by Turks during the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s. The *Greek Slave* is nude, having been forcibly undressed by her Turkish masters in preparation to be sold. Her nakedness, therefore, is neither a choice nor something that the woman is explicitly aware of. In fact, she gazes away from herself, her eyes cast slightly downwards and across to her left side. Her left hand delicately covers her pubis. Chains hang from both wrists, and rest upon her upper thigh. Thus, like the enslaved women in Blake's engravings, the *Greek Slave* herself does not confront viewers directly. Spectators are invited to look upon her body without challenge. As Charmaine Nelson writes, 'any sensualism' is 'safely detached from her person and made the responsibility of her audience, both real and imagined'.[40]

[40] Charmaine A. Nelson, *The Color of Stone: Sculpting the Black Female Subject in Nineteenth-Century America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 82

Figure 1.4. Hiram Powers, *The Greek Slave* (1849), manufactured by Minton and Company, courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/4140> [accessed 05/01/2022].

Yet, it was the *Greek Slave's* whiteness that 'ensured the sweeping sentimentalism and the paternalistic moral concern with which she was greeted'.[41] Though the threat to the woman comes from her enslaver, thereby establishing a potential critique of the system of chattel slavery in America, this threat also stems primarily from an imagined Black (Turk) male sexuality. The idea that Black men were soon to have ownership over this white woman's body would have been as horrifying to many white Americans in the mid-nineteenth

[41] Ibid, p. 81.

century as Lewis's Bleeding Nun or the gory victims of popular anti-slavery texts. The same visual rhetoric can also be found in nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings such as Jean Leon-Gerome's *The Slave Market* (1866) and Victor Giraud's *A Slave Merchant* (1867), as well as later works by artists such as Fabio Fabbi and Otto Pilny of similar scenes depicting white female slaves either being inspected or sold at auction, most often by North African or Turkish men. The white female protagonists were often desirable and sexually passive, subordinate to their darker-skinned masters and potential buyers. This inversion of racial hierarchies 'disavowed the immediacy and horrors of transatlantic slavery and the specific oppression of Black female slaves' by displacing the body of the Black enslaved woman with a white counterpart.[42] Images such as *The Greek Slave* and *The Slave Market* thus provided viewers the opportunity to lasciviously gaze upon the naked bodies of sexually passive, white or near-white women with the option to immediately shut down their lustful impulses by condemning the brutal buyer and slave trader, whilst getting an additional thrill from the notion of the degradation and humiliation that were implicitly aspects of inter-racial sex in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

This amalgamation of white femininity and slavery, particularly at the site of the slave auction, created a potent sentimental concoction that Stowe recognised as a powerful tool in the antislavery movement's arsenal. In *UTC,* Stowe describes a scene from inside the slave warehouse in which Tom awaits his sale. After describing the conditions Tom faces in the warehouse, Stowe recognises that her 'reader may be curious to take a peep at the corresponding apartment allotted to the women'.[43] The notion of 'peeping' at the women's room immediately evokes a sense of voyeurism, as though Stowe is providing access to a spectacle the reader would otherwise be prohibited from seeing. This instils a sense of

[42] Ibid.
[43] *UTC,* p. 285.

excitement and anticipation before her description even begins. She continues: 'Stretched out in various attitudes over the floor he [the reader] may see numberless sleeping forms of every shade of complexion, from the purest ebony to white, and of all years, from childhood to old age'.[44] That Stowe's implied reader is male—made clear in her use of the identified pronoun 'he'—together with the scattered sleeping bodies of the identified women described as objects or wares, ranging in colour from 'purest ebony to white', makes this scene almost salacious. It grants the white male gaze access to the bodies of these enslaved women whilst they sleep, unprotected and unaware of their observers. Stowe proceeds to describe two enslaved women she identifies as having 'a more interesting appearance than common'.[45] The first is Susan, described as a 'respectably dressed mulatto woman between forty and fifty', 'her dress neatly fitted', 'with soft eyes and a gentle and pleasing physiognomy'.[46] Susan's daughter, Emmeline, is nestled closely to her mother. Stowe describes Emmeline as 'a quadroon', detectable from 'her fairer complexion'.[47] She has 'the same soft, dark eye', as her mother, but 'with longer lashes'.[48] Her 'curling' hair is 'of a luxuriant brown'.[49] Like Susan, Emmeline is also 'dressed with great neatness, and her white, delicate hands betray very little acquaintance with service toil'.[50]

Like Eliza and Joanna before them, both Susan and Emmeline are portrayed as pious, beautiful, and near-white. Their 'soft, dark eye[s]' are akin to Eliza's 'rich' and 'dark' eyes, or Joanna's 'ebony' ones. The same attention to detail is placed on Susan and Emmeline's figures, their neat dresses attesting to their civilised and feminine nature in the same way that Eliza's dress was 'of the neatest possible fit'. Both Eliza and Emmeline have 'long lashes'

[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

and fair complexions. Emmeline's hands are even strikingly described as 'white' and 'delicate', unused to hard labour. Stowe thus evokes the same sentimental and paternalistic concern over the fate of white femininity that was extended to Powers' *Greek Slave.* The author's vivid description of Susan and Emmeline's sale only entrenches this further. Before the sale, Stowe details how Susan remembers one potential buyer inspecting her daughter's body. Susan remembers how 'he had looked at Emmeline's hands, and lifted up her curly hair, and pronounced her a first-rate article'.[51] Stowe informs her reader that Susan, in response to her daughter's inspection, 'had the same horror of her child's being sold to a life of shame than any other Christian mother might have', knowing 'that tomorrow any man, however vile and brutal, however godless and merciless, if he only has money to pay for her, may become owner of her daughter, body and soul'.[52]

Stowe's appeals to her white anti-slavery audience's desires and protectiveness continue at the auction itself. Whilst waiting for the sale, Emmeline is once again inspected by another white man eager to purchase her. Stowe writes, 'He put out his heavy, dirty hand, and drew the girl towards him; passed it over her neck and bust, felt her arms, looked at her teeth, and then pushed her back against her mother'. Here, as before, Stowe compels her audience to fear for Emmeline's virtue. As this beautiful, fair child is groped and inspected by men at the auction, powerless to defend or save herself, Stowe grants her audience the opportunity to extend their compassion, profess their outrage, and show their moral virtue through their horrified response to Emmeline's sale. Yet, not only does the horror presented to her audience come from Emmeline's inspection, it is the 'heavy, dirty hand' that assaults the young woman which evokes the most fear. The hand that is blackened. As with Powers' *Greek Slave,* Black male sexuality is presented as the most horrifying and dangerous threat.

[51] *UTC*, p. 286.
[52] Ibid, pp. 286-287.

Susan is purchased by a seemingly kind man, whom she entreats to purchase Emmeline so mother and daughter would not be separated. Susan's new owner, however, claims he does not have enough money to buy Emmeline. Susan is forced to watch as her daughter mounts the block and 'look[s] around her with a frightened and timid glance'.[53] As she does so, Stowe describes how the 'blood flushes painfully' to Emmeline's cheek, and Susan 'groans to see that she looks more beautiful than she ever saw her before'.[54] As with Stowe's description of Eliza's 'perceptible flush' and Stedman's description of the 'vermillion' tinge to Joanna's cheek, license was given to contemporary imaginations to transform these Black enslaved women into pious sentimentalist figures of sympathy; their nature, dress, and complexions are portrayed as alluringly white to appeal to the desires and protectiveness of white audiences. By displacing the Black enslaved woman's body with a near-white one, Stowe encourages her white liberal audience to imagine Emmeline as their own child, sister, or niece, violated and at risk. Anti-slavery activists felt these exercises in cross-racial empathy were a crucial component in converting people to the cause. However, as we have seen, such representations often objectified enslaved people's suffering and pornified their physical pain. Even anti-slavery attempts to encourage sympathy with enslaved women as opposed to horror at specific instances of the violence they endured displaced Black women's suffering with that of near-white women to better appeal to their intended audiences. Thus, each of these representations, and those that would later draw from them, were moulded by the dominant white gaze.

Sentimental and sensational approaches to representing slavery and racial violence through the white gaze thus elicited complex and multi-layered responses from audiences. In the early nineteenth century, John Rankin, Presbyterian minister and abolitionist, sought to

[53] Ibid, p. 290.
[54] Ibid.

tutor his own compassion by imagining himself and his family as enslaved people. In an epistle to his brother, after quoting the oft-stated remark that slavery's horrors 'far exceed[ed] the power of description', he outlined the importance of bringing the enslaved experience of suffering closer to home:

> We are naturally too callous to the sufferings of others, and consequently prone to look upon them with cold indifference, until, in imagination we identify ourselves with the sufferers, and make their sufferings our own… When I bring it near, inspect it closely, and find that it is inflicted on men and women, who possess the same nature and feelings with myself, my sensibility is roused.[55]

Rankin goes on to demonstrate precisely how and why such a thought experiment raised his sensibilities by describing his own imagined scenario in which he and his family were enslaved:

> My flighty imagination added much to the tumult of passion by persuading me, for the moment, that I myself was a slave, and with my wife and children placed under the reign of terror. I began in reality to feel for myself, my wife, and my children, the thoughts of being whipped at the pleasure of a morose and capricious master, aroused the strongest feelings of resentment; but when I fancied the cruel lash was approaching my wife and children, and my imagination depicted in lively colors, their tears, their shrieks, and bloody stripes, every indignant principle of my nature was excited to the highest degree.[56]

Rankin's response shows the complexity of the imaginary observer position that anti-slavery visual culture created. Though Rankin describes how 'every indignant principle of [his] nature was excited to the highest degree', his excitement is refracted through his imagination of his family's suffering rather than his own in the same way that Stowe's novel or Powers' *Greek Slave* encouraged white audiences to imagine their own female relatives as bodies at risk. There is thus a double projection of Rankin's identification, as he is outraged by the violence against enslaved people *through* the imagined violence against his own wife and children. His language furthermore reveals the intricate and overlapping layers of identification—layers which have been previously evidenced in the discussions of Stedman's

[55] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, p. 18.
[56] Ibid.

and Douglass's texts—that result in Rankin's emotional excitement, distress, and seeming pleasure in response to his imagined spectacle of suffering.

Firstly, Rankin's professed outrage results from his sympathy with his wife and children as he imagines them beaten. This outrage is then projected onto the enslaved, who Rankin claims have been 'brought closer' to him following this imaginary scenario involving his family, the latter of whom he sincerely cares for. Rankin's ability to then feel for the enslaved, his ability to feel compassion when presented with their suffering, leads to the moral self-regarding satisfaction that comes from his capacity to fulfil the role of the cult of sensibility's hero, the "man of feeling". Yet, despite Rankin applauding himself morally for his ability to sympathise with the enslaved, on closer examination his identification proves to be a more sadistic one, one which prioritises the white master class, and therefore the white gaze. Rankin's language reveals that he does not, in fact, identify with the enslaved people being beaten, nor even with his wife and children. Instead, he vividly renders the white enslaver's psychological condition when he labels him as 'morose' and 'capricious', and 'aroused by the strongest feelings of resentment'. Rankin must have identified with, or put himself in the position of, the master to ascribe such attributes to him. Rankin thus identifies with the master, who is described not as an indifferent mechanical force but as a dramatic protagonist with an imagined interior emotional world; bestowed with the power to think, feel, and act. All elements of power and agency in Rankin's emotional exercise in extending sympathy to the enslaved therefore reside either with Rankin himself or with the white, male enslaver. Returning to Stedman's *Narrative* and Blake's engravings, the same can be said of the representation of the Samboe girl. Stedman himself is the primary protagonist, who exercises his agency in his attempt to persuade the overseer to cease his torture. Yet, the only other person Stedman identifies with, who he endows with agency, is the overseer, whose psychological condition, though monstrous, is labelled at various intervals as 'detestable',

'jealous', and vengeful.[57] Though the Samboe girl's refusal of the overseer's advances hints at her own agency, she is not accorded the same level of identification. Her described actions are passive and exist solely to mark her as an object of sympathy as opposed to an individual with any power or personality.

Anti-slavery visual-verbal representations of enslaved suffering therefore granted open access to the violent landscapes of slavery in a way that privileged a majority white audience's gaze. Anti-slavery visual culture appealed directly to white audiences through popular literary tropes such as pornography, horror, and sentimentality which pornified and dehumanised Black bodies, turning them into objectified sites and sights of suffering. Though there was room in some of these representations to highlight the agency of enslaved people and amplify their voices, evident in the *ASA*'s illustration and Douglass's *Narrative,* such techniques were superseded by sensational spectacles of suffering that centred Black bodily pain as the primary vehicle to relate slavery's violence to an audience whose appetites for horror and pornographic imagery had been wetted for decades by popular literary discourses. Though these representations elicited complex and multi-layered responses from their audiences, the focus on Black suffering often encouraged identification not with Black individuals but with white sympathetic spectators and, even more dangerously, with white perpetrators. As anti-slavery culture firmly established the white gaze as the dominant force in representations of slavery and racial violence, it generated an extremely influential visual cultural archive that used pained Black bodies as tools to reaffirm white identity, power, and moral superiority under the guise of activism. In what remains of this study, I will continue to explore the generation of this visual cultural archive, whilst tracing its various afterlives in

[57] Stedman, *Narrative,* p. 326.

later commemorative practices and highlighting the complex responses these representations continue to elicit from audiences.

Chapter 2

Desirable and Detestable Bodies: Photographing Racial Violence in the United States

This chapter examines photography as a dialectical and complex visual space in which the struggle over representations of Black historical pain is often played out. I investigate how Black bodies as sites and sights of pain were central to the development of photography as a new visual technology in the US. I examine daguerreotypes of enslaved people taken under the direction of biologist and geologist Louis Agassiz to highlight how dominant ideas rooted in the phenomenon of the pseudoscience of race dictated that Black bodies be photographed, indexed, and studied to "prove" that they were biologically distinct from white Europeans.[1] The chapter also interrogates lynching photographs as sites of struggle over the representation and meaning of Black pain. America's march to modernity was saturated with unspeakable acts of violent murder perpetrated by and in front of large crowds of white men, women, and children. Lynchings shaped modern America as much as they were a product of it. This chapter highlights how photographic technologies contributed to the spectacularisation of these public killings at the turn of the twentieth century as the camera became an instrument to record the fate of Black people who dared to challenge white supremacist rule.

In the foreword to her collection of essays titled *On Photography*, Susan Sontag writes 'the more I thought about what photographs are, the more complex and suggestive they

[1] I borrow the phrase 'pseudoscience of race' from Professor Manisha Sinha to emphasise that what is commonly referred to as race/racial science 'was regarded as the science of the day' without affording the ideas at the centre of this 'American school of ethnology' any scientific authority. Manisha Sinha, 'Of Scientific Racists and Black Abolitionists: The Forgotten Debates over Slavery and Race', in Ilisa Barbash, Molly Rogers, Deborah Willis (eds), *To Make Their Own Way in the World: The Enduring Legacy of the Zealy Daguerreotypes* (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum Press, 2020), p. 235.

became'.[2] The complex role of photography in the modern world is evident throughout Susan Sontag's theorisations. Photographs 'furnish evidence'; they incriminate but also verify.[3] Photographs are a 'tool of power', a 'social rite', and yet are an 'act of non-intervention'.[4] Photographs 'turn people into objects that can be symbolically possessed', 'actively promote nostalgia' and 'reinforce' moral positions.[5] Photographs provide proof that a given thing happened, and yet 'the camera's rendering of reality must always hide more than it discloses'.[6]

Photographs, then, are inherently complex and often dialectical in that they are often used for contradictory or opposing means and hold contradictory or opposing meanings depending on the circumstances in which they are viewed. Once an image is captured, regardless of the intention of the photographer, its meaning is open to constantly shifting interpretations and re-interpretations. As a result, photography was central to Black critical memory as much as it was central to white supremacist understandings and social constructions of race. African American artists and activists seized upon the dialectical nature of photography highlighted by Sontag to carve out a space in which they could not only control their own representations but use images of Black pain intended to subjugate and dehumanise Black people to shine a light on white violence and barbarity. This chapter therefore also examines how African American photographers challenged the dominant white gaze and white supremacist perspectives. Drawing from the work of Frederick Douglass, I explore how Black people used photography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to deconstruct dominant white narratives and exert control over their own bodies. An exploration of the life and works of James Presley (J.P) Ball provides further evidence of how

[2] Susan Sontag, 'Foreword', *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1979).
[3] Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 5.
[4] Ibid., p.8, 11.
[5] Ibid., pp. 14-15, 17.
[6] Ibid., p. 23.

African Americans challenged a dominant white gaze that often dehumanised and criminalised Black citizens. In tracing Ball's early career, exploring the spaces in which he worked, and analysing a selection of his photographs and panoramas, I highlight how Ball celebrated Black artistic excellence, rallied against racial violence, and restored vitality and individuality to the lynching narrative. In adopting a transtemporal approach, I shed light upon how African American commemorative representations in the present may draw upon Ball's representational strategies to reintroduce vitality and individuality to visual narratives of racial violence. *Without Sanctuary*, the 2000 exhibition of American antique collector James Allen and his partner John Littlefield's private collection of lynching photographs and postcards, provides the basis for my concluding discussion of the various afterlives of lynching images in a commemorative setting. *Without Sanctuary* underpins my interrogations of the main questions that dominate this study: should we—can we, and how do we—look at these images without re-inflicting the violence they reflect?

*

French artist Louis Daguerre took the first photographic images in Paris in January 1839. Three weeks later, the English scientist Henry Fox Talbot followed closely behind with his method, which used light-sensitive sheets of paper as opposed to Daguerre's silver plates. Within months, successful daguerreotypists had set up studios in New York City, Philadelphia, PA, and Boston, MA.[7] By 1853, an estimated three million daguerreotypes were being produced globally every year.[8] The new medium, which accurately captured what was placed before the lens, heralded 'a new way of seeing, a new way of understanding the world

[7] For a more detailed history of America's earliest daguerreotypists, see Keith F. Davis, *The Origins of American Photography, 1839-1885: From Daguerreotype to Dry-Plate* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2007).
[8] John Wood, 'The Curious Art and Science of the Daguerreotype', in Barbash, Rogers, and Willis (eds), *To Make Their Own Way in the World,* p. 171.

that rested on notions of universal Truth'.[9] Yet, in the same way that the tracts, narratives, and illustrations in the previous chapter were shaped by the influences of Western gothic horror, sentimentality, and pornography, photographic convention was embedded in and governed by an American visual culture dominated by the white gaze.

One of the earliest sets of antebellum photographs which show enslaved people was rediscovered in the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in Cambridge, MA, in 1976. The daguerreotypes, which had been stored in an old wooden cabinet in the attic, were taken by Joseph Thomas Zealy in 1850 at the request of Professor Louis Agassiz, a Swiss-born Harvard geologist and founder of the University's Museum of Comparative Zoology.[10] The images show seven enslaved people: Alfred, a Fulani born in West Africa and enslaved on the plantation of an I (or J) Lomas; Jem, who was enslaved by an F.W. Green and is believed to have been Gullah; Fassena, a Mandinka carpenter enslaved on the Hampton plantation, and; Jack, Drana, Renty and Delia, two father and daughter pairings owned by the South Carolinian plantation owner Benjamin Franklin Taylor.[11]

A former student of the French anatomist Georges Cuvier—who famously dissected the body of Sara Baartman, also known as the Hottentot Venus, in an attempt to validate his belief in the inferiority of African people—Agassiz commissioned the daguerreotypes to provide evidence for his theory of separate creations. Studying a group of enslaved African Americans allowed Agassiz to use what he called the "natural history" method: 'the comparison of individuals of different kinds with one another'.[12] This method necessarily

[9] Molly Rogers, *Delia's Tears: Race, Science, and Photography in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 14.
[10] For more information on Agassiz's work, see Christopher Irscher, *Louis Agassiz: Creator of American Science* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008). For more on how racial science influenced Agassiz's geological studies, see Marion McInnes, 'Looking for Louis Agassiz: A Story of Rocks and Race in Maine', *Mosaic*, 52:2 (2019): 35-36.
[11] Rogers, *Delia's Tears*, p. xvi.
[12] Ibid., p. 218.

relied upon one's ability to read external bodily features to reveal internal and supposedly irrefutable biological characteristics. Rogers cites this as evidence that ethnology itself shared many traits with the science of photography, which Roland Barthes called the science of 'desirable or detestable bodies'.[13] The similarities in methodology makes this claim difficult to refute. Like racial pseudoscientists, photographers tasked with capturing the likenesses of American citizens in popular portraiture were also required to read external bodily features as indicators of individual character and design their portraits to reflect that character.

This is why the finely decorated portraits of the "desirable bodies" most often belonging to white European elite society—the bodies of scientists, politicians, businesspeople, and medical practitioners, along with their wives and children—were conventionally civilised. Taken in drawing rooms, parlours, and ornate offices, the images were intended to reflect internal identity through external appearance and surroundings. Yet, for Agassiz to photograph the "detestable" bodies of the enslaved, the conventions, structure, and purpose of portrait photography would have to be inverted. As Rogers describes:

> Frontal, profile, and rear views were what was needed. And they [the enslaved] would have to remove their clothing. They would have to be daguerreotyped naked so that their bodies would be visible, so that the naturalist could see them clearly… The presence of slaves and the demands of science transformed the photographic studio, turning the purpose, conventions, and routines of photography on their head.[14]

Rather than reflect an identity, Agassiz's photographs of the enslaved suppressed individuality. Zealy's daguerreotypes thus transformed the Black subjects at their centre into objects to be studied and possessed by white observers.

[13] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 18.
[14] Rogers, *Delia's Tears*, p. 225.

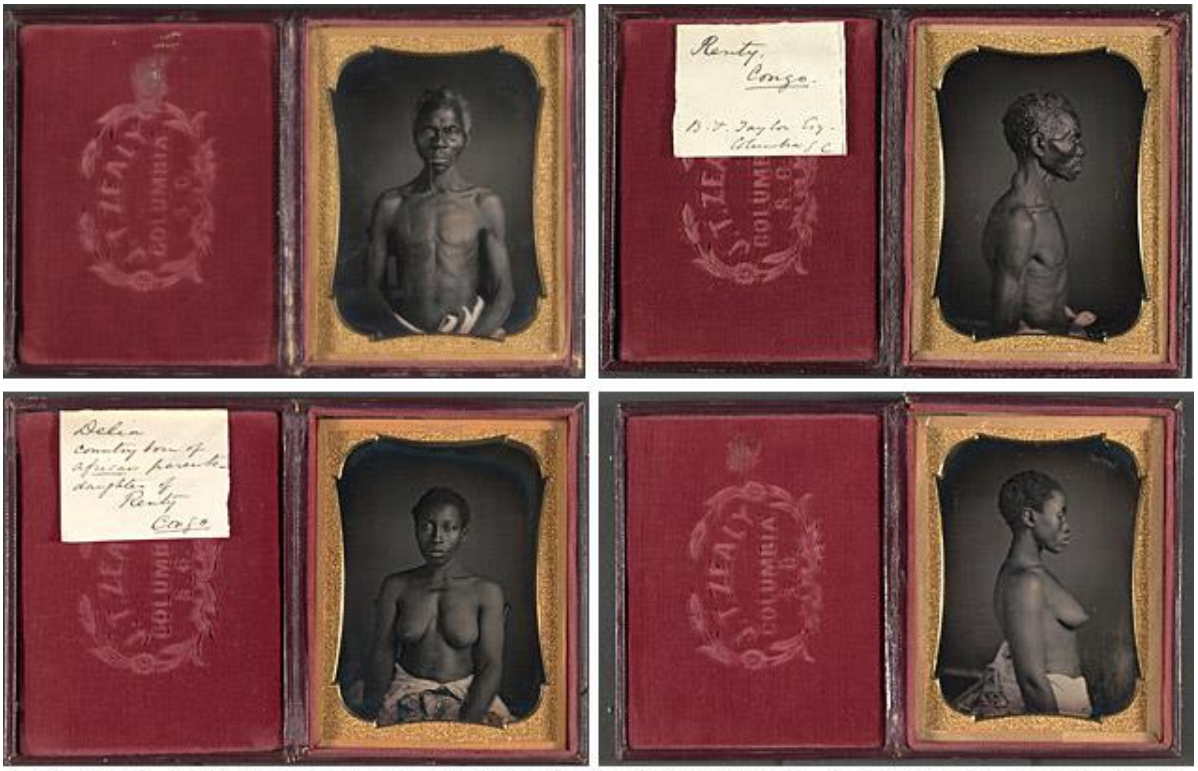


Figure 2.1. Photograph of J.T. Zealy daguerreotypes of Renty and his daughter, Delia. Image taken from Molly Rogers, 'Fair Women Are Transformed into Negresses', *Mirror of Race Project* (18th January, 2012), <http://mirrorofrace.org/fair-women/> [accessed 18/06/2020].

However, though their production was fuelled by a pseudoscientific racism that 'strip[ped] men and women of the right to cover their genitalia', the pictures also 'shatter[ed] that mould by allowing the eyes' of enslaved people to speak directly to ours, 'in an appeal to a shared humanity'.[15] The veracity of pseudoscientific racism is therefore contested by the affecting eyes of Alfred, Jem, Fassena, Jack, Drana, Renty, and Delia. Photographs of African American people, enslaved or free, could thus challenge white supremacist narratives of Black inferiority by highlighting Black humanity and showcasing Black civility. African American people recognised this from the start. Historian Matthew Fox-Amato has studied how, across the slave states in antebellum America, enslaved Black Americans used

[15] Alan Trachtenburg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), p. 56.

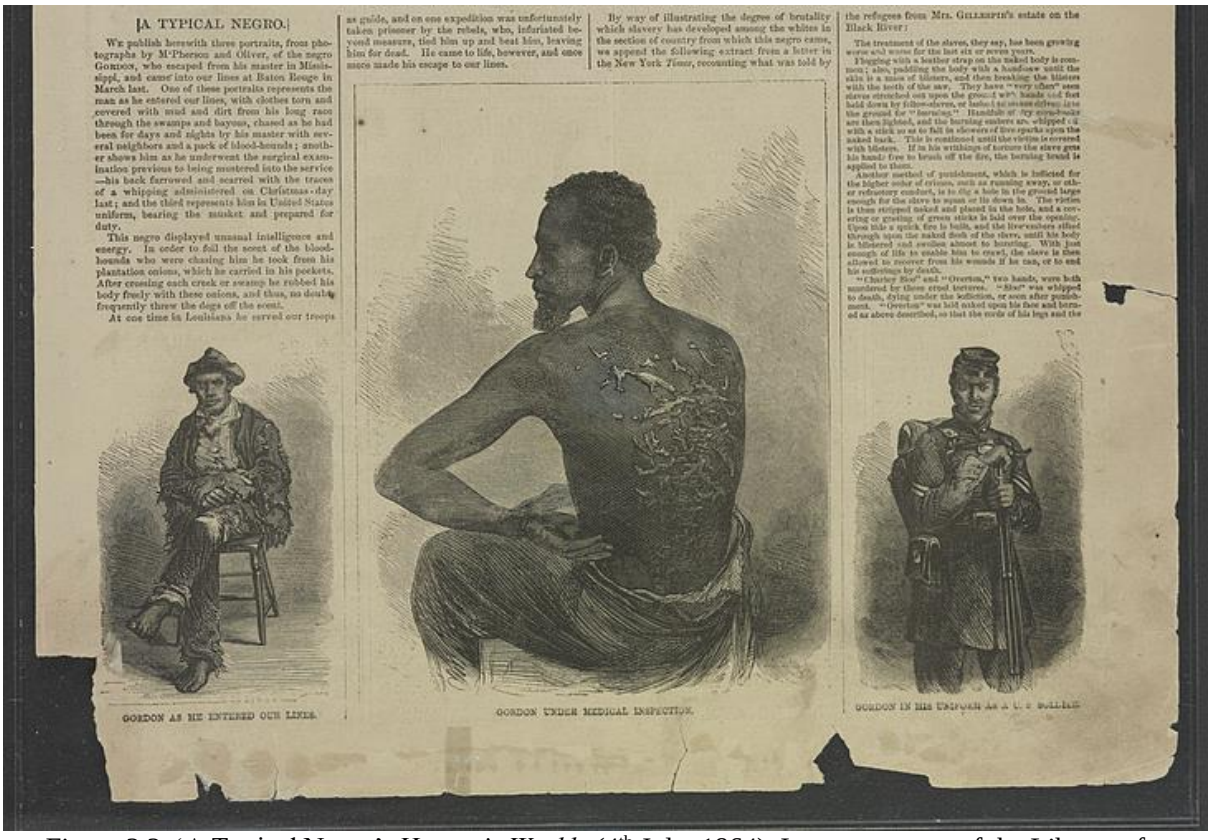
photography for their own purposes, which ranged from the simple pleasure of seeing oneself captured in a photographic image to sustaining familial ties with loved ones who had been sold away.[16] Photographic images, writes Fox-Amato, 'could testify to an enslaved person's individuality in a society that denied her or his full personhood'.[17]

*

Another early photographic image of an enslaved person, taken in 1863 by union forces in Louisiana, is that of a man named Gordon. Photographed facing away from the camera with his horrifically scarred back exposed to the viewer in gruesome detail, Gordon's injuries now constitute one of the most widely recognisable images of American slavery.[18] Henry Ward Beecher's anti-slavery publication *The Independent,* which first published an article featuring the photograph in May 1863, titled it 'The Scourged Back'.[19] American Studies scholar Simon Strick attributed to the image's iconicity to its 'ostentatious plainness' and 'uncompromising display of shocking violation'.[20] Originally a photograph taken at the Union Army refuge at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in April 1863, the image was first printed as a small *carte de visite* (CdV), a process invented only ten years beforehand in Paris by photographer Andre Adolphe Eugene Disderi. *Harper's Weekly* published the image on the 4th July, 1863, as part of an account of Gordon's life. The article was titled "A Typical Negro", and narrativised Gordon's escape from slavery to the refuge of the Union Army. Significantly, in *Harper's Weekly* the image was accompanied either side by representations of Gordon's appearance as he entered the Union camp—his clothes filthy and torn—and his appearance

[16] Matthew Fox-Amato, 'Portraits of Endurance: Enslaved People and Vernacular Photography in the Antebellum South', in Barbash, Rogers, and Willis (eds), *To Make Their Own Way in the World,* pp. 151-169.
[17] Ibid., p. 156.
[18] Also known as Peter, as there are varying accounts of who the individuals depicted in the publication are.
[19] David Silkenat, '"A Typical Negro": Gordon, Peter, Vincent Colyer, and the Story Behind Slavery's Most Famous Photograph', *American Nineteenth Century History,* 15:2 (2014), p. 169.
[20] Simon Strick, *American Dolorologies: Pain, Sentimentalism, Biopolitics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014), p. 102.

as a Union soldier at the end of his ordeal; armed, uniformed, and free. The framing of the triptych established a liberating narrative, chronicling Gordon's journey from slavery to freedom. However, by positioning the image of the scarred back as the central focus of this narrative, *Harper's Weekly's* sensationalised Gordon's physical suffering.


A TYPICAL NEGRO.

We publish herewith three portraits, from photographs by McPherson and Oliver, of the negro GORDON, who escaped from his master in Mississippi, and came into our lines at Baton Rouge in March last. One of these portraits represents the man as he entered our lines, with clothes torn and covered with mud and dirt from his long race through the swamps and bayous, chased as he had been for days and nights by his master with several neighbors and a pack of blood-hounds; another shows him as he underwent the surgical examination previous to being mustered into the service—his back furrowed and scarred with the traces of a whipping administered on Christmas-day last; and the third represents him in United States uniform, bearing the musket and prepared for duty.

This negro displayed unusual intelligence and energy. In order to foil the scent of the blood-hounds who were chasing him he took from his plantation onions, which he carried in his pockets. After crossing each creek or swamp he rubbed his body freely with these onions, and thus, no doubt, frequently threw the dogs off the scent.

At one time in Louisiana he served our troops as guide, and on one expedition was unfortunately taken prisoner by the rebels, who, infuriated beyond measure, tied him up and beat him, leaving him for dead. He came to life, however, and once more made his escape to our lines.

By way of illustrating the degree of brutality which slavery has developed among the whites in the section of country from which this negro came, we append the following extract from a letter in the New York *Times*, recounting what was told by the refugees from Mrs. GILLESPIE'S estate on the Black River:

The treatment of the slaves, they say, has been growing worse and worse for the last six or seven years.

Flogging with a leather strap on the naked body is common; also, paddling the body with a handsaw until the skin is a mass of blisters, and then breaking the blisters with the teeth of the saw. They have "very often" seen slaves stretched out upon the ground with hands and feet held down by fellow-slaves, or bound to stakes driven into the ground for "barracks." Handfuls of dry corn-husks are then lighted, and the burning embers are whipped off with a stick so as to fall in showers of live sparks upon the naked back. This is continued until the victim is covered with blisters. If in his writhings of torture the slave gets his hand free to brush off the fire, the burning brand is applied to them.

Another method of punishment, which is inflicted for the higher order of crimes, such as running away, or other refractory conduct, is to dig a hole in the ground large enough for the slave to stand or sit down in. The victim is then stripped naked and placed in the hole, and a covering or grating of green sticks is laid over the opening. Upon this a quick fire is built, and the live embers sifted through upon the naked flesh of the slave, until his body is blistered and swollen almost to bursting. With just enough of life to enable him to crawl, the slave is then allowed to recover from his wounds if he can, or to end his sufferings by death.

"Charley Rice" and "Overton," two hands, were both murdered by these cruel tortures. "Rice" was whipped to death, dying under the infliction, or soon after punishment. "Overton" was laid naked upon his face and burned as above described, so that the cords of his legs and the

GORDON AS HE ENTERED OUR LINES.

GORDON UNDER MEDICAL INSPECTION.

GORDON IN HIS UNIFORM AS A U. S. SOLDIER.

Figure 2.2. 'A Typical Negro', *Harper's Weekly* (4th July, 1864). Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Photography's reputation as a truth-telling medium was fundamental to the impact of Gordon's image. Beecher's publication demonstrated this most vividly in its claim that, unlike the narratives and novels written by authors such as his sister Harriet Beecher Stowe, the reality of what the photograph showed could not be doubted as the 'instrument [photography] can't lie'.[21] Beecher argued Gordon's scars symbolised southern slave-holding

[21] Silkenat, '"A Typical Negro"', p. 173.

society and all that upheld it, writing that the image 'should be multiplied by one hundred thousand and scattered over the States' because it told the story 'to the eye' in a way that even *Uncle Tom's Cabin* could not.[22] However, as Silkenat explains, the centralisation of Gordon's physical suffering in the represented transition from slave to soldier and then citizen is evidence of the anti-slavery movement's willingness to 'homogenize African Americans and their individual experiences in the service of the redemptive narrative'.

In fact, Silkenat has compellingly argued that the soldier and enslaved man pictured at either side of Gordon may be a separate individual altogether. He claims that the narrative published by *Harper's Weekly* was partially invented and that the inclusion of 'The Scourged Back' was a tactic used by the anti-slavery press to excite public sentiment at a time when enthusiasm for the war was faltering. Union defeats at Fredericksburg in December 1862 and Chancellorsville in May 1863—the latter being the same month Beecher's New York *Independent* published Gordon's image—had taken their toll on public support for the war in the North. The anti-slavery movement thus used Gordon's photograph to reinforce its moral position and justify the Union cause, both uses outlined by Sontag's earlier exposition. Gordon's identity and individual experience, on the other hand, were subordinated to the visual power that Black suffering could harness. Labelled 'A Typical Negro' by *Harper's Weekly,* and 'The Dumb Witness' by William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper the *Liberator,* Gordon became an object, a literal 'body of evidence' whose lived experience mattered little in comparison to the scars that recorded his suffering.[23]

Whilst representations of Gordon in the anti-slavery press obfuscated the formerly enslaved man's individuality, it is important to note that Gordon himself was an active and

[22] Ibid., p. 173.
[23] Kathleen Collins, 'The Scourged Back', *History of Photography,* 9:1 (1985), p. 44, quoted in Celeste-Marie Bernier, 'A "Typical Negro" or a "Work of Art"? The "Inner" via the "Outer Man" in Frederick Douglass's Manuscripts and Daguerreotypes', *Slavery & Abolition,* 33:2 (2012), p. 288.

willing participant in the creation of his image. Gordon would have had to willingly expose his back, sit still for a long period of time, and be cooperative with the photographer in order to create the photograph. Thus, Gordon's escape, his cooperation with the photographer, and his willingness to show what preceded his act of self-liberation were all active assertions of selfhood. Despite this, images such as Gordon's were primarily used by the anti-slavery press to arouse public sentiment in favour of the war that would ultimately end slavery. As we have seen in the previous chapter, proponents of the anti-slavery cause were determined to tell the story of slavery in a way that would capture the hearts and imaginations of white liberal audiences. The importance placed on finding ever more emotionally visceral ways to invite audiences to see for themselves the horrors of slavery was therefore at the forefront of anti-slavery tactics. It was imperative, to this end, that Gordon's image be readily, widely, and cheaply available. As opposed to earlier daguerreotypes that had to be protected by a fragile glass case, Gordon's CdV could be easily reproduced and mailed at a low cost. Consequently, the image circulated amongst publications and private citizens with previously unparalleled momentum. As one of the most widely-read news publications during the Civil War, *Harper's Weekly*'s circulation exceeded 100,000 per issue.[24] Copies of 'The Scourged Back' were sold by Beecher's *Independent* for 15 cents, seven prints for one dollar, or $1.50 per dozen, for almost two months.[25] Other photography studios also reproduced Gordon's image, including studios in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and London.[26]

The Independent published a letter, written by an individual using the pseudonym "Bostonian", who claimed to have been present at the Union camp when The Scourged Back image was taken. They wrote that the sight of Gordon's back 'sent a thrill of horror to every white person present', but that the African Americans present in the camp who were waiting

[24] Silkenat, '"A Typical Negro"', p. 180.
[25] Ibid., p. 180.
[26] Celeste-Marie Bernier, 'A "Typical Negro"', p. 288.

to pass through union lines ‘paid but little attention to the sad spectacle’, such terrible scenes being painfully familiar to them all’.[27] According to “Bostonian”, then, for the Black people wanting to pass through Union lines, the ‘sad spectacle’ of Gordon’s scars were an all-too-familiar reminder of the violence that saturated their daily lives and was fundamental to the system of slavery. Yet, for white audiences, the shock as a result of seeing Gordon’s brutalised body was both thrilling and horrifying.

“Bostonian’s” account of the response elicited from white audiences is significant, because the implication is that Gordon’s scars were an unfamiliar sight. As we have seen in the previous chapter, however, sensationalised representations of Black pain had long been a staple of anti-slavery visual culture and had dominated popular American media for decades prior to the Civil War. That ‘every white person present’ experienced a ‘thrill of horror’ in response to seeing Gordon’s scars whilst the Black people present barely noticed was therefore a conditioned response, one that had been shaped by decades of discourse. The ‘thrill’ of horror described by “Bostonian” is a revealing encapsulation of the complex interplay of the sympathy, horror, and sadistic pleasure anti-slavery visual culture elicited from audiences. This is precisely why the image of Gordon was such a successful marketing tool for the anti-slavery cause. In the same way that engravings and graphic narratives had enthralled and appalled audiences for the past several decades, photographs of damaged and brutalised enslaved bodies also evoked an emotional reaction that often hid the sadomasochistic, pornographic enticements of such displays behind a veil of sympathy.

The belief that photography could be used to the advantage of African American citizens is most readily identifiable in the works of Frederick Douglass. Douglass understood the complex nature of photographic imagery and recognised an opportunity to use the

[27] Ibid., p. 181.

medium's supposed "truth-telling" authority to challenge the dominant white gaze. With his own self-imaging practices Douglass hewed a space in which African American individuality could enter American visual culture.

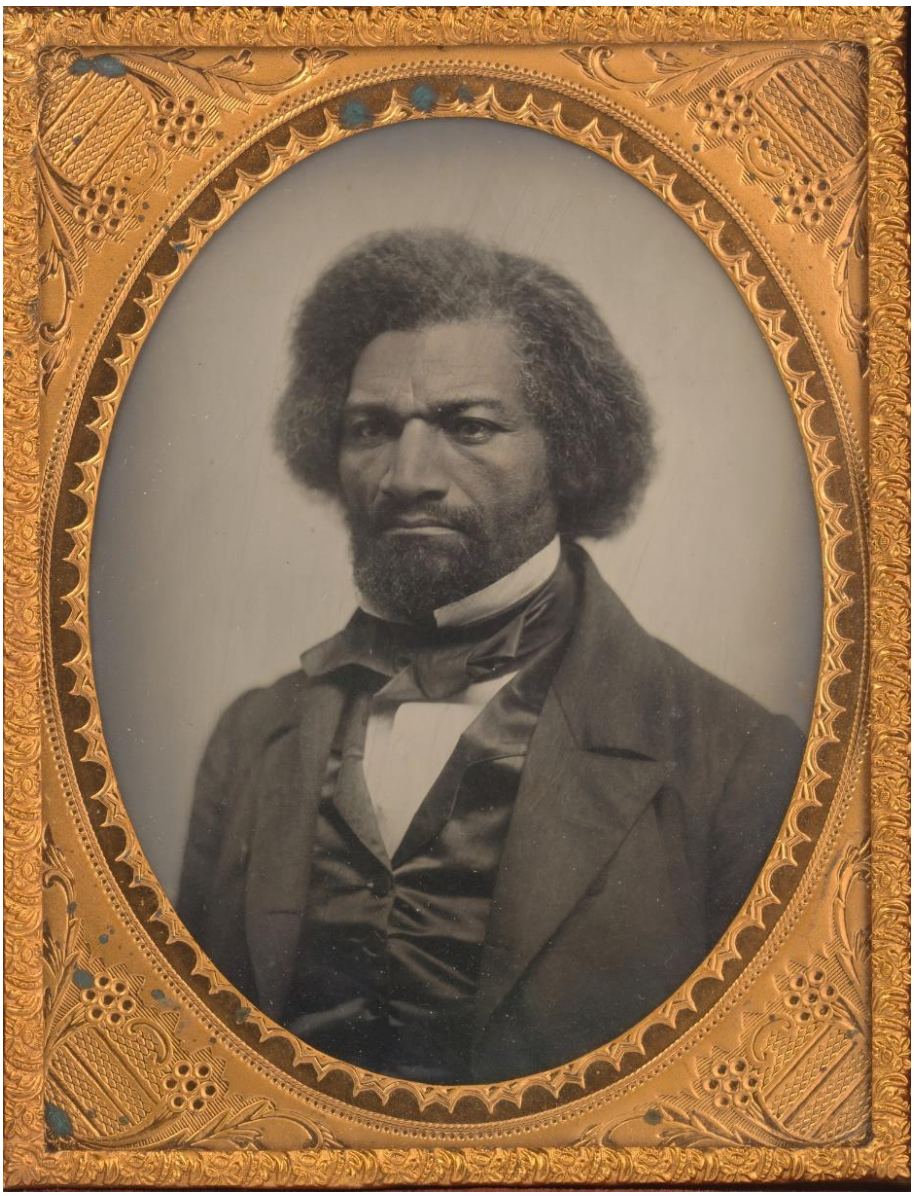


Figure 2.3. Portrait of Frederick Douglass (1856), Quarter Plate Ambrotype, taken by an unidentified artist, from the collection of National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; acquired through the generosity of an anonymous donor, <https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.74.75> [accessed 28/02/2022].

With his own image, Douglass sought to emphasise dignity, selfhood, and strength. His portraits were often ambiguous images that conveyed intellectual activity, sternness, and

moral seriousness. Douglass presented himself as a thinker, an actor, an individual who was intellectually engaged with the world. Viewers, in attempting to uncover any indication of his nature through the image, must by necessity recognise Douglass as a separate and complex subject. His images—and there were a lot of them, Douglass was the most photographed American of the nineteenth century—challenged dominant white visual culture by 'insert[ing] Black subjects into the realm of fine art'.[28]

Douglass recognised the role that race science had played in shaping photographic representations of Black people when he said that he had never once seen an image in a work of American ethnology 'designed to give an idea of the mental endowments of the negro, which did anything like justice to the subject; nay, that was not infamously distorted'.[29] Douglass furthermore believed the greatest harm inflicted by photographs of Black pain was not the explicit representation of violated and brutalised flesh but the resultant loss of enslaved individuals' humanity and identity. He believed enslaved people became incorporated into a generic representation of suffering that, though used as an emotive tool to criticise the entirety of American slavery, often silenced enslaved individuality. Douglass described his own experience of this silencing in *My Bondage and My Freedom* when he writes that he was 'generally introduced as a "chattel"—a "thing"—a piece of southern property' that the chairman of the anti-slavery meeting often assured audiences could speak.[30] This form of white control over Douglass's presentation echoes how white anti-slavery authors and activists inserted their own explications at the beginning of published narratives

[28] Celeste Marie Bernier, 'A Visual Call to Arms against the Caracature [sic] of My Own Face': From Fugitive Slave to Fugitive Image in Frederick Douglass's Theory of Portraiture', *Journal of American Studies,* 49 (2015), p. 339.
[29] Frederick Douglass, 'The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered', *An Address Before the Literary Societies of Western Reserve College* (Rochester: Lee, Mann, & Co, Daily American Office, 1854), p. 21.
[30] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), pp. 360-361.

written by formerly enslaved people to assure audiences that the Black author could be trusted to write an accurate account of their experience of slavery.

Like with the image of Gordon, Douglass's individual experience of violence at the hands of slavery became "typical" when it was presented within the parameters set by anti-slavery visual culture. As Bernier writes:

> These and other 'living parchment[s]', as Douglass famously described the suffering backs of enslaved men and women in *My Bondage and My Freedom* [...] became muted in the hands of white abolitionists, who failed to appreciate black subjectivities as individualised, imaginative and anything but 'typical'.[31]

Though Douglass consistently promoted Black strength in his writing and self-imaging, his publications were also reliant upon white editors, publishers, and artists. Douglass consequently often had to concede to the wishes of those with the power to distribute his image and writings. For example, in 1881 Douglass threatened to take legal action against the English publishers of his *Life and Times.* Douglass had approved the portrait that adorned the frontispiece but was adamantly opposed to the addition of other illustrations in the book, which Douglass claimed 'load[ed] the book with all manner of coarse and shocking woodcuts, such as may be found in the news papers of the day'.[32] The woodcuts Douglass protested included images of beatings and of runaways being hunted by dogs, images that would have echoed those in the graphic narratives of the previous chapter**.** Yet, by 1882, Douglass resigned himself to the inclusion of these images and withdrew his opposition when the publishers refused to remove the woodcuts. Undoubtedly as a consequence of the popularisation of such graphically violent images of American slavery, Douglass's publishers knew the importance of gratifying the desires of their primary consumers with images of Black pain and suffering.

[31] Celeste-Marie Bernier, 'A "Typical Negro"', p. 289.
[32] Bernier, 'A Visual Call to Arms', p. 352.

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Lynching photographs functioned not only within the parameters set by centuries of visual conventions that spectacularised and pornified representations of pain but also within those being set by what Goldsby calls the late-nineteenth-century 'zeitgeist' which further propelled a 'stress upon visual sensations during these years':

> Amid the rise of 'amusement parks, world's fairs, urban theatre districts and their White Ways, and circus extravaganzas'—together with the awe-inspiring constructions of elevated railways, underground subway systems, skyscraper buildings, and department stores—lynching was a vital link in this new order of display because the violence, like these other visual phenomena, heightened Americans' 'consciousness about vision' in its own particular ways.[33]

One of America's most popular summer tourist destinations at the turn of the twentieth century, Coney Island in New York City, offered visitors the opportunity, for a small fee, to watch live performances and films depicting war, disaster, and violence. In 1903, visitors to Coney Island were enthralled by the spectacle of an elephant being electrocuted.[34] 'Lynching', writes Goldsby, therefore thrived 'as a culturally logical practice because its violence enacted the premise that "Coney Island realism" depended on but did not fulfil—as the very essence of its appeal as a thrill—the spectacularisation of death'.[35] In other words, sensational violence as an attraction was not unique to spectacle lynching but was embedded in a society that had popularised displays of violence for over a century in its visual culture. Photography and film, as then innovative visual technologies, became tools to propel this sensationalistic visual culture even further. Thus, Americans were not only drawn to the violence of lynchings—some of which attracted thousands of spectators as schools and banks closed for the day to allow the entirety of the local community to come together for the

[33] Ibid., p. 224.
[34] For more details, see James Fiumara, 'Electrocuting an Elephant at Coney Island: Attraction, Story, and the Curious Spectacle', *Film History, Popular Attractions & Visual Narrative,* 28:1 (2016): 43-70, also, Amy Louise Wood, '"Killing the Elephant": Murderous Beasts and the Thrill of Retribution, 1885-1930', *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (2012): 405-44.
[35] Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, p. 223.

event—but also to other scenes of spectacular suffering. In this context, lynchings, as frenzied performances of "justice", were distinctively theatrical and visually enthralling because they were both a product and an architect of modern American visual culture.

The lynching of Will Porter in Livermore, KY, in 1911 provides a striking example of how the spectacularisation of death in American visual culture influenced the actions of lynch mobs. Accused of shooting a white man in a bar fight, Porter was taken to a theatre where over fifty armed men shot him. An even larger, unarmed crowd gathered to watch. As the *New York Times* reported:

> [Porter] was bound hand and foot and placed in the centre of the stage. Many of the lights when the current was turned on refused to burn, and in the semi-darkness the mob silhouetted against the theatre walls, awaited the signal of their leader. When it was given fifty guns fired in unison, one piercing scream was heard, and their work was over. The lights were extinguished, the curtain lowered, and the mob filed out.[36]

According to an investigation carried out by the The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), those given 'the privilege of emptying their six shooters at the swaying form above them' had to buy more expensive tickets for an orchestra seat.[37] Those in the gallery were allowed only one shot each. The money collected was donated to the family of the white man Porter was accused of killing.

Placed centre-stage before a baying crowd, Porter's death was transformed into an attraction like the Coney Island theatres of violence and destruction. The mob's performance was dictated by a distinctively spectacular visual culture that was more at home in early twentieth-century America than many would prefer to admit. The language used in the *New York Times* report emphasises the theatrical influence upon Porter's lynching. The event reads like a scene in a drama. Bound and shrouded in semi-darkness, Porter's body was pierced by dozens of bullets from the guns of men who had paid to take part in the killing in the same

[36] Ibid., p. 227.
[37] Ibid., p. 227.

way one might pay to enter a fairground or carnival attraction. Porter's last screams echoing through the theatre signalled the end of the show, before the lights and curtains were lowered and the perpetrating audience vacated the galleries and stalls.

Porter's death was not the only lynching transformed into a spectacular mode of entertainment. In 1898, the *Fitchburg Daily Sentinel*, reporting from Massachusetts on the lynching of Henry Smith, described how the town had 'orchestrated a procession', including 'a "float" complete with a cardboard "throne" on which the man was seated and then handed a "sceptre" to hold, "in mockery of a King"'.[38] For the alleged crime of murdering and raping three-year-old Myrtle Vance—an account refuted by Ida B. Wells' *Red Record* after an investigation revealed no signs of sexual assault could be found on the young girl's body—Smith was tortured in front of a large crowd of onlookers for almost one hour with hot irons and blades before being burned alive. The scaffold upon which Smith was tortured and eventually killed was adorned with the word "Justice".

Smith's lynching is reminiscent of the Bakhtinian notion of the carnivalesque, a scene which overturns established hierarchies and halts entrenched social and behavioural codes. Bakhtin writes that what carnival suspends 'first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety and etiquette connected with it—that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people'.[39] As a celebration of freedom, carnival provides the opportunity for new relationships between people and the world they inhabit. One of the most important performances in the carnival is the mock crowning and subsequent de-crowning of a "King". The ritual harnesses an ambivalent duality in that it symbolises the topsy-turvy world of the carnival whilst ultimately

[38] Edwin T. Arnold, *What Virtue There is in Fire: Cultural Memory and the Lynching of Sam Hose* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), p. 107.
[39] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 122-123.

reinstating the hierarchical and structural norms of society. I contend that Smith's mock parade, in which he was crowned and sceptred whilst being carried to the scaffold, was a similar ritualistic performance of white racial identity by the mob in retaliation to the perceived gains made by Black people since emancipation. The mock King Smith would have made a ludicrous figure; a Black man sitting upon a throne, bestowed with false power. His violent de-crowning would symbolise the restoration of order. The triumph of "Justice".

Furthermore, to add to the spectacular nature of the murder, Smith's torture and death were not only photographed but sound recorded so that the killing could be exhibited to audiences across the US in an almost cinematic display. Black soldier and activist Samuel Burdett's 1901 *Test of Lynch Law: An Expose of Mob Violence and the Courts of Hell,* documents his encounter in Seattle, WA, with 'photographic views' of Smith's lynching alongside 'phonographic records'.[40] Burdett recalled his horror as he heard 'that poor human being scream and groan and beg for his life, in the presence and hearing of thousands of people, who had gathered from all parts of the country to see it'.[41] Smith's murder was not only spectacularly staged in Livermore, KY, to the delight of the perpetrating crowd, but the images and sounds of his violent death were disseminated across the nation, reaching as far as the other side of the country, and displayed to audiences there as an attraction. For African American citizens such as Burdett, the fear, horror, anger, and sorrow felt at the circulation of this recording were disregarded in favour of appealing to and enthralling white consumers.

The consumption of lynching imagery grew alongside the democratisation of photography. Following the era of the daguerreotype, picture cards and postcards abounded. The small size and light weight of these images meant they could be easily transported and

[40] Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret,* p. 13.
[41] Samuel Burdett, *A Test of Lynch Law: An Expose of Mob Violence and the Courts of Hell* (Seattle: n.p., 1904), 17, in D. A. P. Murray Pamphlet Collection (microfilm), Library of Congress. Quoted in Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret,* p. 14.

exchanged at a low cost. Furthermore, the invention of the Kodak camera in 1888 handed the power to create photographic images to the masses as cameras themselves became portable, cheap, and extremely easy to use. Unlike earlier cameras which depended upon rigid glass-plate negatives for each exposure, the Kodak was a roll-holder device that came preloaded with flexible paper—later cellulose—film. Though the professional photographer maintained their authority over how to light, structure, and assemble the perfect image, particularly when it came to portraiture, the Kodak allowed Americans to capture whatever, whenever, and whoever's image they wished to preserve.

The result of this can be seen in a report from an NAACP informant writing from the site of the lynching of Thomas Brooks in 1915. Brooks was accused of murdering a white planter and his plantation manager. Whilst he was in police custody, a mob of vigilantes seized Brooks, took him to a nearby railway bridge, and hanged him. The NAACP reporter wrote: 'Hundreds of kodaks clicked all morning at the scene of the lynching […] Picture card photographers installed a portable printing plant at the bridge and reaped a harvest in selling postcards showing a photograph of the lynched Negro'.[42] The hundreds of Kodak photographs and hundreds more picture cards sold by vendors encouraged the production and circulation of lynching photographs. Amateur photographers, who could now instantaneously produce photographs to share or covet, contributed their own records of racial violence to the American visual cultural archive.

Yet, like the daguerreotypes of Alfred, Jem, Fassena, Jack, Drana, Renty, and Delia, lynching photographs had the potential to function dialectically as complex spaces in which dominant representations of Blackness could be challenged. For example, though lynching photographs and postcards were often produced by and for perpetrating whites to provide

[42] Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, p. 258.

evidence of white power and bolster white supremacist narratives, these photographs also provided evidence that a brutal act of murder had been committed. This evidence could be used to challenge white supremacy by exposing the violence that underpinned it, and could even be used to identify murderers and members of the mob from the white faces captured by the camera's lens. As Raiford writes, '*white* criminality, barbarism, lasciviousness, and mendacity' are revealed as 'one looks at the crowds of men, women, and children who attended and perpetrated lynchings'.[43]

African American photography thus became a political statement, with the camera as the most valuable weapon against injustice, objectification, and dehumanisation. This can be seen most readily in the work of African American photographers, who manipulated photography's visual conventions to produce counter-narratives of lynchings in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries by producing images that emphasised the humanity and individuality of lynching victims. Primarily, this was done using a "frame narrative", in which a series of images showed lynching victims not only at the moment of their death but also before and after it. This narrative offered 'empathetic visual care to the victim's bodies' because the focus shifted from the objectified and lifeless body, a still of death, to a narrative of life. In lynching photography, this frame narrative was a distinctly African American approach. Though not the only contemporary approach used by the Black press to report on lynchings—for example, hand-drawn political cartoons which could display the explicit violence of lynching without circulating photographs was a distinctly Black American tradition—early Black photographers worked specifically in this way to challenge dominant visual conventions that objectified the Black body.[44]

[43] Leigh Raiford, 'Lynching, Visuality, and the Un/Making of Blackness', *Journal of Contemporary African Art*, 20:1 (2006), p. 25.
[44] For more details on the use of cartoons and other visual techniques to represent lynchings in the Black Press, see Amanda K. Frisken, '"A Song Without Words": Anti-Lynching Imagery in the African American

The most famous of these African American photographers was J.P Ball. Born free in Virginia in 1825, by the end of his eighty-year life Ball would become the most celebrated Black daguerreotypist and photographer of the nineteenth century. He began his career in his late teens when he met the African American daguerreotypist John B. Bailey. By 1845, Ball had opened his own one-room studio in Cincinnati, OH. Initially, he struggled to establish himself. The first studio Ball opened saw only two sitters in the first three months, one of whom was photographed on credit. But after four years of itinerant work and a short yet successful period back in Virginia, Ball would return to Cincinnati in 1849. This time, with years of experience, an established name, and the financial means to support the running of his own gallery behind him, his career would thrive.

Ball's Great Daguerrean Gallery of the West was more than a studio. In keeping with the entertainment culture sweeping the nation, Ball's gallery was a sensational experience. With a reception room measuring twenty by forty feet, fine furniture, gold-leaf wallpaper, a piano, and two towering mirrors, the opulence of the space led to its crowning as 'the most famous…and most ornate' studio in Cincinnati.[45] The extravagant surroundings would also host works by the best of Cincinnati's Black artists and cultural innovators. Paintings by African American artist and Cincinnati resident Robert Duncanson adorned the walls, along with sculptures paying homage to goddesses of Science, Religion, Music, Poetry, and Purity. An advertisement Ball printed in 1855 demonstrated the extent to which he publicised his studio as exquisitely experiential:

> The very seat on which you sit and the carpet on which you tread seem to be a gem culled from the fragrant lap of Flora; all of these are reflected by two bright mirrors in the south end, present you a scene replete with elegance and beauty — to cap the

Press, 1889-1898', *The Journal of African American History*, 97:3 (2012): 240-269, and Koritha Mitchell, *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

[45] Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black*: *A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), p. 5.

> climax, there is a noble piano by whose sweet notes you are regaled, while the skilful operator is painting your face with sunbeams on the sensitive yet tenacious mirror.[46]

Ball's success was ground-breaking. He soon opened two more galleries in the city with the help of his brother and brother-in-law. When one studio was destroyed during a tornado in 1860, both Black and white patrons funded the rebuild. Ball's list of sitters ultimately included illustrious personages such as Frederick Douglass, Jenny Lind and P.T. Barnum, and the wife and daughter of Ulysses S. Grant.

The reason behind Ball's relocation to Helena, Montana, in 1887 is not known for sure, though there is speculation that the rising Black population and reputably vibrant culture may have drawn him there. Nevertheless, it was here that Ball photographed and narrated the lynching of an African American man called William Biggerstaff. Convicted of the murder of African American prize fighter Dick Turner, Biggerstaff was hanged in front of a crowd of spectators in 1896. In all likelihood, Ball and Biggerstaff were acquaintances, perhaps good friends. Either way, Ball was certainly familiar with the case and was aware that Biggerstaff had claimed self-defence in the trial. In the days following his sentencing, Ball headed a clemency movement alongside Helena's Black community. Their efforts were to no avail. Unable to save Biggerstaff's life, Ball did what he could to preserve it. He developed a triptych of photographs, backed onto cards bearing the emblem of Ball's Montana studio. Rather than sensationalising Biggerstaff's physical suffering, Ball narrativised his life and death in a way that created a sense of movement, transition, and vitality.

[46] Shelly Jarenski, '"Delighted and Instructed": African American Challenges to Panoramic Aesthetics in J. P. Ball, Kara Walker, and Frederick Douglass', *American Quarterly*, 65:1 (2013), p. 137.

Figure 2.4. J.P Ball & Son, *Portrait of William Biggerstaff seated in a chair with a hand on his face wearing a flower in his lapel; Photograph of the Execution of William Biggerstaff, hanged for the murder of "Dick" Johnson, flanked by Rev. Victor Day and Henry Jurgens, sheriff, 1896; Photograph of William Biggerstaff, former slave, born in Lexington, KY in 1854* (1896). Image from Duke University.

In displaying images of Biggerstaff when he was alive and after his death, Ball brings both life and loss into the narrative of Biggerstaff's death using a frame narrative structure. He reminds his audience that Biggerstaff was a man. A man who, like most others at this time, had sat for a portrait that would project a civilised, refined image. A man who, as we can see from the final image (and the ring on his left hand) was married. A man who was mourned. A man who was taken away from his family. In showing this, Ball's approach allowed for a fuller expression of the pain felt by the African American community in the wake of Biggerstaff's death.

This was not the first time Ball had used a frame narrative approach to challenge the dominant white narrative on Black experience. Forty-one years earlier, Ball exhibited his anti-slavery panorama *Ball's Splendid, Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States Comprising Views of the African Slave Trade; of Northern and Southern Cities; of Cotton and Sugar Plantations; of the Mississippi, Ohio, and Savannah Rivers, Niagara Falls &c.* Operated

through the use of a canvas that was rotated across two poles, panoramas were illusory spectacles designed to make audiences feel as though they were moving through time and space as they were swept along with a narrative trajectory. As would be expected from a mode of visual technology shaped by decades of discourse on the truth-telling capacities of the photographic medium, panoramas were met with a demand to 'promote a scientific discourse of evidentiary truth', specifically those truths 'that could be substantiated by ethnographic, spatial forms' such as 'landscapes, bodies, and artifacts'.[47]

In many ways, due to the constraints of the form he was working with, Ball's *Pictorial Tour* complied with these demands. Landscapes played a central role. Though the panorama itself is lost, it can be inferred from the title alone that viewers of the panorama could expect to be transported across different continents, states, and countries. The fifty-six-page pamphlet that accompanied the panorama paid great attention to the details of the flora and fauna in each scene, providing audiences with a substantial scientific knowledge of each landscape.[48] More important than this adherence to panoramic conventions, though, is the narrative Ball created. He presented his tour of the US through the journey undertaken by an enslaved African American man. Beginning with his life in an African village, described as an idyllic world of natural wonder and beauty, the story follows the man as he is captured, transported—an outbreak of smallpox at sea stands as evidence of the horror of the Middle Passage—sold at an auction in St Louis, MO, and enslaved on a plantation. The panorama shows his eventual escape through the swamps of Louisiana before he reaches Canada, where the monumental Niagara Falls thunderously celebrate his freedom.

Ball's struggle to reconcile conventions that often evoked imperialist nostalgia through ethnographical and spatial forms with the violent reality of slavery is detectable, but

[47] Jarenski, 'Delighted and Instructed', p. 133.
[48] Ibid., pp. 135-136.

so too is his desire to challenge and disrupt the dominant white gaze.[49] The 'subversive force' behind Ball's earliest attempt at a frame narrative, applied to the story of American slavery rather than an individual such as Biggerstaff, is what was pivotal to African American photographers' earliest works.[50] The enslaved man in Ball's panorama is first depicted as a man with a sense of place, purpose, and citizenship in his African home, before he was kidnapped and enslaved. Like Biggerstaff, the man in Ball's panorama is shown to have family, a community, and therefore a subjective humanity that cannot be denied.

In his portrait, Biggerstaff is clean-shaven, with a trimmed moustache and neatly cut hair. He wears a suit jacket and waistcoat, with a flower blooming in his lapel. Seated in a wooden chair, he gazes thoughtfully at something just to the left of the camera's lens. His chin rests upon his right hand. Significantly, the direction of Biggerstaff's gaze and his ambiguous expression directly mirror the earlier image of Frederick Douglass, perhaps in an intentional homage to the highly respected and well-known African American figure who emanated strength, dignity, and intellect through his many portraits. The background, though faded, shows a circular trellis which forms a halo around Biggerstaff's head. The cherub that bestows a wreath of flowers upon the top of the trellis could almost be reaching out to touch Biggerstaff, to whisper in his ear as he sits in contemplative repose.

It is difficult to subsequently reconcile this image of Biggerstaff with the one that succeeds it. Now dead, the face that first greets and intrigues the viewer with its thoughtful meditation is covered by a hood, unable to return the gaze of either camera or viewer. Though he wears the same jacket—presumably his best—the flower, a sign of life blossoming, has gone. A wedding ring is just visible on Biggerstaff's left hand. A crowd of white men stand behind Biggerstaff's corpse, whilst Reverend Victor Day and Sheriff Henry Jurgens stand

[49] Ibid., p. 136.
[50] Ibid., p. 138.

either side. Every white face is staring intently at the camera, which returns their relentless gaze in a stand-off that teeters upon the confrontational. Considering that Ball had headed the group that lobbied for Biggerstaff's life, this may indeed have been a confrontational exchange between the Black photographer and the crowd of white officials and spectators.

The final image in the sequence is of Biggerstaff in his casket. Now more prominently displayed, his wedding ring draws the viewer's gaze immediately. This draws attention not only to the loss of Biggerstaff himself but to the sorrows felt by a wife and family left behind. Biggerstaff's body is displayed in a lined casket that has been propped up to allow Ball to capture Biggerstaff's torso in a style not too far removed from that of classic portraiture. Spectators can see that, after his execution, Biggerstaff's body was attended to, cared for, and mourned. An adherence to African American mourning rituals widely practiced at the end of the nineteenth century was central to Ball's mode of presentation. Open-casket funerals were traditional in African American communities. This way of communal mourning allowed an active 'laying on of hands, touching, kissing, and expressing one's grief by viewing the remains'.[51] Lovingly embracing and establishing physical contact with the bodies of lynching victims was often a way for families and loved ones to reclaim the bodies of those who had been taken from them, a way to protest the injustice of their deaths. In photographing the casket in this way, Ball made the mourning process available to a wider audience. Where Biggerstaff's community in Helena could see, touch, and mourn his body at the funeral, the tactility of the photographs allowed viewers to participate in this ritual from both a geographical and temporal distance. Viewers, too, could lay their hands upon the body, hold it to their lips or hearts as they mourned Biggerstaff's death. Thus, the dialectical nature of photography is once again evident in Ball's visual counter-narrative production. Where white officials and spectators may have used the image of Biggerstaff's death to strengthen their

[51] Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, pp. 243-244.

claim to superiority and civil justice, Ball re-contextualised the image within his frame narrative to reclaim Biggerstaff's body and share the story of his life and death with those who mourned him.

This approach would be mirrored almost sixty years later by commemorations at the funeral of Emmett Louis Till, a fifteen-year-old boy lynched in Money, MS, in 1955. Though it was the image of Till's brutalised face published in *Jet Magazine* that came to define this tragic moment in African American history, the young boy's funeral was also to become a defining moment in the Civil Rights Movement. Emmett's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, held a public, open-casket funeral for her son. The open lid of the casket displayed not only the *Jet Magazine* image but photographs of Emmett as a happy, smiling teenager at the beginning of a life brutally snatched away. It was vital that the thousands of people attending Emmett's funeral and the millions watching from afar would remember him not solely as the victim of a horrifically brutal lynching but as an individual, a child who had lived and loved and smiled for his photograph in the same way that William Biggerstaff had posed for his only decades before. This emphasis on life and loss was vital to African American authored lynching photographs.

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Without Sanctuary, James Allen and John Littlefield's collection of lynching photographs and postcards first published in 2000, marked a significant revival in the circulation of lynching photography, this time in a commemorative setting. When Allen first amassed his collection of lynching postcards and photographs for display, he did so because he believed that the oblivion and secrecy surrounding their existence—the fact that most had been kept hidden in the attics and basements of people's homes for most of the second half of the twentieth century—was as disturbing as the violence that had produced the images.

'Lust', he writes, in his afterword to the published volume of the collection, 'propelled the commercial reproduction and distribution of the images, facilitating the endless replay of anguish. Even dead, the victims were without sanctuary'.[52] Though obscure when he first began to collect them in the 1990s, the images had once been in common currency, 'so worn with the marks of circulation' that Allen had the sense the victims 'were being continually re-lynched and that they never had a refuge, even in death'.[53]

The collection was first exhibited as *Witness: Photographs of Lynchings from the Collection of James Allen* at the Ruth Horowitz Gallery in New York. With the exhibition confined to one room, visitors were forced to wait for hours outside in freezing weather before they could see the collection. Despite this, an estimated five thousand people visited the exhibit before it closed. African American Studies scholar Natasha Barnes, who has attended all seven exhibitions of Allen's collection to date, writes that the display at Ruth Horowitz mounted the lynching postcards 'simply' and on 'bare walls'.[54] The display lacked the 'accoutrements of professional curatorship: they had no sequence, no markers of time and place, no captions of any kind'.[55] Allen himself was the sole source of contextual information.

In his review of the same exhibit, Peter J. Wosh made clear the polarising effect that this stark mode of display had on audiences:

> Some viewed the exhibition as voyeuristic, pointless, insensitive to suffering, dehumanising, and fundamentally pornographic in its exposition of violence. Others, echoing the words of congressman John Lewis […] believed that *Without Sanctuary* might 'inspire us, the living, and as yet unborn generation, to be more compassionate, loving, and caring'.[56]

[52] James Allen, 'Afterword', *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms, 1999), p. 203.
[53] Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching,* p. 138.
[54] Natasha Barnes, 'On Without Sanctuary', *Journal of Contemporary African Art* (2006), p. 89.
[55] Ibid., p. 89.
[56] Peter J. Wosh, 'Exhibition Review: Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America', *Archivaria* (2000), p. 167.

In other words, where some felt the lack of curation and contextual information made the exhibit 'fundamentally pornographic' due to its voyeuristic display of Black bodies, others believed that *Without Sanctuary* could foster a deeper emotional understanding. This account, however, leaves little room to consider that these responses are not mutually exclusive. As the first chapter in this study has shown, the suffering body can be as much a site of sadomasochistic pleasure as it is one of pain for the viewer.

Provided with further mobility as a book and online collection, the photographs in *Without Sanctuary* are now universally and immediately accessible to a global audience. Visitors to the website are given the opportunity to contribute to an online forum, as well as view a short film narrated by Allen. The belief in the 'truth-telling' power of photography, inherited from nineteenth-and-twentieth century American visual culture, saturates many visitor responses to the *Without Sanctuary* collection. The cover of the book itself—a 'horribly attractive, obscenely desirable' hardback coffee-table volume printed in black and white with a scarlet sash—alludes to the influence of photographic technology.[57] The covering scarlet stripe bears a quote from Richard Lacayo's review of the book in the *Times*, which reads: '*Without Sanctuary* is a great and terrible book. It's an album of peacetime atrocities during which hundreds of Kodaks clicked'.[58] Barnes, too, conceded that despite the pornographic nature of Ruth Horowitz's relentless reel of uncontextualised images, something felt 'right' about the intimacy of the whole experience. There is an 'evidentiary quality' unique to the photographs which makes them undeniably powerful.[59]

Sarah Valdez, who also attended the 2000 exhibition, wrote for *Art in America* that many, including herself, 'left the museum stunned, with an immediate impulse to battle the

[57] Marcus Wood, 'Valency and Abjection in the Lynching Postcard: A Test Case in the Reclamation of Black Visual Culture', *Slavery and Abolition*, 34:2 (2013), p. 218.
[58] Allen, *Without Sanctuary*, front cover.
[59] Barnes, 'On Without Sanctuary', p. 91.

dragon of inequity armed with a big, aimless sense of rage'.[60] She continued that the photographs made 'the abomination of lynching appear real in a way that textbook history' could not.[61] Her view is reflected in other audience responses to the collection posted on the *Without Sanctuary* website. For example, one college student posted in February 2013:

> I've been taught about how far we've come and how much we've changed in the past 100 years here in America […] I've also been taught all my life about slavery down here in the south and all of the segregation between whites and Blacks, but I never thought or even possibly imagined it to be as bad as this slideshow of pictures reveals [...] Never in all of my years of learning did I ever get close to feeling this impact or ever imagining images like these. Before this, segregation and slavery was just another part of a lesson plan in a history class.[62]

Another student from the same class wrote that it is 'much different to read about the brutalities of lynching than to see them'.[63] These responses attest not only to the ability of the *Without Sanctuary* photographs to shock but also to the striking effect they can have on an audience in comparison to textual descriptions or narratives.

Yet, the moral and commemorative value of Allen's *Without Sanctuary* collection has been destabilised by accusations that the exhibition is too explicitly violent. Much like the image of Gordon, which was so striking because of its uncompromising display of shocking violation, the collection commonly leaves images to speak for themselves, particularly in its book and website formats. They thus remember the history of racial violence primarily through a focus on abject Black bodies. Consequently, American studies and History scholar Grace Elizabeth Hale concluded that *Without Sanctuary* left 'viewers with an exhibit that is too close to the spectacle created by the lynchers themselves'.[64] To allow the *Without*

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[60] Ibid., p. 91.
[61] Sarah Valdez, 'American Abject', *Art in America*, 88:10 (2000), p. 89, cited by Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p. 12.
[62] Username 'Sammullis72', *Without Sanctuary* Website Responses, <http://withoutsanctuary.org/main.html> [accessed 04/07/2017] (hereafter WSWR).
[63] Username 'ab_sheff', WSWR.
[64] Grace Elizabeth Hale, 'Review: Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America', *The Journal of American History*, 89:3 (2002), p. 993.

Sanctuary photographs to speak for themselves and stand alone as photographic evidence of historical racial violence—in accordance with a visual culture shaped by eighteenth and nineteenth century notions of "truth" and a sadomasochistic obsession with pained Black bodies—commits a double violation against the Black historical subject: the violence in the photograph is reanimated for the viewer whilst they are simultaneously deprived of the opportunity to see the life history of the victim.

That is not to say, however, that the photographs in the *Without Sanctuary* collection should not be looked at. Though the adverse feeling towards circulating and sharing these photographs expressed by Barnes is understandable and the continued display of such images ethically questionable, there is something equally troubling in the idea that the photographs should be destroyed or removed altogether from public commemorative spaces. Like J.P Ball's photographs of William Biggerstaff, the spaces of mourning created by the *Without Sanctuary* collection together with its potential to bring together families who had lost loved ones to lynching should not be overlooked. For example, after viewing one of the later exhibitions in Atlanta, GA, Barnes outlined one of the 'more rewarding' aspects of the collection.[65] She describes how three survivor families came looking for information about relatives who had been lynched in the area several decades before. As well as being able to meet with museum professionals and researchers who could help with their search, these families could share their experiences with one another and with the public. 'It is in the gathering of this community', Barnes believes, 'that *Without Sanctuary* shows its true potential for the enabling of a new public history that uncovers the shadows of the past'.[66]

[65] Barnes, 'On Without Sanctuary', p. 91.
[66] Ibid., p. 91.

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Throughout American history, photography has served to offer Black bodies, particularly pained Black bodies, for scrutiny, possession, and consumption. Early daguerreotypes sought to categorise and document enslaved bodies to support developing scientific theories on the origins of human races. Scholars such as Agassiz created highly racialised visual conventions which objectified and dehumanised enslaved bodies. Like the engravings and graphic narratives that preceded it, anti-slavery photography also captured Black bodies in pain to render them passive receptacles of violence and accommodate emotional engagement with suffering. Gordon's scarred back, for example, was widely published in anti-slavery pamphlets and papers to shock and enthral a primarily white audience with a thrill of horror that would in turn garner support for the anti-slavery cause. These early visual vocabularies both detested and desired Black bodies as much as they detested and desired representations of violence and destruction.

This is most apparent in the rise of spectacle lynching in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Staged as theatrical extravaganzas, photographed, sound recorded, and paraded through public spaces, Black bodies were violently sacrificed for a vulnerable white identity that would seek to destroy the perceived threat of Black success and civility. Perpetrating mobs took inspiration from a rapidly evolving culture which moved relentlessly towards the visually spectacular, immersive, and enthralling. Picture cards and postcards of these killings, produced by and for the perpetrating crowds, privileged the white gaze as that which could bestow meaning and significance. From a position of power, control, and safety, the white gaze fixated on pained or destroyed Black bodies and saw white power and superiority reflected back.

Today, photographic representations of violated Black bodies transcend their original purpose. In commemorative practice in particular, the role assigned to these images during the anti-slavery and anti-lynching campaigns—to document racial injustice and highlight white barbarity—takes precedent. Undeniable power and intimate understandings are generated through viewing images of atrocity that are difficult to replicate in a history book, as many of the responses to the *Without Sanctuary* collections attest. The difficulties that arise when viewing these photographs as re-circulations of racial violence may act as a starting point to promote conversation and education amongst audiences about what it means to see and share these images in the present. They can also, as we have seen, lead to new research, to communal mourning and social gathering, to new modes and spaces of memorialisation that far transcend the images themselves as historical records. However, allowing photographs of pained Black bodies to stand alone as evidence of historical racial violence in commemorative spaces does not allow room for the recognition of the complex spaces photography may open up. Using white-authored images of spectacle lynching as sole evidence of racial violence not only risks reanimating that violence and reinforcing the white gaze but also risks effacing contemporary Black critical responses to that violent gaze. A focus on pained Black bodies is a violence that deprives the viewer in the present of the life history of Black violated subjects, but it also deprives the viewer of the opportunity to see the work of African American activists and artists who sought to restore that vitality and life history to victims of racial violence.

Ultimately, an adherence to visual conventions that focus on physical suffering shaped by dominant white perspectives on the body, pain, and power privilege the white gaze whilst obscuring Black historical experience. Though there may not always be a practical means of representing the lives of enslaved people or victims of lynching before their image was taken in moments of suffering or death, a space may be created in which the whiteness that

dominates photography's history and dictates its reception and representation in the present is revealed and challenged. Archival material, testimony, and scholarship can be used in conjunction with one another to provide contextual grounding for photographs that display Black suffering. So, too, can the physical space of the museum, alongside performance, music, art, and communal engagement be used to deconstruct dominant narratives and highlight loss, mourning, strength, and resistance as well as violence and suffering. In the chapters that follow, I examine some of these spaces and performances to reveal the complex interweaving of such narratives, beginning with slavery reenactment performances.

Chapter 3

Embodying Blackness, Embodying Resistance: Staging Enslaved Bodies in Historical Reenactment

"You who have returned. We have found you again in places we would have never imagined".

These are the words that greeted a tired yet jubilant army of enslaved rebels in New Orleans' Louis Armstrong Park, on the 7th November, 2019. Clothed only in the simple, worn-out garments of enslaved labourers, the army had just completed the twenty-six-mile march along the banks of the Mississippi River from the Woodland Plantation in West Pointe à la Hache. The march was part of a reenactment of the 1811 German Coast uprising organised by performance artist Dread Scott, whose work has consistently challenged entrenched racism in American historical narratives. After two years of planning and a QuickStart campaign which raised $42,227 from 478 individual sponsors, Scott's reenactment sought to 'return a history that was suppressed by slave owners and white supremacists, to its rightful place amongst people struggling to end oppression and be free'.[1] The nature of this performance, however, not only returned the history to its 'rightful place' in the national narrative, it also sought to return participants to the past itself. Reenactors embodied the history of enslavement as a new means of accessing it, of re-presenting it in the present-day landscape using their own live bodies as spaces of memory and knowledge production.

Dread Scott's 'Slave Rebellion Reenactment' worked to deconstruct dominant narratives whilst highlighting strength and resilience in a way that avoided an over-reliance upon modes of representation that exploit Black pain as spectacle. Scott's decision to interrupt

[1] 'Slave Rebellion Reenactment', Kickstarter Campaign Page, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/antennaworks/slave-rebellion-reenactment> [accessed 12/12/2018].

the timeline of the original 1811 rebellion—which ended with the torture and execution of hundreds of enslaved African Americans—and replace it with a public celebration of Black strength, culture, and solidarity, epitomises his vision for the re-enactment to highlight freedom, power and the courage of those who rebelled against their enslavement at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This chapter, then, explores how slavery reenactments can provide a space in which to highlight and celebrate the strength and resistance of enslaved people without reanimating violence and replicating the white gaze. I focus particularly on how embodied Blackness complicates present commemorative performances, using the 1994 reenacted slave auction at Colonial Williamsburg, VA, as an example in which African American interpreters were required to submit themselves as slaves to the gaze of white interpreters and to their audience. Embodied Blackness and the inhabitation of spaces designed to return audiences to the past in this way thus often position Black participants as historical relics of suffering, bodies that were always-already subjugated. Yet, this chapter also posits that establishing a connection between historical racial violence and present injustice can help performances move away from the spectacularisation of Black suffering. The work of Black performance artists like Dread Scott is integral to this process which challenges dominant white narratives and modes of looking at Black pain.

Reenactment as a mode of commemoration has its own history of struggle. The anti-slavery movement's focus on Black bodies in pain, together with the influence of the Romantic and Sentimentalist movements on visual discourses during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, shaped slavery reenactment from its traceable beginning. Though the anti-slavery movement staged reenactments in the nineteenth century to garner support for the cause rather than commemorate enslaved experience, a focus on the most violent horrors of slavery—in particular the sexual violation of young women and girls and the tearing apart of families on the auction block—went hand in hand with the focus on pained Black bodies

in the visual culture outlined by the previous two chapters. Despite what Lisa Woolfork has called bodily epistemology—using the body as a means to cultivate knowledge and understanding—being the central component of living history programmes, this means of knowledge production becomes problematic when representing the history of slavery, a system of subjugation which relied upon commodification, objectification, and dehumanisation.[2] These problems led the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) to declare the use of slavery simulations in American schools as 'traumatic', 'trivialising', and 'inappropriate for any student'.[3] They were, according to a former participant, 'white culture'.[4]

For Dread Scott and his reenactors, this is only partly true. Participants in the November 2019 reenactment confirmed that the march brought them 'back to [the] trauma' of slavery and of what ultimately happened to the enslaved rebels in 1811. Yet, for these reenactors, meeting that trauma was far from inappropriate or trivialising. Instead, it was a powerful demonstration of freedom and Black cultural resilience. What, then, is the difference? How can reenacting slavery be at once educational and epiphanous yet inappropriate and deprecating? Does the embodiment of the history of slavery in the present empower participants and spectators with knowledge and understanding or does it reconstruct the white gaze by offering up slavery's trauma as a mode of entertainment which trivialises the historical reality of enslavement and its legacies in the present? This chapter will explore these questions in more detail.

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[2] Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery*, p. 131.
[3] Julian Lucas, 'Can Slavery Reenactment Set Us Free?', *The New Yorker* (10th February, 2020), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/02/17/can-slavery-reenactments-set-us-free> [accessed 17/02/2020].
[4] Lucas, 'Can Slavery Reenactment Set Us Free?'

The first slave auction reenactments on record took place under the control of abolitionist minister Henry Ward Beecher. Beecher would stage his auctions to raise money to purchase the freedom of enslaved individuals, most commonly young women or girls, whom he would beseech his congregation to save from a lifetime of violent sexual abuse. At first, he would simply pretend to be selling the enslaved individual he intended to save, but eventually he would use the bodies of those he had already freed.

Beecher held his first mock sale of an enslaved girl, named Sarah, on 1st June 1856 after a sermon at his Church in Brooklyn. After closing the sermon with a recital of Luke 10:27—'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself'—and joining the congregation in a final hymn, Beecher made an announcement: 'I am about to do a thing that I am not wont to do, which I have never done before up to this day…And, in order that you may have no scruples about it, I will preface it by reading what the Lord Jesus Christ says of the Sabbath and its duties'.[5] He proceeded to recite the tale of Jesus healing a man with a withered hand, and ended the reading with passages 8-10 from Luke 6:6: 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good, or to do evil? To save life or to destroy it?'[6]

Beecher then summoned Sarah to the stage. The young woman, light-skinned and dressed all in white, rose from her seat in the congregation and ascended the steps. Sarah immediately seated herself on the closest chair, 'embarrassed and apparently overcome by her feelings'.[7] Seemingly oblivious to her discomfort—or, perhaps, propelled by it—Beecher began his passionate plea for Sarah's freedom:

> And this is a marketable commodity. Such as she are put into one balance and silver into the other. She is now legally free, but she is bound by a moral obligation which is stronger than any law…What will you do now? May she read her liberty in your

[5] Shaw, 'The Plymouth Pulpit: Henry Ward Beecher's Slave Auction Block', *ATQ,* 14:4 (2000), pp. 335-336.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

> eyes? Shall she go out free? Christ stretched forth his hand and the sick were restored to health; will you stretch forth your hands and give her that without which life is of little worth? Let the plates be passed and we will see.[8]

Deeply moved by the performance, congregation members gave whatever they could spare as the plates were circulated. Before long the required funds had been raised to purchase Sarah's freedom. Beecher declared Sarah free. The congregation burst into applause. The service ended with a final hymn, in which the newly emancipated Sarah joined Beecher and his audience.

Beecher's sale of Sarah was a skilfully crafted performance that tapped into popular anti-slavery visual culture. As such a striking figure of sentimental virtue, Sarah was certain to inspire the imagination and engage the emotions of contemporary audiences. When C.H Spurgeon, an English Baptist preacher, wrote that Beecher's first auction of Sarah was 'better for appealing to the feelings of an audience than any amount of description could possibly be', he encapsulated the reasoning behind anti-slavery visual culture's propensity to sacrifice near-white female enslaved bodies.[9] He wrote that when Beecher 'brought a beautiful slave girl, with her manacles on, into his pulpit, he did more for the anti-slavery cause than he might have done with the most eloquent harangue'.[10] Sarah's physical presence made the performance 'better for appealing to the feelings of an audience' than any textual or verbal description. For Spurgeon in the nineteenth century, and for Shaw in the twenty-first, Beecher 'did for abolition with sermons and lectures what his sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, accomplished by writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Both knew how to touch the heart with the evils of slavery'.[11] Both knew, more importantly, that the evils of slavery were best personified in

[8] Beecher and Scoville, assisted by Mrs Henry Ward Beecher, *A Biography of Henry Ward Beecher,* p. 298, cited in Shaw, 'The Plymouth Pulpit', p. 336.
[9] Shaw, 'The Plymouth Pulpit', p. 338.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., p. 339.

the figure of a young, beautiful, and near-white woman endangered and ravaged by the violent institution of slavery.

Indeed, Sarah's physical appearance in the accounts of her sale and the theatrical nature of Beecher's auction are likely to have been profoundly influenced by publications and performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (*UTC*). Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Ward Beecher's sister, published her novel in March 1852, only a few years prior to Sarah's sale. Within eighteen months of its release, *UTC* had been adapted for the stage on three separate occasions, one of which was performed at Purdy's National Theatre in New York. By 1853, local theatre companies had staged performances of *UTC* in Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Salt Lake City, Philadelphia, and San Francisco.[12] As discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this thesis, *UTC* used representations of 'near-white' female bodies being sold at auction to engage with white audiences' sympathies and garner support for the anti-slavery cause. Auction scenes were as central to theatrical productions as they were to the original novel. Theatre Studies scholar John Frick has detailed how uneducated, often anti-abolitionist audiences in the north were quick to condemn the poor treatment of slaves on stage in performances of *UTC*. During the 1852 production at Purdy's, for example, audiences reportedly shouted, 'it ain't right' when people were beaten or sold.[13] The same visual rhetoric was thus at work in the staged productions of *UTC* and Beecher's sales as the horrors of slavery were primarily accentuated by the sale of near-white female bodies. For example, Eliza and Sarah, both young mothers, are displayed as demure, pious, beautiful, and near-white. In *UTC,* Eliza is described as having 'ripples of silky black hair', and the younger enslaved girl Emmeline had hair of a 'luxuriant brown'. In the account of Beecher's auction,

[12] John Frick, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin on the Antebellum Stage', *Uncle Tom's Cabin & American Culture: A Multi-Media Archive,* 2007 <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/interpret/exhibits/frick/frick.html> [accessed 04/08/2020].
[13] Ibid.

Sarah is also described as having ‘glorious’ hair that ‘fell in shining waves to the floor’. Sarah was also dressed in virginal white, whilst Eliza and Emmeline’s clothes were of ‘the neatest possible fit/[of] great neatness’. The women’s clothes were thus presented as neat, clean visual signifiers of innocence, civility, and virtuousness.

The most famous of Beecher’s reenacted auctions was the sale of a young girl in 1860 named Sally Maria Diggs, or ‘Pinky’; a young woman whom Beecher is known to have referred to as ‘too fair and too beautiful a child for her own good’.[14] During the auction, Beecher presented a ring to Pinky that had been donated by author Rose Terry Cook as he proclaimed, ‘Now remember this is your freedom ring’.[15] Eastman Johnson also translated the scene onto canvas in an oil painting which would eventually hang in Beecher’s parlour. Pinky is presented in the Johnson painting with neatly tied back hair, the perceptible flush of her cheek placed at the very centre of the canvas. The influence of sentimentalism both on Pinky’s representation is evident when we think back to the scenes of imprisonment, slavery, and women in distress that dominated anti-slavery literature and works of art. As figures of profound sympathetic desirability, the young women sold by Beecher in the reenacted auctions were exhibited to crowds of white liberal subjects as passive and powerless vessels onto which spectators could project themselves in order to develop an emotional connection. Audiences were encouraged to consider how they would feel if they were Pinky, if she were their daughter, their sister, their niece. Through such exercises in emotional identification the enslaved girls could be recognised as individuals whose rights were worth defending.

[14] Shaw, ‘The Plymouth Pulpit’, p. 340.
[15] Auslander, ‘Touching the Past’, p. 165.

Figure 3.1. Eastman Johnson, *The Freedom Ring* (1860). Oil on canvas. Image from 'Artworks by Eastman Johnson', *The Athaneum Website* <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=13304> [accessed 12/03/2020].

As the first chapter of this thesis has shown, to engage the sympathies imputed to a white audience, enslaved women's bodies were assigned qualities that were aimed to appeal to a white audience's desires and protectiveness, the latter possibly masking the former. Often showing the female body as exposed and vulnerable, these images accommodated the lascivious gaze of an implicitly male audience who could ogle the bodies of enslaved women whilst simultaneously morally condemning the women's exploitation, exemplified in the audience's calls of 'it ain't right' during the 1852 performance at Purdy's. Beecher's auctions thus drew upon these same salacious visual and literary constructs to engage with white audiences.

These early slave auction reenactments were thus shaped by an anti-slavery visual culture that centralised suffering Black bodies and focused on the violated—or soon-to-be violated—enslaved female figure. Robbed of their ability to speak or act for themselves on the auction block, Beecher displayed Sarah and Pinky as passive figures with significant sexual allure that would appeal to his audience's emotions and desires. Bound by the white gaze just as Eliza and Joanna before them, these young women participated in Beecher's reenacted auctions primarily as enticing and powerless objects.

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Yet, evidence can be found in the nineteenth century of formerly enslaved people using rituals of reenactment to arrest control over their own bodies from the white gaze and shape their own narratives. In Charleston, South Carolina, in March 1865, the *Charleston Daily Courier* reported that after Union forces liberated the city, crowds of people celebrated in the streets. The report—which is worth quoting in full—describes how, as part of a 'long parade of newly freed workingmen':

> an auctioneer, mounted on a spring cart, [was] accompanied by his driver with the auction bell and a number of "negroes for sale". Two colored women with their children were seated on the cart while the rest of "the gang to be sold" followed, their hands tied with ropes. As the procession moved along the auctioneer was calling out vigorously — "How much am I offered for this good cook." …For good prime field hands or mechanics no lower bid would be entertained than from ten to twelve thousand dollars. The representative auctioneer acted his part well, and caused much merriment… Behind the auctioneer came a hearse, with the body of slavery, followed by the mourners all dressed in black. On the hearse were the following inscriptions: "Slavery is Dead". "Who Owns Him." "No One". "Sumter Dug his Grave on the 13th of April 1861". This attracted a great deal of attention. The countenance of the mourners on this occasion exhibited much more joy than sadness.[16]

Despite the exultant celebrations and general 'merriment' that the *Charleston Daily Courier* reports, it appears that many people found the festivities to be distressing. Another newspaper, reporting on the same event, recorded that as the African American man playing the role of

[16] *The Charleston Daily Courier* (March 1865), cited in Auslander, 'Touching the Past', p. 168.

the auctioneer—who had himself been sold at an auction in Charleston—'went on imitating in sport the infernal traffic of which many of the spectators have been the living victims…Old women burst into tears as they saw this tableau, and forgetting that it was a mimic scene, shouted wildly "*Give me back my children! Give me back my children!*"'[17] For many of these women, haunted by the loss of their children under the same cruel system reanimated in front of their eyes, the fact that this was a mimic scene may not have been of much significance. In the years following the end of the Civil War, vast numbers of emancipated people roamed the country in search of relatives that had been sold away from them. Many would post advertisements in newspapers with the names, physical descriptions, and details of the past owners of their missing relatives in the hope of gaining information. Slavery's cruelty would long outlive its abolition and would be forever present in the lives of those it tyrannised. The auction scene in Charleston thus transported the old women back to the moment of this traumatic loss: the recreated auction block viscerally summoning up 'the many actual blocks upon which their children had been sold away from them across the years'.[18]

Yet, the performance seems to have also provided a way in which these African American people could establish their freedom—both physically and emotionally—from slavery's bonds. Auslander writes that the reenactment 'constituted an important rite of self-liberation, transforming and closing off the disturbing scenario of the reenacted slave auction'.[19] The procession through the streets, the reenacted auction, and the public celebration itself allowed these reenactors to have control over their environment, their bodies, and their emotions. These interactions, the processions, rituals, reenactments, deaths, burials, are the processes needed to transfer control back to the African American community in Charleston. The crowds and participants in Charleston were not re-living the auction scenes

[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., pp. 168-169.

as enslaved but as free people. No matter how recently in their lives participants had personally experienced being sold, they witnessed the Charleston reenactment from the other side of that trauma. Indeed, in choosing to be there and allowing themselves to be sold—albeit in fictitious circumstances—participants turned the institution of slavery and all that it stood for on its head. This inversion, more than anything else, signalled slavery's powerlessness and the power of free persons of colour to 'transmogrify'; to turn what was at Charleston 'a living nightmare a few weeks earlier' into a 'figure of absurd revelry that is emphatically past its time'.[20]

The Charleston reenactment thus laid the trauma of slavery to rest in a way in which all free persons of colour could participate and embrace new opportunities simply by being present in these spaces: the street, the platform, the cart. Theirs was a physical act of defiance and self-liberation. The African American reenactors in Charleston were visibly present in a counter-narrative of their own making that celebrated freedom and Black strength in the face of slavery in the past whilst acknowledging continued trauma in the present. Unlike the auction scenes dominated by the white gaze in anti-slavery visual culture, the Charleston reenactment prioritised Black embodiment of freedom. Where anti-slavery representations rendered enslaved bodies as silent sites and sights of pain and as conduits for white emotional engagement, epitomised by the sentimentalised near-white bodies of enslaved women on the auction block, the emancipation celebrations in Charleston allowed Black reenactors to control their own representation, and to embody slavery in a way that acknowledged loss but more importantly celebrated resilience.

[20] Ibid., p. 168.

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Slave auction reenactments did not begin to appear in modern commemorative practice until the 1990s. The most notable example of such a performance was staged at Colonial Williamsburg in 1994. Set up as a private foundation, Colonial Williamsburg was financed primarily through a Rockefeller Grant awarded in 1920 to promote patriotism. Consequently, what is now heralded as the world's largest living history site has sometimes been referred to as "Republican Disneyland", a place where Black history has been ignored in favour of a celebration of white settler colonialism.[21] Colonial Williamsburg provided white America with a secure and happy home for a nostalgic performance of their colonial past. It was not until 1979, when Rex Ellis, Montrose Cones, and Darin Taylor performed the inaugural character interpretations of African Americans, that Colonial Williamsburg presented visitors with the reality of Black historical presence—enslaved and free—in the town's history.

The idea to reenact a slave auction first arose during discussions over how to stage the funeral of craftsman William Rind, whose death in 1773 left behind a substantial estate and a wealth of belongings. Among these belongings was Dick, an enslaved man, who lived in Rind's house. Discussions commenced over how to stage a sale of Rind's property in October 1994. The African American Interpretations and Presentations Department (AAIPD), led by interpreter Christy Coleman, proposed to use the opportunity to educate visitors about this aspect of enslaved history by holding a separate sale in which several enslaved people would be sold. However, re-staging the 'horrors of slavery' for a majority white audience at a site of entertainment traditionally associated with a specifically Republican whitewashing of history came with its own problems. Coleman's idea was met

[21] "Republican" here refers to the US political party as opposed to the political ideology of republicanism. Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 220.

with vehement opposition from the Virginia NAACP and local activists who felt that the Colonial Williamsburg performance would trivialise the history of slavery. The voyeuristic nature of the crowds of spectators gathered to witness Black bodies being sold into slavery led to a series of questions over the real intentions and consequences of the Colonial Williamsburg reenactment. Was it supposed to educate—to force a confrontation with a past scarred by racial oppression in a present still weighed down by its effects? Was it to entertain—to romanticise the past, to bring it back for modern audiences to enjoy the spectacle? Could it be both? Could it, ultimately, be re-inscribing in the present a racial hierarchy that presented Black enslaved people as abased and powerless victims in a historical narrative dominated by the white gaze? Local activists feared that exhibiting slavery in a public forum in this way would carry with it the unsettling prospect that Black enslaved people—and, perhaps, the Black actors who played the part—would remain commodities in the service of white majority interests. As Stupp writes, there was a risk that the 'problematic nature of empathy', which attempts to make the experience of enslaved people sharable, 'displaces the Black subject' under the white gaze.[22] It was also feared that the historical reality of slavery in Colonial Williamsburg would be lost and overridden by commemorative practice's preference to provide 'sensory experiences' that cater to visitors' 'fond memories' and emotional comfort rather than challenge perspectives and unsettle visitors with an uncomfortable truth, a notion which ties into Gable and Handler's explication of how museums tend to shape their environment to match the expectations and needs of audiences.[23]

Indeed, Timothy W. Luke outlines how the word 'entertainment' itself has semantic roots pertaining to notions of 'holding' or 'keeping among', suggesting that living history's

[22] Jason Stupp, 'Slavery and the Theatre of History: Ritual Performance on the Auction Block', *Theatre Journal,* 63:1 (2011), p. 62.
[23] Scott Magelssen, 'Making History in the Second Person: Post-touristic Considerations for Living Historical Interpretation', *Theatre Journal,* 58:2 (2006), p. 294.

use of entertainment to educate is akin to 'a mode of confinement and coercion that furthers their agendas of Foucauldian "governmentality"'.[24] These sites, according to Luke, serve to indoctrinate visitors 'into particular behaviours, politics, or attitudes', and rally visitors behind 'familiar and nostalgic narratives of Americanness and progress'.[25] Of course, these narratives of American progressiveness are familiar and nostalgic only for white Americans, whom these narratives have benefitted and placated for decades, if not centuries.

Consequently, it is not surprising that the Virginia NAACP and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) accused Colonial Williamsburg of 'glorifying the horrors and humiliation of the evils of slavery', labelling the reenactment 'a trivialisation of African American heritage'.[26] Nor that Salim Khalfini, an NAACP field coordinator, expressed concerns that 'whenever entertainment is used to teach history there is the possibility for error or insensitivity and historical inaccuracy'.[27] In a similar vein, Brenda Andrews commented in *Jet* magazine that the auction was 'in poor taste', and 'produced for entertainment value, rather than as an effort to educate the public about "the African Holocaust in America"'.[28]

In an interview recorded prior to the auction, Coleman explained she chose to continue with the event despite this opposition because she felt the auction 'epitomised the horrors of American slavery'.[29] 'The fact', she said, 'that human beings were treated like chattel, the fact that families were torn apart, the fact that people were treated as inhuman, the slave auction epitomised all of that'.[30] Like Spurgeon and Beecher before her, Coleman wanted visitors to witness 'the horrors of American slavery' in order to better understand them. But

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] James Oliver Horton, 'Presenting Slavery: The Perils of Telling America's Racial Story', *The Public Historian,* 21:4 (1999), p. 31.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Robert L. Harris Jr, 'We can best honour the past…by facing it squarely, honestly, and above all, openly', *The Journal of African American History,* 94:3 (2009), p. 395.
[29] *Publick Times* (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1994). Hereafter *PT.*
[30] *PT.*

this tendency to restage the most violent and horrifying aspects of enslavement to educate audiences is a strategy—as we have previously seen—shaped by the white gaze that risks presenting enslaved people as passive receptacles of pain, as mere historical artefacts whose bodies are primarily positioned as symbols of suffering. This was a risk that Colonial Williamsburg was willing to take.

On 10th October 1994, as a female African American interpreter attempted to introduce the estate sale and auction of enslaved people to a cheering crowd, she was interrupted by a protesting member of the Virginia NAACP. 'If no one else will stand, we will stand. It's a carnival atmosphere', the protestor proclaimed.[31] The protester then took his seat on the front steps of the deck-cum-auction-block. His eyes faced the crowd of onlookers. Christy Coleman, dressed in the garments of her enslaved character, Lucy, emerged to address the crowd. It is difficult to know whether Coleman's subsequent speech was planned as part of the introductory remarks or whether she stepped in to spare her female colleague the task of addressing a divided and volatile crowd of spectators. She announced: 'What is happening today is a very real tragedy. However, we came here to teach the story of our mothers and our grandmothers. We came here to do this voluntarily; we came here so that each and every one of you never forget what happened to them'.[32] As she thanked the cheering crowd for their open-mindedness and support, Coleman also extended her thanks to those present 'who may oppose even though [they] don't understand' Colonial Williamsburg's 'track record', 'history', 'respect', and 'integrity'.[33] She concluded by stating that Colonial Williamsburg 'had no intention whatsoever of sensationalising' the event, but that they 'had no intention

[31] *PT.*
[32] *PT.*
[33] *PT.*

whatsoever of denying' the event would take place. Her speech ended to cheers from the crowd. The auction began.

A total of four enslaved individuals were up for sale: Sukey, a laundress; Billy, a carpenter; and Daniel and Lucy, a married couple and enslaved house servants. The NAACP protestors remained seated on the steps directly in front of the three white male interpreters playing court officials and legal officers, staring directly at the crowd, and refusing to look at who and what was being put on show. After being led to the stage, Sukey stood on a step lower down than the other reenactors. She did not speak a word. Her eyes remained cast down. As a bidding war proceeded between a white slave owner and Sukey's free Black husband, her eyes betrayed the intensity of her emotional turmoil as they flickered momentarily between the bidders before she focused them back on the ground. When her husband won the bid—albeit after a rigorous interrogation by white officials of the documents which granted him the right to participate in the auction, a demonstration that acted as a reminder for the audience that they were mere spectators to the performance and were not invited to participate as bidders—Sukey finally smiled and joined her husband to cheers from the spectators.

The auctioneer sold another tract of land before white officials led Billy the carpenter to the steps. 'Do the tools go with him?', one bidder immediately shouted, interrupting the auctioneer's introduction of his next lot.[34] The auctioneer immediately assured the bidder that the enslaved man's tools were indeed included in the sale price, and the bidding commenced at twenty-five pounds. Billy kept his eyes either on the floor or beyond and above the enthralled crowd, his expression contemplative, his thoughts unfathomable, his eyes adamant

[34] *PT.*

in their refusal to engage with any person present. He was sold for seventy pounds. The crowd fell quiet.

'The last property for auction today, gentlemen', the auctioneer declared, 'are Daniel and Lucy'.[35] The couple, still stood together on the courthouse steps, embraced before they were forcibly separated by white officials. As he was led away from his wife and towards the auction steps, Daniel pulled his arm away in a refusal to be touched by the white officer. His determined figure remained silent and dignified as he was sold to the highest bidder for sixty-five pounds.

Only as Lucy was led up the steps and presented to the crowd did it become clear to all spectators that she was pregnant. Her tears were ignored by the white reenactors. As the bidding commenced, Lucy immediately began to beg the same bidder who had purchased her husband to take her, too. As she looked pleadingly from the auctioneer to the bidders in the crowd, a spectator cried out to the bidders to let Lucy 'be with her husband'.[36] This outcry—reminiscent of the cries from audiences of 'it ain't right' during auction scenes in the 1852 production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in New York—sparked a sudden surge of crowd participation, as other spectators began to cheer each bid made by Daniel's new master and decry any bid from an outsider. Daniel, too, broke his silence to plead with his new enslaver: 'Please, sir', 'two for one, sir, please!'[37] All was to no avail. Lucy was sold, along with her unborn child, to a different bidder. Her cries pierced the now quietened crowd as a white official led her away into the courthouse. The auction ended with an announcement for the estate sale of William Rind that afternoon, though no mention was made of his enslaved

[35] *PT.*
[36] *PT.*
[37] *PT.*

property. There was a ripple of applause from the crowd. Some simply stood still in stunned silence.

Coleman, along with fellow members of the AAIPD, returned to answer questions from spectators. The first few questions tended to be specific to the re-enactment itself. Visitors were primarily interested in whether the cases were "real" and why Colonial Williamsburg chose those particular stories. Coleman explained that they wanted to 'exemplify how slavery worked'.[38] Sukey, for example, is sold to her husband, a free African American man living in Virginia. Billy, as a carpenter, was chosen as an example of the highly skilled Black population in America at this time. 'You also needed to see Black families torn apart', concluded Coleman.[39] 'Their marriages were not legal nor sanctified by the Church. We wanted you to see that horror as well'.[40]

Visitors also asked about the legal processes of how one could purchase enslaved people in order to free them, how people may trace families of enslaved people, the living conditions of poor whites in the area, whether there were any white slaves, and the percentage of whites who owned enslaved people in Virginia. All visitors who asked questions seemed happy with the performance, were curious about what had been represented, and wanted to find out more. One spectator, however, who stood amongst a group of protestors—one of which was holding up a sign that read 'Say No to Racist Shows'—raised the issue of Colonial Williamsburg's representations of African American enslaved people as 'passive bystanders' in the re-enactment.[41] The exact wording of the question is unclear, as the spectator's voice was partially lost to the hustle and bustle of the crowd. Coleman rephrased the question and repeated into her microphone, for the benefit of those who did not hear the original challenge:

[38] *PT.*
[39] *PT.*
[40] *PT.*
[41] *PT.*

'Where do we show African Americans as fighters?' Coleman answered, 'In all of our programs'.[42] She began to explicate the notions of active and passive forms of resistance amongst enslaved populations but was interrupted once again by the visitor: 'Where was that today?'[43] Coleman's answer was, this time, a little less convincing. 'You saw it. And you are not going to see all of it every time…'[44]

Ultimately, though it did not derogate the reenacted event, the Colonial Williamsburg performance turned its audience into emotionally engaged but passive observers because it did not ask audience members to question their own knowledge or perceptions of slavery, its history, and its legacy. Audiences were instead invited to witness the sale of African American bodies—to watch people treated and sold as mere commodities—whilst remaining comfortably distant from the events throughout. Despite some viewers' participation in the performance through shouting out words of encouragement or rebuke, their position as spectators was a comfortably secure one. They could emerge from the experience unchanged and return to their own worlds in the comfort of knowing what they saw, although true to history in essentials, was a reproduction of an event that could not happen in the America of today.

Most importantly, the performance did not encourage the audience to confront their own subject position or complicity. Spectators were instead invited to engage with the active protagonists: the bidders, who were either encouraged or urged not to purchase an enslaved individual. This was problematic because, for example, in engaging the audience's sympathy for Lucy and Daniel who were about to be separated, Colonial Williamsburg manipulated their audience into rooting for the same person who bought Daniel to buy Lucy. Thus, the

[42] *PT.*
[43] *PT.*
[44] *PT.*

audience were not only positioned to identify with white bidders in the crowd but were specifically rooting for a particular buyer in the sale of enslaved people. To experience the full emotional charge of that moment, the audience had to be able to sympathise with Lucy's anguish, but it was a white protagonist who had the power to act and provide any relief from her pain. The process is not too dissimilar from how Stedman's *Narrative* invited viewers to identify not only with the Samboe girl's suffering through Stedman's own response but also with the cruelty of the white overseer, who was the only other protagonist alongside Stedman endowed with the power to make decisions and act on them. Like the Samboe girl in Stedman's *Narrative,* and the enslaved women sold at Beecher's auctions, the enslaved themselves existed in the Colonial Williamsburg reenactment primarily as powerless bodies that the audience could project their sympathies, desires, and detestations onto.

What, then, did the Colonial Williamsburg auction achieve? If, as Coleman emphasised, the reenactment was an educational program as opposed to a form of entertainment, questions over what lessons the reenactment taught and how it taught them must be considered. As to the former, for Coleman at least, the reenactment was a survey of enslaved experience; a lesson in 'how slavery worked'. It explicated the horrors of slavery as well as the reality of free Black populations. It encapsulated, too, the determination to gain freedom and to sustain familial ties in the face of slavery's brutal system. For the visitors, the reenactment provided an opportunity to learn what a slave auction was *really like*—or at least, to experience Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation of what a slave auction was really like—as well as to ask questions about how the buying and selling of enslaved people in Virginia functioned in the eighteenth century. Pivotally, and in a way that is unique to living history reenactments, visitors were able to participate in this experience in an environment designed to look and feel like an eighteenth-century town, a space designed to aid their imaginative journey into the past. In this sense, historical reenactment may provide an educational

experience for visitors using bodily epistemology, bringing together reenactment, spectator, and historical spatial environment to foster new understandings of the past. For the spectator, to witness a historical reenactment is to place themselves in an immersive relationship with their surroundings—with people, objects, and space—in such a way that they can imagine what they see is a scene from the eighteenth century as opposed to the present. They embark upon a physical and imaginative journey to the past, from which there is an expectation that they will emerge having learnt what it was *really like* to have been at a slave auction in the late-eighteenth century.

The reenactor, however, must take this relationship further. They are required to physically embody the past. They offer up their bodies as representations of the past not only for themselves but for spectators, for strangers who are invited and actively encouraged to see the reenactors as historical relics which exist to provide a service, be that for educational or entertainment purposes. The job of historical interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg, according to a document produced by the Character Interpretation Department in 1980, states that the interpreter 'must immerse himself in the period; he must understand the society and its values so thoroughly that he can adopt them, naturally and without apparent effort, as his own'.[45] In 2020, thirty years later, this demand has not changed. According to Colonial Williamsburg's website, interpreters at their site are the 'real deal': 'These aren't actors; they're skilled makers and their apprentices. Our interpreters aren't delivering a script. They're living the part'.[46] The statement ends with a call to potential visitors: 'So join us: Stomp in some clay. Shoot a flint musket. Ride in a carriage. Soak in our historic halls. But

[45] Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery*, p. 165.
[46] 'Visit Us', Colonial Williamsburg Official Website, <https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/?_id=785083D9A1BB4B2B88FB1B5F7385022B&_z=z> [accessed 13/03/2020].

most importantly, unwind with your friends. Unplug and connect with your family. Create memories that will last a lifetime'.[47]

For those participants and spectators who get to live the part of their white nineteenth-century counterpart, who ride in carriages and soak up halls and shoot and stomp and shop to the delight of visitors looking for a fun and relaxing adventure, this is what Colonial Williamsburg provides. Yet, the fundamental question visitors are asked at Colonial Williamsburg—What would you be doing?—establishes a 'tacit, silent form of white supremacy'.[48] Interpreters, in following their job requirements and the demands placed on them by Colonial Williamsburg's promise to visitors of a relaxing and enjoyable retreat into history, must always interact with visitors as though they were a white elite in the eighteenth century. According to Woolfork, the risk posed by the strategy 'is that whiteness becomes an invisible entitlement of this tourist experience'.[49] In other words, the risk is that the white gaze is prioritised as the primary mode of seeing. Thus, Black interpreters must submit and expose themselves to the white gaze, under which the Black body is objectified, derogated, and dehumanised. Rex Ellis described in detail the discomfort he felt when he played the role of an enslaved person at Colonial Williamsburg. He said, 'putting on that costume became more of a burden as the days wore on. Walking down the street was no longer pleasurable. I began to think that all eyes were on me, that people were not interested in the character I had created, but instead they used my character to confirm prejudices in their own minds'.[50] Ellis's words powerfully capture the dominance of the white gaze. His sense of simultaneously being watched, that 'all eyes' were on him, and yet feeling that those around him saw only Black subservience as opposed to Ellis himself or his performance as an

[47] Ibid.
[48] Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery,* p. 181.
[49] Ibid., p. 188.
[50] Ibid., p. 172.

enslaved character is telling of how racial hierarchies may be transposed onto the relationship between white audience members and Black reenactors in spaces established by sites such as Colonial Williamsburg. In the slave auction in particular, reenactors become vulnerable to the effects of the historical shame and trauma that accompanied being possessed and sold as an enslaved individual.

After the reenacted auction in 1994, interpreters who had played the role of enslaved people suffered from what Coleman described as 'extreme emotional exhaustion'.[51] This was primarily caused by 'the need to internalise the characters' emotion in the performance, since historically the slaves on the auctioning block were not allowed to speak'.[52] In fact, Coleman also revealed in a recent interview with Theatre and Performance Studies scholar Scott Magelssen that despite 1994's apparent success, the site decided not to continue with multiple reenactments because 'the staff didn't want to do it because it was too emotionally draining'.[53] Coleman admitted an entire year had passed before she could watch the performance on tape. For all involved, the experience was far too intense to repeat on a daily or weekly basis.

In his discussion of the Colonial Williamsburg reenactment, Patrick Hagopian states that if the racial identity of a reenactor certifies their qualification to play the role of a slave in an auction scene, then the reenactment 'reopens an unhealed wound for those who feel their bodies marked with a stigma of shame and humiliation'.[54] Perhaps it is the pain resulting from this reopened wound, the suffering caused by the stigma of shame and humiliation that is attached not only to the role of an enslaved person but to the Black body itself, that can make the experience for reenactors so traumatic. As a result of the confines established by

[51] Magelssen, *Living History Museums: Undoing History through Performance* (Plymouth, NH: Scarecrow Press, 2007), p. 120.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid., p. 121.
[54] Hagopian, 'Race and the Politics of Public History in the United States', p. 281.

the white gaze, Black skin is 'always already perceived' in a 'racially subjugated' position.[55] The emotional burden upon reenactors is critical.

This burden upon Black participants in historical reenactments of slavery can also be found in responses to a reenactment at Conner Prairie, a living history museum in Fishers, IN. Situated on a 1400 acre farm, the museum claims to be a place where 'families of today engage, explore and discover what it was like to live and play in Indiana's past'.[56] Conner Prairie's star attraction is their *Follow the North Star* programme, a living history performance of the Underground Railroad system which is open to visitors four times each year. On the eve of its tenth anniversary in 2008, over thirteen thousand participants had taken part.[57] Performance Studies scholar Scott Magelssen, who has both studied and participated in the programme, describes how, a few weeks before his group's allocated experience, they were sent a liability release waiver and were informed of what to expect from the reenactment. '[I]nteractive to the extreme', it began, '"Follow the North Star", an educational program based on the historical phenomenon known as the Underground Railroad, is unlike anything Conner Prairie has ever done'. Conner Prairie claimed the programme was a 'sensory and emotional testament to the African-American perseverance toward freedom […] a new "walk-in-the-shoes" kind of history requiring participants to become—and be treated like—fugitive slaves'.[58]

Cindy Rogers, the Pulitzer Prize-nominated journalist and editor-in-chief of TravellingMom.com, a travel guide blog and website, wrote an account of her own experience taking part in Conner Prairie's programme. She writes that *Follow the North Star* provides visitors with 'the visceral feeling of actually being treated like a slave', in a way that

[55] Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery,* p. 167.
[56] Conner Prairie Senior Interpreter Staff Member Business Card.
[57] Woolfork, *Embodying American History,* p. 13.
[58] Magelssen, '"This Is a Drama. You Are Characters"', p. 24.

Hollywood depictions cannot.[59] 'It certainly is the closest I ever wanted to come to understanding the realities of slavery', she said.[60] For Magelssen, too, becoming a fugitive slave was not easy. He provides details of his discomfort during his participation in the programme. His account is worth quoting in full:

> …the reenactment began when our guide left us alone in the dark countryside. Within moments, a piercing gunshot at close range startled and unnerved us (and filled me with stomach-turning adrenaline). After black-market slave traders lined us up by gender ("bucks" and "breeders"), they made us stack and restack firewood for several minutes—there was no logic to this task, just dehumanizing work. We received conflicting instructions from the slave drivers and were consequently berated and verbally abused for doing the wrong thing. Some of us were singled out to yell "stack the wood" and "pile it high" to our companions. We were threatened to be shot. Throughout the evening, we saw a lot of the ground and a lot of darkness. We were not allowed to look at our captors, and, by virtue of our indoctrination to nineteenth-century race-based rules, we did not look at our helpers, either… We quickly learned the rules of behaviour. After our first companion was severely reprimanded for putting his hands in his pockets and looking up, we did neither for the rest of the evening.[61]

As a scripted performance, the range of possible endings is decidedly limited. However, visitors are granted, to a degree, the freedom to make choices about what their characters will do next during the reenactment. For example, Magelssen reports how at one point, his group were captured by a poor white southerner who planned to sell the new captives back into slavery. As he stepped out of sight to fetch some rope to restrain the group, the group suddenly 'had the choice to run or stay on [their] knees'.[62] They ran. 'At the time', writes Magelssen, 'I wondered what would have happened if we had stayed—but I later found out we had a docent planted among us, in case we made a wrong decision. Thus our perception of the choice of our own fate was only that—a perception'.[63]

[59] Cindy Rogers, 'The Route to Freedom – From a Slave's Perspective', *Daily Herald* (3rd October, 2014) <https://www.dailyherald.com/article/20141003/entlife/141009969/> [accessed 08/05/2020].
[60] Ibid.
[61] Magelssen, '"This Is a Drama. You Are Characters"', p. 25.
[62] Ibid., p. 28.
[63] Ibid.

American Studies scholar Amy M. Tyson has also conducted two ethnographic research trips to Conner Prairie in 2004 and 2005, and in 2005 participated in two of the *Follow the North Star* excursions. She describes how visitors, the majority of whom were white, often expressed fear, anxiety, understanding, and excitement, sharing words such as 'frightened', 'anxious', 'reality', 'depersonalizing', and 'scary', as well as 'eye-opening', 'intriguing', 'wow', 'awesome', and 'fun'.[64] These kinds of contradictory variations in visitor responses are common, and happen in spite of the introductory session beforehand in which participants are reassured that the reenactment is a drama, that the people they will encounter are Conner Prairie employees, and that, should they wish not to be included as a participant at any point during the reenactment, they are able to 'opt-out' by tying a white sash around their head. Tyson reports one guide as saying: 'If the experience becomes too intense we have given you a little escape hatch; we have given you some white strips to tie around your head if you can't stand it anymore'.[65]

The intensity of the experience resulted in Cindy Rogers's admission that the Conner Prairie programme was one of the few experiences she was glad she did not take her children to. Being called 'cow' and asked how many 'calves' she had birthed was 'tough enough', she explained, but the thought of someone saying such things to her teenage daughter was unbearable.[66] 'I know my husband could not have taken it', she confessed.[67] Rogers's evening ended the same as any other participating group's, with a debriefing in which attendees discuss their responses during and after the reenactment. The session also encouraged participants to consider the effects of modern-day slavery, using the *Slavery Footprint* website to calculate the number of enslaved people who would work for each individual

[64] Amy M. Tyson, 'Crafting Emotional Comfort: Interpreting the Painful past at Living History Museums in the New Economy', *Museum & Society*, 6:3 (2008), p. 250.
[65] Ibid, p. 249.
[66] Rogers, 'The Route to Freedom'.
[67] Ibid.

participant according to their lifestyle and consumer habits. Rogers details how those parents in the group who had brought their children to Conner Prairie with them claimed that their experience was made more difficult by their children's presence. Rogers's husband, too, admitted that he had to resist the urge 'to take a swing at' the slave trader who had called him a 'buck' at the beginning of the evening.[68]

Most significantly, Rogers writes that during the debriefing session, 'the African Americans in our group [we]re strangely quiet'.[69] She does not elaborate. Though this observation and subsequent lack of interrogation does not necessarily mean that Rogers had failed to consider how African American participants may have experienced the *Follow the North Star* programme differently to her husband and herself, her labelling of their subdued response as 'strange' signals her lack of understanding of the potentially traumatic and emotionally burdensome effect that 'actually being treated like a slave' may have had on African American participants in her group.

At the Slave Dwelling Project's 2018 conference in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, a panel titled 'Playing a Slave: The Follow the North Star Programme' was organised by Alisha Gaines of Florida State University, Nicole Ivy of George Washington University, and Dennis Tyler of Fordham University to discuss their experiences as African Americans taking part in the programme.[70] As an English and African American studies scholar researching empathy and performance, it was Gaines who invited the group to take part in the reenactment. She said that she knew when she came across the Follow the North Star programme that she wanted to try it. Her colleagues were less convinced. 'My initial thoughts were, "why would

[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] The Slave Dwelling Project (SDP) was founded in 2010 by Joseph McGill Jr. McGill first staged overnight stays in abandoned slave cabins to raise awareness about the lack of preservation of those sites. Since then, the SDP has expanded and now aims to change the dominant narratives around the history of slavery in America, preserve and sustain slave dwellings, and bring together scholars, practitioners, activists, students, artists, and legislators to commemorate slavery. See <https://slavedwellingproject.org/> for further information.

anyone want to do this?"', commented Tyler.[71] Ivy, though interested in the interplay between witness and participant, chose to opt out of full participation by using the white sash supplied by Conner Prairie staff as an 'escape hatch'.

The group's experience generally follows a similar narrative to those of Magelssen and Tyson. Gaines explained how it began at night, with the group being herded onto a golf cart. '[I]n my mind it was a wagon', she added.[72] They were told to sit and be quiet until they were suddenly forced to move and separated into female and male groups. Once again, the women were called 'breeders' and the males 'bucks'. The women were interrogated about their domestic skills and experience, and about how many children they had, and were verbally abused should they raise their eyes to their white 'captors'. The group also moved through the same set of scenarios, encountering fugitive slaves, seemingly helpful Quakers—who nonetheless forbade the group from touching anything in their home—and slave catchers. The reenactment ended with a 'colonial oracle woman' who emerged to inform each participant of their fate: survival, recapture, death, freedom.

'I am surprised at how much of an emotional impact it had on me', said Tyler.[73] After the reenactment and debriefing was over, he explained how he had to 'spend time trying to forget'.[74] However, the debriefing—which the panel unanimously agreed was flawed—did not seem to adequately address the needs and emotions it had engendered amongst the participants. The first questions posed to the group were 'Who did you feel safest with?', and 'Who did you feel most in danger with?'. After a discussion about their time spent with the

[71] Dennis Tyler, speaking on the 'Playing a Slave: Follow the North Star Programme' panel at the Slave Dwelling Project Conference held at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN (24th October 2018).
[72] Alisha Gaines, speaking on the 'Playing a Slave: Follow the North Star Programme' panel at the Slave Dwelling Project Conference held at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN (24th October 2018).
[73] Tyler, 'Playing a Slave: The Follow the North Star Programme'.
[74] Ibid.

fugitive slave, whom the group left behind when it was felt that he was drawing too much attention to his whereabouts by chopping wood and building a fire, the facilitating staff member informed the entire group that the most successful slave catcher in Indiana was a Black woman. This led to a discussion of alleged African American slave owners in the area. The debate prompted one professor in Gaines's group to interrupt the Conner Prairie staff member to correct the historical narrative being portrayed. In a similarly disturbing report, Magelssen described how, during one of his participations in the reenactment, 'a group of middle-aged, affluent white men and women […] were so disrespectful (giggling the whole way through, sassing back to the costumed characters) that the staff recognized [the] entire experience was compromised, and we were offered the opportunity to go through [it] again'.[75]

The extraordinary nature of Conner Prairie's programme is most striking here, not only in the shockingly dismissive attitudes that these white visitors displayed towards the historical interpreters, but in the fact that Conner Prairie's solution to the problems caused by this group of participants was to offer a repeat reenactment, as a theme park would offer a free ride to guests on a broken-down rollercoaster. Rather than confronting and interrogating the uncomfortable and problematic responses of their visitors—which could have led to a discussion of how the white participants felt in those moments and why—Conner Prairie chose to simply start again and hope for a better outcome in the next reenactment.

Further to the seeming failure of Conner Prairie's programme to adequately portray the historical narrative and interrogate the responses of all participants, Ivy made clear that the 'escape hatch' represented by the white sash was equally ineffective. She spoke of a 'slippage' between herself 'as a Black woman refus[ing] to participate' and the role the white reenactors expected her to play: 'embodied Blackness encoded me as a slave reenactor, and I

[75] Magelssen, '"This Is a Drama. You Are Characters"', p. 28.

wasn't given the option to not participate'.[76] Like the African American interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg, Ivy's Black skin was always already perceived in a racially subjugated position by Conner Prairie's white reenactors. She was consistently mistaken for a fully participating member. She had interpreters shout in her face, verbally threaten her, order her to get down on the ground, and verbally abuse her for looking at them. The ability to '"become invisible" should the programme get too emotionally or physically intense' clearly did not apply to the bodies of Black participants.

However, as we have seen in the emancipation celebrations in 1865 Charleston, reenactment may also provide access to spaces which grant the opportunity to transmogrify, to seize control and overturn dominant narratives. Historical modes of performative identity may therefore have the potential to change perceptions and redirect power in the present. Magelssen has written that, in contrast to living history reenactment performances like Colonial Williamsburg's which position Black participants as historical relics of suffering, Black performance artists in the twenty-first-century have the freedom to 'continually challenge the audience's modes of perception and the comfortable relationship between spectator and performer, often inducing audience anxiety or discomfort by pushing the boundaries of taste, breaking social mores, or not allowing the spectator to fall back on traditional rules of passive observation'.[77] Black performance artists are thus able to embody resistance and persistence in spaces that have previously prioritised the white gaze and been hostile to or eliminated Black presence in historical narratives. They can create their own narratives and visual cultures free from the dominant white gaze and work through the trauma of slavery without being marked or presented as sights and sites of suffering.

[76] Nicole Ivy, speaking on the 'Playing a Slave: Follow the North Star Programme' panel at the Slave Dwelling Project Conference held at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN (24th October 2018).
[77] Magelssen, *Living History Museums*, p. 123.

This was central to performance artist Dread Scott's 'Slave Rebellion Reenactment', a reenactment of the German Coast Uprising in Louisiana. Led by Charles Deslondes in 1811, more than five hundred enslaved people took up arms and marched along River Road towards New Orleans to overthrow the system of slavery. The revolt was brutally put down; close to one hundred enslaved people were recaptured, tortured, and beheaded as punishment for the rebellion. Their heads were mounted on spikes along the plantations on River Road to serve as a warning against future revolts. Deslondes himself was captured, tortured, and burned alive for his crimes, whilst other leading rebels were convicted in show trials staged by local white state officials**.** However, Scott's reenactment focused not on the violent end of the 1811 rebellion but on the march itself. He and a group of Black reenactors marched the twenty-six miles along what is locally known as "Cancer Alley", due to the number of petrochemical plants which now inhabit the plantation sites, to commemorate the lives that were lost and to shed new light upon the resilience, strength, and power of Louisiana's enslaved population. When the 2019 reenactors reached New Orleans, there was instead a cultural celebration, where reenactors danced, sang, and remembered the strength of their ancestors.

'Slave Rebellion Reenactment' fragmented the traditional historical narrative to connect racial violence in the past to that in the present. It physically demonstrated and re-presented the legacies of slavery using the bodies of those who are still fighting to have this history, and their own voices, recognised. Embodiment and inhabitation, yet again, are central to this. Bob Snead, executive director of Antenna—the group that worked in partnership with Scott on the reenactment—claimed on the project's *Kickstarter* page the purpose of the performance was 'to create an artwork in which people will embody the suppressed history of resistance and change'.[78] In light of this, Scott's choice not to represent the slaughter of enslaved captives at the end of the performance is all the more significant. As he explained,

[78] 'Slave Rebellion Reenactment', *Kickstarter Campaign Page*.

the end of the reenactment 'intentionally interrupt[ed] the timeline of history on which it was based to culminate in a celebration featuring a public commemoration of the enslaved rebels who sacrificed their lives and a community celebration of Black cultural expressions of freedom through music and performance'.[79] Unlike the reenactors at Colonial Williamsburg's slave auction reenactment, who were expected to immerse themselves so fully in the past that they are able to adopt the values of eighteenth-century white society as their own, who embodied history as a way to educate and/or entertain an audience, Scott's reenactors were invited to embody themselves, to identify as descendants and contributors of a Black culture defined by strength and resilience. The reenactment in New Orleans was a celebration of freedom and Black culture in the face of enslavement in the past and continued injustice in the present.

Figure 3.2. Dread Scott leads reenactors during the 'Slave Rebellion Reenactment'. From Richard Fausset, 'With a Slave Rebellion Reenactment, an Artist Revives Forgotten History', *The New York Times* (6th November, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/06/arts/design/dread-scott-slave-rebellion.html> [accessed 05/03/2020].

[79] Ibid.

Figure 3.3. Reenactors on horseback during the ‘Slave Rebellion Reenactment’. From Richard Fausset, ‘With a Slave Rebellion Reenactment, an Artist Revives Forgotten History’, The New York Times (6th November, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/06/arts/design/dread-scott-slave-rebellion.html> [accessed 05/03/2020].

It was therefore of vital importance to Scott that the generations of Black Americans involved in the reenactment knew that they were 'not the descendants of slaves but the descendants of people who were enslaved', that the strength and resistance of those enslaved people who fought for their freedom in the past must be celebrated and replicated in a present that is still tainted by racial violence and inequality.[80] Making the violated bodies of the enslaved individuals who were brutally killed after the rebellion the focal point of the reenactment would render them as objects of pain and abjection under the white gaze. They would be trapped in the same state as they were when they were used by white enslavers as symbolic warnings to assert white supremacy. As with the postcards and photographs of lynching victims, the re-presentation of the deaths of the 1811 rebels would render the violence a spectacle of Black pain from the perspective of the white executioner rather than a display of Black strength from the perspective of those who rebelled.

[80] Ibid.

The reenactment itself, which took place on the 8th of November 2019, began at the Woodland Plantation House, soon to open as a museum. Reenactors first surrounded the plantation house, then, as in 1811, they attacked the white owner, Manuel Audry. John McCusker, who played the part of Audry, is reportedly descended from Louisiana sugar planters who are said to have owned hundreds of enslaved people. McCusker's participation in the reenactment seemed to have had a significant impact on how he perceived his heritage. 'I told Dread that from my point of view, this is going to re-sanctify and cleanse the land', he said.[81] In embodying his ancestors, in choosing to participate, McCusker was able to come to terms with his ancestors' past and the history of enslavement in Louisiana. His explicit reference to a cleansing of the 'land' suggests that McCusker believed the ritual of reenactment could help to rid the land of his ancestors' guilt.

For the Black reenactors who continued to march the twenty-six-mile road to New Orleans, the reenactment symbolised something else. Many believed they were at once embodying the resilience of their ancestors as well as their own strength. 'I feel very full, proud. I'm inspired, empowered', said one female reenactor.[82] 'I'm not acting', said the artist Jordan Rome, who was also taking part; 'I'm having a whole experience with a bunch of other Black people, carrying weapons, embodying the spirit of freedom and emancipation […] I think that's really powerful'.[83]

[81] Richard Fausset, 'With a Slave Rebellion Reenactment, an Artist Revives Forgotten History', *The New York Times* (6th November, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/06/arts/design/dread-scott-slave-rebellion.html> [accessed 05/03/2020].
[82] Andres Fuentes, Video, <twitter.com/news_fuentes/status/1193362391532265472> [accessed 05/03/2020].
[83] NBC News, 'Culture Matters', <nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/heritage-resistance-reenactment-honor-slave-rebellion1076501> [accessed 05/03/2020].

Figure 3.4. Black female performers during the 'Slave Rebellion Reenactment'. From Rick Rojas, 'A Slave Rebellion Rises Again', *New York Times* (9th November, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/09/us/a-slave-rebellion-rises-again.html> [accessed 05/02/2020].

The importance of the reenactment's emphasis on strength, on the celebration of Black culture and resilience, seemed to further solidify the relationship developed between reenactors. "It's just good for us", said Dorothy Rea, the project coordinator, '"Returning to a historical narrative but at the same time moving forward. You get to camp out with Black people and walk for miles with nothing but Black people. And it's not because somebody died. I feel like that hardly ever happens. It's like we always get together for tragedy, but never just for celebration"'.[84]

This notion of at once embodying the history of violence and repression whilst 'moving forward' in the spirit of freedom and emancipation served to highlight another underlying theme of Scott's reenactment: the continued struggle for equality and justice in

[84] Fausset, 'With a Slave Rebellion Reenactment, an Artist Revives Forgotten History'.

the present. Be it the fight for reparations, the campaign to end police violence, or the push to stop mass incarceration, says Scott, all of which are fundamentally rooted in the institution of slavery, 'the people fighting to change those things today are actually walking in the tradition of enslaved people who were fighting for freedom and emancipation'.[85] The reenactment, then, represented not just the past but the present and future.

Scott's reenactment thus inserted the 1811 rebellion into a historical narrative whilst also raising the issue of slavery's consequences in the present. In the words of one reenactor, it posed the question: 'If we take a page from what they did, what can we do now?'[86] Though commemorative reenactments of slavery in the present must, to an extent, educate audiences about the past, it is important that they do so in a way that highlights its consequences today. By establishing a connection between historical racial violence and present injustice, the focal point of a reenactment can move away from the spectacularisation of historical Black suffering and instead illuminate the consequences of past violence and the damaging effect of the dominant white gaze. As Woolfork notes, 'any program or reenactment of slavery that chips away at that easily assumed mantle of whiteness and privilege is valuable, and might represent the start of more serious considerations about slavery and America's past'.[87] In the next chapter, I examine representations of violence at a site which aims to provide visitors with a more serious consideration of slavery within a commemorative landscape that has been built upon white privilege: the Whitney Plantation Museum.

[85] Oliver Laughland, '"A Story About Freedom": Artist Set to Reenact Largest Slave Revolt in US History', *The Guardian* (8th November, 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/nov/07/new-orleans-slave-uprising-dread-scott-1811> [accessed 05/03/2020].
[86] Ibid.
[87] Woolfork, *Embodying American Slavery,* p. 189.

Chapter 4

‘America’s Auschwitz’: Representations of Slavery at the Whitney Plantation

The Whitney Plantation located just outside of Wallace, LA, is the self-proclaimed first and only ‘museum in Louisiana with an exclusive focus on the lives of enslaved people’.[1] Initially established by the German Heidel family as an indigo plantation in 1752, the Whitney Plantation was home to over three hundred and fifty enslaved people during its time as a plantation, including at least nineteen African-born survivors of the Middle Passage. Opened to the public as a museum in 2014, the Whitney Plantation site now offers visitors the opportunity to visit ‘memorials built to honor enslaved people’, as well as ‘original slave cabins, a freedmen’s church, detached kitchen, and a 1790 owner’s house’ in order to learn about the history of slavery on the site and in the state of Louisiana.[2] Despite its atypical focus, Whitney’s structure and geographical location position it within a group of museums which have existed in the US for several decades.

Over three hundred and fifty plantation museums are currently open to the public, the vast majority of which can be found in Louisiana, Virginia, Georgia, and North and South Carolina. However, plantation museums have traditionally offered visitors a whitewashed heritage tourism. Often, this narrative of Southern history served white nostalgic desire to inhabit antebellum plantation spaces romanticised by novels and films such as Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1936). As Butler has shown, the commodification of the slave-free antebellum South—in which plantation museums played a central role—excluded

[1] ‘Whitney Plantation’, Whitney Plantation Official Website, <https://whitneyplantation.org> [accessed 12/09/2020].
[2] Ibid.

the history of slavery in favour of providing more appealing and desirable heritage experiences in which visitors could witness the grandeur of the Big House and the beauty of its grounds.[3] The commodification of this tourist experience thus fostered white identity and bolstered white pride whilst obscuring the historical presence and lived experience of the enslaved people whose forced labour built and upheld the lifestyles of white planters.

This chapter examines how the Whitney Plantation represents violence through multiple visual, textual, and oral narratives. It begins with a brief overview of the narratives established by traditional plantation museums, with a focus on Oak Alley Plantation in Vacherie, Louisiana, less than ten miles away from Whitney. A study of Whitney's memorials and guided tour highlights how the site's emphasis on violence, though designed to appeal to an audience's emotions, relies upon representations that ultimately re-inflict violence upon Black enslaved people. Though it is hailed as a site that 'challenges the power balance of heritage interpretation from the white master to the enslaved', and explicitly evokes 'strong feeling and moral reflection about slavery', Whitney often relies upon representational tropes shaped by the white gaze that re-inflicts trauma and renders Black bodies as passive receptacles of pain.[4]

This chapter thus interrogates representations of violence at the Whitney Plantation as products of a history and visual culture that have been shaped by the dominant white gaze. It examines how Whitney's use of the Ex-Slave Project (ESP) testimonies—a 1935 project designed as part of the Federal Writer's Project (FWP) to document, record, and preserve enslaved history and culture in the words of those who had experienced slavery first-hand—as well as its display of images of violence against enslaved people and its commemoration

[3] See David Butler, 'Whitewashing Plantations: The Commodification of a Slave-Free Antebellum South', *International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration,* 2:3 (2001): 163-175.
[4] Stephen P. Hanna, Derek H. Alderman, Candace Forbes Bright, 'From Celebratory Landscapes to Dark Tourism Sites? Exploring the Design of Southern Plantation Museums', in Phillip R. Stone (et al), *The Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 418.

of the 1811 German Uprising fail to adequately acknowledge and interrogate how white supremacist understandings of race shaped their production. An examination of visitor responses taken from online reviews and from research conducted as part of a site visit in October, 2018, highlight the complex narratives produced by these representations of slavery and the responses they elicit. Ultimately, I argue that Whitney's focus on slavery makes the site a valuable addition to a Southern commemorative landscape that has traditionally served to bolster white identity. However, Whitney's focus on violence often reinforces the white gaze to the detriment of narratives of Black strength and resistance. Thus, Whitney's potential to foster conversations about racial inequality in the present is often shackled and subsumed by its representations of historical violence that perpetuate white modes of looking at Black pain.

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Ambroise Heidel (1702-1770), an immigrant from Germany to French Louisiana, built the Heidel—later Haydel, as the family became accustomed to life in Louisiana—plantation in the early 1750s.[5] Heidel first established the site as an indigo plantation, but later Ambroise's son Jean Jacques adapted the land to accommodate sugar cane farming. Enslaved labour supported the Heidel business and provided Ambroise and his family with their wealth and comfort. After the Civil War, the plantation was purchased by Bradish Johnson, who named it after his grandson, Harry Whitney. Through the middle of the twentieth century, the plantation passed through a line of wealthy white Louisianans, as it continued to profitably produce sugar and rice.

Maintenance of the site dwindled during the 1970s, leaving the buildings to deteriorate. Formosa Chemicals and Fuber Corporation, a petro-chemical company,

[5] After thirty years in Louisiana, Ambroise changed the spelling of the German family name 'Heidel' to the French-sounding 'Haydel'.

eventually bought the dilapidated site in 1990. They intended to demolish Whitney's buildings and erect a Rayon plant on the land. However, after facing local resistance to the destruction of the plantation buildings and concern over the polluting effects of the proposed plant, Formosa relented and agreed to preserve Whitney's buildings as part of a museum. A research team from Louisiana State University soon began preparations for the "Museum of Louisiana's Creole Culture", beginning by conducting research into the history of the property. Preparations were disrupted, however, when the Rayon business faced a significant depression. Formosa's investment was no longer profitable, and the company sold the plantation to John Cummings, a white lawyer from New Orleans. After investing a reported 8.6 million dollars, Cummings transformed Whitney into a museum of slavery alongside Dr Ibrahima Seck, a Senegalese historian and Whitney's Director of Research.[6] Together, Cummings and Seck developed a plantation museum and memorial site that, unlike any other before it, focused on the story of its enslaved labourers rather than on its white inhabitants. To do so, however, they would have to challenge the white, euro-centric conventions that had been entrenched in plantation museum representational strategies for over a century.

The earliest studies on representations of slavery at plantation museums found that most sites focused on one or a variety of the following tropes: 'architecture, original owners, current owners, furnishings, garden/landscape, the Civil War, and heritage/politics'.[7] Histories of enslavement were only briefly acknowledged, if they were acknowledged at all. Eichstedt and Small identified four primary representational strategies used by plantation

[6] Seck has traced the history of the Whitney Plantation site in a book titled *Bouki Fait Gombo,* which was published in 2014. See Ibrahima Seck, *Bouki Fait Gombo* (New Orleans, LA: University of New Orleans Press, 2014).

[7] Matthew Cook, 'Counter-Narratives of Slavery in the Deep South: The Politics of Empathy Along and Beyond River Road', *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 11:3 (2016), p. 292. David Butler's 2001 study, *Whitewashing Plantations: The Commodification of a Slave-Free Antebellum South,* was among one of the first studies on representations of slavery at plantation museums. Eichstedt and Small's *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums,* which analysed 122 plantations across Louisiana, Georgia, and Virginia, followed closely behind.

museums.[8] The first, which they call 'symbolic annihilation and erasure', is found at plantation sites where the history of slavery is ignored altogether. The second, 'trivialisation and deflection', is where the narrative of slavery is told through mechanisms that distort, for example those mechanisms which claim that slavery was a benign system or that there were "faithful slaves". '[S]egregation and marginalisation of knowledge' follows next, and is a strategy in which slavery narratives are sold and participated in separately, so that visitors can choose to learn about the history of enslavement. Finally, there are plantation museums which demonstrate 'relative incorporation' of enslaved histories.[9] Though fewer in number, these were more likely to 'disturb a positive construction of whiteness and challenge the dominant themes' through their representations of slavery.[10]

One underlying reason for the erasure and marginalisation of enslaved experience at plantation museums is that many were developed into tourist destinations by white Southern women who were often descendants of previous plantation owners.[11] These women were working as contributors to and products of the "Lost Cause" culture that swept the South in the wake of the Civil War. The Lost Cause movement was based on tenets that at once valorised Confederate veterans as noble defenders of a traditional Southern way of life and defended the South's role in the Civil War and its support of the institution of slavery. Proponents adhered to narratives which presented slavery as a benevolent institution, in which slaveowners played a caring, paternalistic role in providing their slaves with food, clothing, accommodation, and moral instruction. Other favoured narratives included the violation of state's rights as the South's primary reason for secession, thus presenting the US government as the aggressor in the war, and the loyalty of Southern women and African American slaves

[8] See Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).
[9] Ibid., p. 4.
[10] Ibid., p. 11.
[11] See Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2003).

to the Southern cause. White Southern women in particular were represented as sanctified by the sacrifice of Southern men. It thus fell to women's groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) to vindicate the Confederacy's involvement in the war and portray Confederate culture as noble and patriotic. Memorialisation was central to this endeavour. The UDC, founded in 1890, was in fact preceded by Ladies Memorial Associations active between 1865-1890. The primary aim of these local and national groups, both before and after 1890, was to install Confederate monuments in public spaces such as courthouse lawns and town squares.

In a similar move to promote and valorise Confederate culture in public and official spaces, white women restored and opened plantation homes to the public in an attempt to romanticise the Old South. The brutality of enforced labour which built and sustained these homes had no place in such narratives. Typically, these early plantation sites were designed with the mansion or Big House at the centre of their tour, as the house and its furnishings were best suited to narrate the lives of white occupiers. The social lives, careers, and relationships of family members often provided the narrative structure of guided tours. Original artefacts such as portraits, furniture, clothing, and jewellery not only authenticated this narrative but provided visitors with visually stunning representations of white antebellum lifestyles. Furthermore, the development of a mass visual culture by the end of the nineteenth century allowed 'images of plantation life to circulate far more rapidly and widely than they ever could have before'.[12] As the decades rolled on into the twentieth century, these images developed and solidified the dominant visual tropes of beautiful architecture, furniture, and grounds, alongside the elegant lifestyles of white owners that would come to characterise plantation museum sites.

[12] Jessica Adams, *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory and Property on the PostSlavery Plantation* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 6.

These nostalgic visual representations of plantation life laid the foundations for the success of Victor Fleming's 1939 film *Gone with the Wind.* Adapted for the screen from Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel of the same name, *Gone with the Wind* is a romance set at the fictional Tara plantation in Georgia, against the backdrop of the Civil War and early years of Reconstruction. The story follows the turbulent life of Southern belle Scarlett O'Hara, played by Vivien Leigh in Fleming's cinematic adaptation. Filmed in Technicolour and including scenes of elegant parties, expensive furniture, and grand surroundings, *Gone with the Wind* brought the celebration of Southern antebellum life to the masses. The film's premiere was held in Atlanta, staged as the climax of a three-day festival which included a Confederate flag display, a parade, and a costumed ball. By incorporating many of the Lost Cause motifs, *Gone with the Wind* functioned from the beginning as a glorification and celebration of the Old South. The film was not only the culmination of this 1939 Atlantan festival, but the culmination of a decades-long white nostalgic desire to inhabit the antebellum South without the complications of slavery, war, and emancipation. Whilst Jim Crow laws were being violently enforced and expanded across the American South to control and subjugate Black lives, white desires to return to a simpler, safer time burgeoned.

Consequently, when Eichstedt and Small found that plantation sites at the beginning of the twenty-first century worked 'to construct and maintain public white (male-dominated) racial identities that both articulate with and bolster a sense of (white) pride', they found what had been at the centre of plantation museums' design from the beginning: White desire to bring back the security of a past that could be inhabited by visitors without any open challenges to their identity or morality.[13] The absence of slavery at these sites, in many cases, was the appeal. Zeb Mayhew, owner of Oak Alley Plantation, explained in 2003 that although he was 'mindful of the surge in interest in slavery' that had occasioned studies such as

[13] Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, p. 4.

Eichstedt and Small's, he believed that 'Oak Alley visitors, for the most part, are looking for a *Gone with the Wind* brand of fantasy…They come for the hoop-skirts, the grandeur and the elegance'.[14] That's a part of the story', he said, 'and maybe a better part of the story for us to tell'.[15]

Undoubtedly, Whitney's opening has signalled a change in how slavery is narrativised on plantation sites. Oak Alley Plantation now includes slavery on its main tour, despite Mayhew's earlier dedication to the 'hoopskirts' and *Gone with the Wind*-inspired narrative. I visited Oak Alley on the 2nd November, 2018, as part of international sightseeing company Gray Line's operated tour. Our guide informed us upon entry to the house that we would hear from two of almost two-hundred-and-twenty enslaved people who lived and worked at Oak Alley Plantation. In the first room, a brick was placed on a table at the centre of the room. 'Slaves built this house', our guide explained. As we were taken into the dining room, we viewed a list of domestic enslaved servants who worked in the house. The tour used artefacts in Oak Alley's collection to highlight the starkly contrasting lives led by enslavers and those whom they enslaved. A beautifully intricate dress owned by Celina Roman, who was mistress of the plantation between 1830 and 1866, was displayed on one side of the room. On the opposite side, a simple cotton dress, which reportedly belonged to an enslaved domestic servant named Meanna, highlighted the disparate lives led by these two women.

[14] Adams, *Wounds of Returning,* p. 67.
[15] Ibid.

Figure 4.1. Oak Alley Plantation, taken from the Oak Alley Plantation Website (2020), <http://www.oakalleyplantation.com/sugarcane-plantation/plantation-tours> [accessed 16/12/2020].

Oak Alley's tour repeatedly drew these metaphorical connections between the artefacts in their collection and the contradictory co-existence of enslaver and enslaved. For example, a crab rattle shackle—a shackle with two oblong "pockets" on either side filled with small metallic balls used to track an enslaved person's movement using sound—was displayed alongside a copper-plated wedding invitation.[16] The pairing 'summed up' Oak Alley, according to the guide, for the site was 'equal part beautiful and happy as it [wa]s sad'. That curators at Oak Alley chose to use a crab rattle shackle to represent enslaved experience is no surprise. Wood has outlined the process by which objects of torture 'familiar to the western experience', and to the western gaze, such as 'shackles, chains, collars, stocks, brands, gallows, cages, bits, bridles, thumbscrews, fires, and whips' have come to be the most

[16] 'Crab Rattle Shackle', *Oak Alley Plantation Website* <https://www.oakalleyplantation.org/crab-rattle-shackle> [accessed 21/08/2022].

used strategy in museum exhibits on slavery. The problem with such strategies, Wood convincingly concludes, is that 'once the object of torture has gained such primacy the slave body is no longer necessary in order to remember, or to pretend to remember, slavery'.[17] In other words, the process erases Black lived experience from the narrative.

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As a museum focused solely on the representation of enslaved experience, Whitney's main aim is to correct this omission. Whitney's tour begins at the Antioch Baptist Church. The building is not original to the grounds. Antioch was built by the formerly enslaved population of St James Parish, Louisiana, and donated by that same community in 2015. Antioch is not the only structure that is not original to Whitney itself. Only two of the slave cabins, for example, were situated on the Haydel plantation in the nineteenth century. The pair were relocated from a section of the grounds further downriver from where the museum is currently located, with the other cabins being purchased from the nearby Myrtle Grove plantation in Terrebonne Parish. However, the fact that a number of structures on site are not original to the Haydel plantation matters little to Cummings's vision for the site. Unlike traditional plantations, where the narrative focuses on the architecture, furniture and lifestyle of former white owners, Whitney's focus is on the lived experience of those enslaved on the plantation. For this reason, artefacts are rarely found at Whitney. The buildings on site—the church, cabins, Blacksmith's shop, kitchen, and plantation house—are sparsely furnished. Objects are not displayed in cases or alongside information plaques but are placed sparingly and only to provide visitors with a visual representation of how domestic or working spaces may have been arranged.

[17] Wood, *Blind Memory*, p. 223.

Whitney's primary strategy is performative. The tour is spatially conducted to place the least emphasis on the Big House, which is the last building visited and is afforded the shortest time. The most emphasis is placed on the memorial spaces in the grounds, which have been created to foster visitors' visceral and emotional engagements with enslaved suffering and death. This focus led geographer Perry Carter to suggest that Whitney 'should not be considered a plantation museum' but should instead be considered 'a memoryscape of the enslaved'.[18] I visited the Whitney Plantation on the 30th October, 2018, once again as part of a Gray Line-operated tour. As soon as we arrived, our guide asked us not to carry food around the site or record any of the tour. 'This is a memorial site', he said. 'People come here to experience it first hand', without 'the disruption of twenty-first-century life'.

Whitney's confidence that it can provide visitors with a 'first-hand' experience of slavery is most steadfastly rooted in its use of oral testimonies taken from the 1937 Ex-Slave Project (ESP). The project was set up as part of the Federal Writers Project (FWP), an initiative established by President Franklin Roosevelt under the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of April 1935, designed to provide jobs for unemployed people at the height of the Depression. The idea for the ESP was first conceived during the development of a 150-volume series titled *Life in America,* which originally included studies such as 'The Italians of New York' and 'The Negro in Virginia'.[19] When writers in Florida interviewed formerly enslaved people as part of their state's contribution to the series, project directors saw the potential to document African American people's experience of slavery in their own words. By the time the project was completed, over 2,300 formerly enslaved people from across seventeen states had been interviewed.

[18] Perry Carter, 'Response', in Arnold Modlin, Stephen Hanna, Perry Carter, Amy Potter, Candace Forbes Bright, Derek Alderman, 'Can Plantation Museums Do Full Justice to the Story of the Enslaved? A Discussion of Problems, Possibilities, and the Place of Memory', *GeoHumanities*, 4:2 (2018), p. 341.
[19] 'Federal Writers' Project', in Eric Foner and John A. Garraty (eds), *The Reader's Companion to American History* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2014) [accessed 20/05/2022].

The ESP testimonies are central to the history represented at the Whitney Plantation. Voice recordings are played through speakers installed in the church, the cabins, and the plantation house. Quotations translated from the testimonies are etched into the granite walls of the three main memorials. Visitors are also given a lanyard at the beginning of the tour displaying the name, age, and testimony from a contributor to the ESP. This strategy, which attempts to foster visitors' emotional engagement by providing a close, personal connection to a formerly enslaved person, is similar to that which is used at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C., where visitors are invited to take an identification card bearing the name and life history of an individual. Visitors find that these individuals met with various fates: execution, death by disease, liberation, escape. Both the USHMM and the Whitney allow visitors to take these items away as a reminder of their experience. My own Whitney lanyard contained a quote from Albert Patterson, aged 90:

> I remember our plantation was sold twice befo' de war [sic]. It was sheriff's sale, de white peoples they stand up on de porch an' de black men an' women an' children stand on de ground, an' de man he shout, 'how much am I offered fo' plantation an' fine men an' women?' Somebody would say so many thousand… an' after while one man buy it all.

When John Cummings wrote that Whitney 'presents the facts of slavery through the words of those who experienced it', he referred to the power he believes the ESP testimonies have to relate the history of slavery to an audience.[20] He quoted ESP contributor John Little: 'Tisn't he who has stood and looked on, that can tell you what slavery is—'tis he who has endured it'.[21] This message has clearly been incorporated into Whitney's tour. 'Only those who endured can answer the question, "what was it like to be another person's property?"', announced the tour guide as we sat in the pews inside the Antioch Baptist Church. He told us to listen to the voices of formerly enslaved people as they played through speakers within the

[20] John Cummings, 'The US Has 35,000 Museums, Why is Only One About Slavery?', *Washington Post* (14th August, 2015), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-us-has-35000-museums-why-is-only-one-about-slavery/2015/08/14/91d75f54-4138-11e5-846d-02792f854297_story.html> [accessed 08/12/2020].
[21] Ibid.

church. The voices, we were told, were evidence of the 'strength', 'spirit', and 'endurance' of those people who were enslaved at Whitney.

However, where one would expect the opportunity for visitors to hear these testimonies would foster understanding of the 'strength', 'spirit', and 'endurance' of enslaved people as the Whitney claims, the process is limited by the way the testimonies have been collected and translated. As Stewart has recently uncovered, the ESP adopted contemporary literary methods that ultimately 'emphasised the exoticism of "racial" others and simultaneously privileged the view of the outsider to the community being documented'.[22] In other words, the ESP reinforced the dominant white gaze through literary forms of racial "othering". Though African American writers including Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes were employed and published as part of the programme, the control that Black writers and interviewees had over their own representation was routinely curtailed by white editors.[23] Editors followed conventions that had been widely popularised by travel narratives and realist adventure novels in the 1930s to ensure that the ESP's work would appeal to a wider commercial audience. However, this process often led to the dehumanisation of their subjects through exoticisation and othering. This racial "othering", says Stewart, can be most clearly seen in the use of "Negro Dialect", such as that presented on the Whitney Plantation lanyard bearing Albert Pattinson's testimony. Stewart explains how white interviewers in the Southern states of Virginia, Louisiana, and Georgia created 'a textual distinction in their writings between themselves and their informants [that] reinforced […] the case for the vital role of white folklorists in salvaging and interpreting Black folk culture'.[24] The implication was that Black interviewees were capable neither of speaking for themselves nor of

[22] Catherine A. Stewart, *Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the Federal Writer's Project* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), p. 61.
[23] John Edgar Tidwell, 'Recasting Negro Life History: Sterling A. Brown and the Federal Writer's Project', *The Langston Hughes Review*, 13:2 (1995), p. 79.
[24] Ibid., p. 68.

understanding the cultural significance of their own testimonies. In a similar way to the earlier graphic narratives produced by Stedman and Crevecoeur, which alienated and dehumanised enslaved subjects by presenting them as passive victims unable to actively resist or articulate their suffering, white editors of the ESP testimonies reinforced white understandings of racial difference by presenting Black interviewees as intellectually inferior, child-like, and dependent upon white guidance. White interviewers who established this textual distinction between themselves and their informants also echoed the actions of earlier anti-slavery publishers who dictated and prioritised their own explications at the beginning of Black-authored slave narratives as a way to establish moral and intellectual superiority.

In fact, Stewart has found that a number of white interviewers were members of the UDC. These women may thus have taken the opportunity presented by the ESP to demonstrate their belief in the necessity of controlling and subjugating the Black population. Consequently, the same group of white women whose influence shaped traditional plantation narratives to reflect Lost Cause ideology and erase African American presence were collecting and recording the FWP sponsored testimonies. The representation of slavery as a benevolent institution under which enslaved African Americans were better off than when they were free would have perfectly suited the narrative of the Old South that groups such as the UDC wished to establish, regardless of the reasoning behind interviewees' responses.[25]

Cummings and Seck were, however, willing to take the risk of using these testimonies that often dehumanised and exoticised the voices of African American people without

[25] For more on the debates over the use of the ESP testimonies as historical sources, see Shauna Bigham, 'What the Slaves Were Really Saying: Race, Signification, and the Deconstruction of WPA Slave Narratives', *The Griot*, 15:2 (1996): 22-29; Lynda M. Hill, 'Ex-Slave Narratives: The WPA Federal Writers' Project Reappraised', *Oral History*, 6:1 (1998): 64-72; and, Stephanie J. Shaw, 'Using the WPA ex-slave narratives to study the impact of the Great Depression', *Journal of Southern History*, 69:3 (2003): 623-658.

providing visitors with any of the context around their production. The Whitney Plantation's website, for example, says only the following about the ESP testimonies:

> In 1936, the FWP had an active African American unit who took it upon themselves to interview former slaves. John Lomax and his associate director Sterling A. Brown immediately realized the importance of preserving the story of slavery as expressed by its survivors. The formal collection of slave narratives ended in the spring of 1939, except in Louisiana where most of the oral stories were collected in 1940. At that time, 75 years had passed since the end of the Civil War. The majority of the former slaves that the FWP interviewed were children at the time of emancipation. For the most part, their stories recall their time spent in slavery as children and teenagers.[26]

Though not incorrect, the omission of more detailed information about the collection of these testimonies and the resultant exoticisation of African American people using "Negro Dialect" is misleading. As the Whitney relies upon the ESP collection extensively across its buildings and memorials, the fact that it misses the opportunity to discuss the dominant influence of white supremacy here is unfortunate, for it renders the site's recurrent reliance on the testimonies inherently problematic. For example, Nash's Children of the Whitney memorials directly draw from the ESP testimonies. The series of clay sculptures represent the formerly enslaved contributors to the ESP at the age they were emancipated. Nash said that he wanted the sculptures to be 'as genuine to true slave life as possible' and explained that he believed they would 'breathe life into the whole plantation'.[27]

[26] 'Children of the Whitney: Works Progress Administration', Whitney Plantation Official Website, <www.whitneyplantation.org/education/lousiana-history/the-big-house-and-the-outbuildings/the-children-of-the-whitney/> [accessed 08/12/2020].
[27] Ibid.

Figure 4.2. Children of the Whitney sculptures in the Antioch Baptist Church, Whitney Plantation. Sculptures created by Woodrow Nash. Photograph taken by author (30th October, 2018).

Ibrahima Seck echoed Nash's rhetoric when he commented that the Children of the Whitney bring 'slavery back to life'.[28] Journalist Hannah Knowles reported that the children were 'startlingly realistic', and admitted that she kept glancing at them, as if she would 'catch them moving' if she caught them by surprise.[29] Travel reporter Andrea Sachs reiterated Knowle's assertion about the realistic nature of Nash's sculptures when she wrote that '[t]heir sculpted faces were full of expression; some looked defiant, others withdrawn'.[30] Jared Keller wrote for the *Smithsonian Magazine* that, '[w]ithered and raw, the sculpted children are the

[28] Hannah Knowles, 'Why Are You Talking About That?', *WashingtonPost.Com* (9th September, 2019).
[29] Ibid.
[30] Andrea Sachs, '300 Years of Letting the Good Times Roll', *WashingtonPost.Com* (29th July, 2018).

most visceral reminder of those who suffered—and whose stories make up the heart of the tour'.[31]

Yet, as viscerally powerful as Nash's sculptures may be, there is something unsettling about the prospect of the ESP contributors being represented in this way. Though the decision stems from a desired fidelity to historical accuracy by presenting the ESP interviewees at the age they would have been when they were enslaved, the subsequent infantilisation of the adult African American formerly enslaved contributors shares an uncomfortable connection with the paternalism that shaped white editors' production of the narratives for publication, and that characterised pro-slavery narratives in the antebellum South. White supremacists often presented Black people and their descendants as 'inferior, childlike, and dependent' in their defence of the system of slavery.[32] The creation of the stereotype in which Black enslaved people were represented as childlike and unable to care for themselves or their families allowed enslavers to present themselves as benevolent and caring fathers, the head of the family unit. Though they were clearly not created with the same intention to denigrate Black people, Nash's Children of the Whitney do permanently freeze formerly enslaved people in perpetual childhood.

Nash's sculptures, together with the use of the ESP testimonies and the "Negro Dialect" that was used to marginalise and exoticise formerly enslaved contributors, mean that Whitney's seemingly innocent focus on enslaved children relies upon an archive and visual culture shaped by the white gaze that purposefully infantilised Black citizens to represent them as passive and dependent upon white society. In light of this, we must reconsider the reported 'visceral' and emotional effect of Nash's sculptures on visitors. What meanings are

[31] Keller, 'Inside America's Auschwitz'.
[32] Jennifer Hildebrand, 'Uncovering the True Relationship between Masters and Slaves', in Dixie Ray Haggard (ed), *African Americans in the Nineteenth Century: People and Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), p. 63.

visitors bringing with them and projecting onto the sculpted children? Do visitors, in seeing these small Black figures dressed in the clothes of the enslaved and situated on the plantation grounds, inscribe wounds upon the bodies of these children as they imagine the future that slavery held for them? Is this why it is such a visceral experience? If so, the Whitney's curatorial strategy relies upon the anti-slavery tactic of representing violated or soon-to-be violated innocence as a way to emotionally engage white visitors with Black suffering. Cummings himself revealingly spoke to a visitor that he wanted 'to have the innocence of children' at the heart of the museum's narrative 'so that you, as a white person, will open your heart and listen to me'.[33] Like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Ward Beecher, and other anti-slavery authors, artists, and activists before him, Cummings's words demonstrate his awareness of 'how to touch the heart with the evils of slavery' through the personification of innocent, vulnerable and helpless figures.[34]

After tour guides introduce visitors to the Children of the Whitney at Antioch Baptist Church, they lead groups to the first of Whitney's memorials, the Wall of Honor. Made of polished black granite panels, the memorial lists the known names of all those who were enslaved at Whitney between 1750 and 1860. One panel, the first that is visible as one approaches the memorial from the church, is missing. The space has been left empty for those names that have not yet been discovered. A few steps away, the Allees Gwendolyn Midlo Hall Louisiana Slave Memorial stands as an extension of the Wall of Honor. Built from the same black granite, the memorial consists of 216 panels installed across 18 walls listing the names of 107,000 names of people who were enslaved in Louisiana.[35] The names have been drawn from New Orleans writer and historian Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's Louisiana database,

[33] Mimi Read, 'New Orleans Lawyer Transforms Whitney Plantation into Powerful Slavery Museum', *The New Orleans Advocate* (14th October, 2014), <https://www.nola.com/news/article_268ecb52-18b1-5110-abfc-b94432aad8d5.html> [accessed 16/12/2020].
[34] Shaw, 'The Plymouth Pulpit', p. 338.
[35] The names were taken from the Louisiana Slave Database compiled by the historian and activist Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, hence the name of the memorial.

which is based on records Midlo Hall discovered in a courthouse in Pointe Coupee Parish. The memorials are similar in design to Maya Lin's 1982 Vietnam Veteran's Memorial (VVM) on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Although Lin's design was initially criticised as a 'black gash of shame and sorrow', and accused of being a work of anti-war propaganda, her approach heralded a new way of honouring and remembering the dead.[36] Encountering the thousands of names of those killed whilst seeing one's own reflection on the polished granite makes the memorial a highly experiential and emotional space which is also highly performative. Visitors often leave objects—letters, toys, photographs, and religious tokens—at the base of the wall, and many can be seen tracing the familiar names of friends or relatives. The key to the memorial's success, according to Michael Balfour, is its simplicity and ambiguity. By avoiding what Balfour has called 'a direct transcription of experience'—an explicit representation of the war or those who fought and died during it—Lin created a space in which visitors could shape their own commemorative experience.[37]

[36] Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), p. 102.
[37] Michael Balfour, 'Mapping Realities: Representing War through Affective Place Making', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 28:1 (2012), p. 37.

Figure 4.3. The Wall of Honor memorial at the Whitney Plantation museum. Photograph taken by author (30th October, 2018).

However, Whitney's Wall of Honor and Allees Gwendolyn Midlo Hall differ from Lin's design in that they do directly transcribe experience. The memorials go further than solely listing the names of enslaved people and, where known, their occupation, nationality, and birth date, all of which may be found in Midlo Hall's database.[38] Engraved amongst the names are also images of the violence enslaved people endured. Kerri Westenberg of the *Chicago Star Tribune* had her attention held by 'images of a slave market, a man's back crisscrossed with scars, and harrowing snatches of slaves' stories', which had been copied

[38] Find Gwendolyn Middle Hall's 'Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy, 1718-1820' database at <http://www.ibiblio.org/laslave/> [accessed 31/08/2022].

from ESP testimonies.[39] The image of a man covered in scars is, of course, the image of Gordon. Installed without context, without a title, without even his name, Gordon's scars stand alone at Whitney as a symbolic representation of the horrors of slavery. Other illustrations featured on the memorials include Josiah Wedgwood's 'Am I Not a Man and a Brother?' image showing an enslaved man kneeling with his hands in chains, raised in a humble plea for compassion, as well as an image titled 'Dealers Inspecting a Negro at a Slave Auction in Virginia' from the *Illustrated London News* in February 1861, and illustrations from the 1852 edition of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Keller describes these 'testimonials' to the brutality of slavery 'something more telling of the slave experience than a last name'.[40] Yet, it is worth considering why this would be the case. Is it because the image of Gordon's back is a more explicit representation of pain? Is it because the image of a suffering human body, scarred by the lash or presented on the auction block to be sold away, is more relatable for an audience? Or is it simply because these highly recognisable images and motifs, popularised by anti-slavery visual cultures, have come to represent the history of slavery in a way that a single name cannot? In the same way that Wood described chains, shackles, and objects of torture as 'familiar to the Western experience', these images and stories of Black enslaved suffering have gained so much primacy that the individual name of an enslaved person is not only deemed unnecessary but is felt to be a less affective representation of enslaved experience.

This focus on violence continues at the next memorial, the Field of Angels. Dedicated to over 2,200 children who died whilst enslaved in St John the Baptist Parish between 1820 and 1870, the memorial first took form as a wild, untended field populated by several of Nash's clay children. Visitors would stand in front of a black granite sign that provided details

[39] Kerri Westenberg, 'Whitney Plantation, Near New Orleans, Immerses Visitors in the Lives of Slaves', *Chicago Star Tribune* (13th October, 2017).
[40] Keller, 'Inside America's Auschwitz'.

of the memorial and announced that the Whitney ‘hope that you will think of them [the children] often and in your own way provide a personal requiem here today’. Now the memorial is complete, this sign stands in front of a paved courtyard, surrounded by familiar polished black granite panels engraved with names and quotes from the ESP testimonies as well as photographs and illustrations.

At the centre of the memorial space is a sculpture of an angel holding a baby in her arms. She crouches, leaning on one knee, with her wings stretched out behind her, as though she is readying herself to take flight. Both angel and child are cast in black bronze. The angel’s hair is depicted in corn rows, whilst the child’s hair is short and curly. The memorial, titled ‘Coming Home’, was created by the white sculptor Rod Moorehead and represents a Black angel carrying a baby to heaven. As the centrepiece in Whitney’s Field of Angels, the memorial symbolises the tragic fate of the hundreds of enslaved children who died before the age of two.

Figure 4.4. Photograph of Rod Moorehead's sculpture Coming Home, situated in the Field of Angels memorial at the Whitney Plantation. Photograph taken by author (30th October, 2018).

Visitors are then led to the slave cabins. Nash's Children of the Whitney sit on the wooden steps and stand beside the doorways. Before entering the cabin, containing one simple wooden bed, a wooden table, and metal dishes, visitors are told about the living conditions for enslaved people at Whitney. Violence and physical suffering are once again emphasised as guides describe the daily life of enslaved people and the dangers that accompanied sugar distillation and production. Westenberg recalled that her guide explained 'how slaves were forced into the field before the sun rose, brandishing machetes to cut down the thick stocks—and occasionally slicing a leg, instead', before continuing to describe how

'slaves inside the sugar mill stoked fires to boil the cane in large pots, which sometimes spilled thick, scorching liquid onto anyone around'.[41] Tour guides continue to emphasise the violence and physical suffering endured by enslaved people as they lead visitors to the Pennsylvanian steel jail. The jail was built post-emancipation in 1868 and donated to Whitney by Louisianans Mr and Mrs Gary Hebert. A plaque on the outside of the jail explains that Whitney installed the structure because the flat iron steel bars 'are typical of the bars that appeared on doors of slave pens in the large auction houses during slavery'.[42] Tour guides encourage visitors to step inside the jail themselves and imagine the horror of being confined within the metal walls in the middle of a Louisianan summer. The strategy is powerfully performative. Westenberg wrote after stepping inside she 'felt the force of the summer's heat intensified by metal, and quickly backed out'.[43]

[41] Westenberg, 'Whitney Plantation'.
[42] Plaque on jail, Whitney Plantation.
[43] Westenberg, 'Whitney Plantation'.

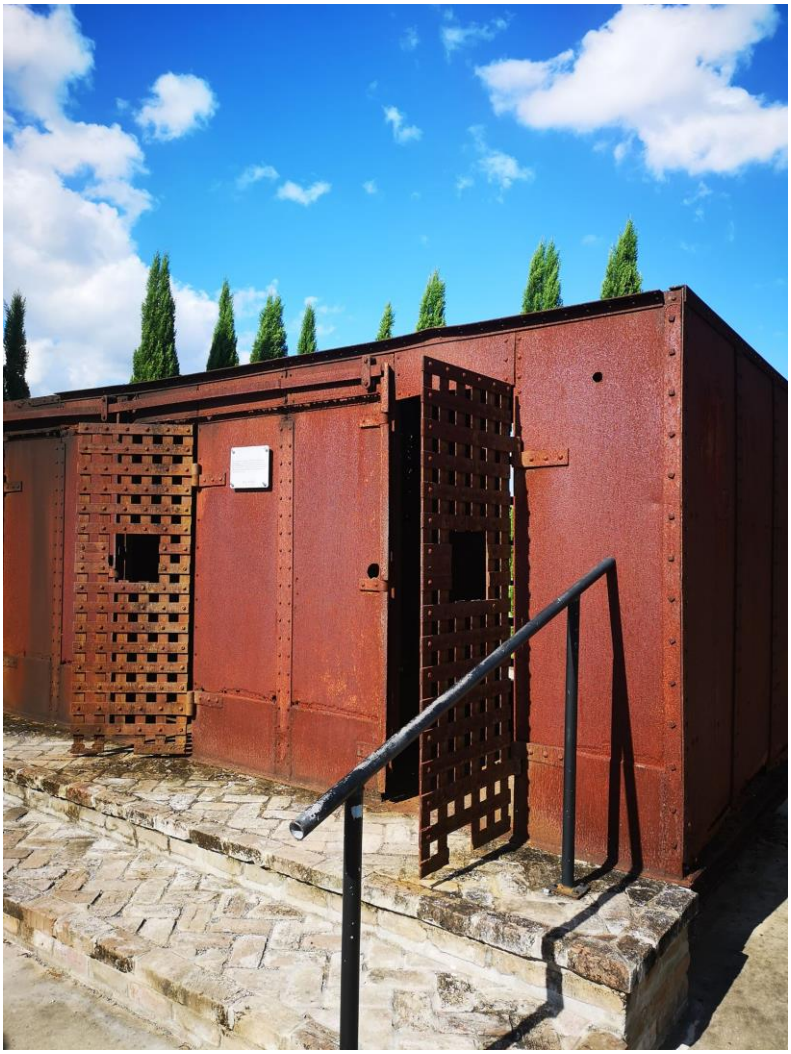

Figure 4.5. Steel jail at the Whitney Plantation. Photograph taken by author (30th October, 2018).

As groups make their way from the jail towards the plantation house, they encounter two structures. First, the Blacksmith's shop, which is fitted with a handful of basic tools, an anvil, and a workbench. Visitors also pass the kitchen, which was restored in 2001, before reaching the Big House. Claimed to be the oldest detached kitchen in Louisiana, the building contains a wooden table, two small preparation tables, two store cupboards, and an assortment of cooking pots and utensils.

Guides lead visitors into the main house through the back door. Not only is this strategy a powerful reversal of the traditional plantation tour that would typically welcome visitors with a grand reception space in the Big House, visitors also enter the house using the

same entrance that enslaved labourers would have used. As previously mentioned, the inside of the house is sparsely furnished, and the time visitors spend inside is brief. However, one of Nash's Children of the Whitney finds a place inside. The figure of an enslaved girl stands at the foot of the four-posted bed in the main bedroom upstairs, a symbolic representation of the forced labour that enabled white privilege and comfort. Her presence hints at the sexual violence against enslaved women and girls that would have taken place in these domestic spaces and thus re-emphasises the trope of violated innocence that characterises Whitney's tour. Tour guides reinforce this connection when they use the bedroom space to tell the story of Anna, a young, enslaved girl who was bought for Marie Azelie Haydel, the last Haydel family member to own the Whitney Plantation. When she was fourteen, Anna was raped by Antoine Haydel, Marie Azelie's brother. Anna gave birth to a child, Victor Haydel, soon after. Guides inform visitors that Anna's ancestral line can now be traced to many wealthy Black Haydel families in the area. Whitney's website, for example, explains how there are now Haydels in the area who are 'successful entrepreneurs, educators, and politicians'.[44] Anna's son Victor was also the great grandfather of Sybil Haydel, First Lady of New Orleans through her marriage to Ernest Moriel, who became New Orleans' first African-American mayor when he was elected in 1978. Sybil and Ernest's son, Marc Moriel, also served as mayor of New Orleans and was elected President of the United States Conference of Mayors in 2001.

That the story ends well, though, does not alleviate Anna's suffering, which is represented by the small sculpture in the bedroom. Visitors are encouraged by the placement of Nash's sculpture to inflict Anna's future sexual assault onto the body of the small child at the foot of the bed. The imaginative exercise is not too dissimilar to that which Reverend Beecher invited his congregation to partake in when he sold Sarah, Pinky, and the other young

[44] 'The Wall of Honor: Louisiana Slave Memorial', Whitney Plantation Official Website, <https://www.whitneyplantation.org/history/the-big-house-and-the-outbuildings/the-wall-of-honor/> [accessed 20/05/2022].

girls from his pulpit in New York in 1860. Though Anna is not depicted or described as a near-white body on Whitney's tour, she does still appear as an innocent, passive object vulnerable to the desires of Antoine Haydel. Anna is thus transformed into a sentimentalist figure of sympathy. Her innocence is always already at risk and violated in the minds of Whitney's visitors. Anna herself is not afforded the right to speak, nor resist her condition or the violence inflicted upon her. She is simply a violated vessel: only through her children's children is Black strength and resistance materialised. Thus, Anna's lived experience as an enslaved woman on the Whitney site is portrayed as part of a dark and violent past which is ultimately overcome by future American progress. Having been informed that Anna's family line can now be traced to wealthy New Orleanians, audiences can rest assured that Anna's ordeal is consigned to the past and remain comfortable in a present in which such violence could not be committed.

The house constitutes the end of the guided tour. Visitors are invited to explore the grounds and reflect upon their experience by sharing their thoughts on small, coloured post-it notes which can be placed on a board in the gift shop. There is, however, one other memorial on site: the sixty-three ceramic heads created by Nash to commemorate the 1811 German Coast Uprising. When Nash had completed the first few sculptures, Cummings put three of the ceramic heads by the river running through the grounds and incorporated them into Whitney's official tour. According to one tour guide, who spoke to geographer Perry Carter in 2017, a rush of negative comments and reviews on online platforms such as TripAdvisor, Twitter, Yelp, and Facebook forced him to remove them.[45] The installation is now located in its own memorial space, behind the building containing the gift shop and welcome centre. Westenberg described the memorial as a 'grim' and 'brutal visual'.[46] Her description is

[45] Carter, 'Response', p. 341.
[46] Westenberg, 'Whitney Plantation'.

difficult to dispute. Four rows of steel poles, staggered in height to allow viewers to see each head in full detail, are positioned uniformly in a bed of wood chippings. Some of the faces and foreheads are glazed with red, just enough to encourage the imagination to see blood still staining the skin. There are two benches facing the memorial, positioned either side of a large palm tree which bears signs requesting silence from visitors. Behind the benches are three boards containing a wealth of information on the uprising: how it started, what happened during the rebellion, and the trials and executions of those caught. Maps, letters, engravings, and the names of those who were executed are also printed on the boards.

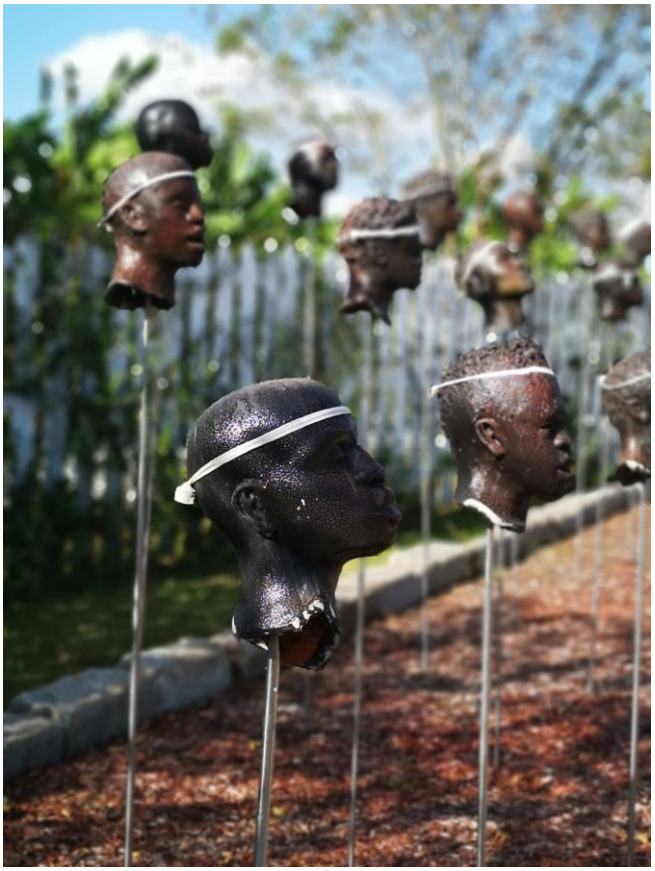

Figure 4.6. 1811 German Coast Uprising memorial at the Whitney Plantation. Photographs taken by author (30th October, 2018).

When Carter visited the plantation, he was the only member of his group who chose to see the memorial. This did not, however, detract from his estimation of the memorial's value. Carter writes that the heads 'more than moved their viewers'. They 'shook', 'frightened', 'offended', and 'touched them in a way that reading about the insurgents' fates or being told of them never could'. Having admitted to being the only person to visit the memorial during the whole day he was there, Carter's 'viewers' must be those who left negative reviews of the original smaller displays online. The fact, nor the consequence, of there being no viewers of the memorial whilst Carter was at the Whitney Plantation does not enter his assessment of the memorial's effectiveness. He continues, 'The heads, or rather the facsimiles of heads, suggest the bodies from whence they were detached. In this sense, the

heads are a form of reembodying the enslaved'.[47] Carter explains why he feels that, in this respect, Whitney 'gets it right': 'Hardened, clay representations of long-dead Black bodies have the power to affect, to touch. Bodies are highly affecting objects. We relate to bodies because we are embodied'.[48]

The complexity of Carter's response merits deeper reflection. The fact that he claims the heads touch viewers 'in a way that reading about the insurgents' fates or being told them never could' mirrors the response of viewers to the *Without Sanctuary* photographs discussed earlier in this study, and attest to the power that visual representations of historical violence have on audiences. It also echoes the sentiments of anti-slavery authors and artists who felt that the best way to engage viewers' emotions with the plight of the enslaved was to show enslaved suffering and spectacular violence, to use the appetite for horror in western imagination to force white audiences to confront the horrors of slavery through visual displays of violated Black flesh. The sentiment behind Carter's assertion that 'representations of long-dead Black bodies have the power to affect' because bodies themselves are 'highly affecting objects' which viewers relate to solely on the grounds that they also have bodies directly evokes the rhetoric fundamental to anti-slavery visual culture. Carter's response is thus entrenched in white western sentimentalist notions of emotional identification through representations of pain and suffering. The problem with such an approach when it comes to commemorating the history of slavery and racial violence, as we have seen, is that this emotional engagement is often complex and multi-layered, shaped by white fears, desires, detestations, and understandings of racial difference. Using visual representations of pained Black bodies to commemorate the horrors of slavery is a tactic that is historically grounded in and was designed to appeal to the white gaze. Such representations have often left little

[47] Carter, 'Response', p. 341.
[48] Ibid.

room for the reality of Black lived experience. As Carter himself notes, the decapitated heads of the 1811 rebels tell the story of 'the insurgents' fate', of the violent end to the rebellion and the post-mortem mutilation and display of the enslaved rebels. But what of the story of the rebellion itself? Where in all of Whitney's memorials is the story of the strength and courage required from the insurgents' in their attempt to fight for an end to slavery?

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When Mitch Landrieu, former mayor of New Orleans, labelled the Whitney plantation as 'America's Auschwitz' at its opening, he did so because he felt the experience of the site was powerful enough to grant audiences a visceral understanding of slavery. 'You have to go inside', he said.[49] 'When you walk in that space, you can't deny what happened to these people. You can feel it, touch it, smell it'.[50] Visitor responses to the site and plantation tour, which can be seen on the tens of brightly-coloured sticky notes in Whitney's gift shop, tended to agree. The selection of responses I had access to in October 2018 are a small sample taken across a limited and unknown time period, but their words are nonetheless valuable in that they offer insight into visitors' initial responses to the site.

'The Whitney tour is the atrocity of slavery', said one. 'You learn all about this in school, but it's nothing compared to seeing it'. 'It adds a picture and a feeling to this horrible time passed', announced another. These responses attest to the power of Whitney's visual representations of slavery. Seeing it, like seeing the images of Gordon's scars or watching a slave auction reenactment, is more powerful than reading about it. Indeed, the words 'emotional', 'knowledge', 'power', 'powerful', 'heart-breaking', and 'interesting', recurred across dozens of responses. Phrases such as 'never forget', 'we will not forget', and 'never again' were also common, and reflect Whitney's status as a site of trauma tourism. The

[49] Keller, 'Inside America's Auschwitz'.
[50] Ibid.

emotional impact of first-person testimonies from the ESP collection is also reflected in these audience responses. 'There is no better story told than the people who lived to tell the story', one note read. Another claimed '[i]t was refreshing to have the story told from the slaves point of view'. These responses, however, must be considered with caution in light of the fact that visitors on the tour are not aware of the circumstances in which the ESP testimonies were taken, or of their limitations.

The specific emotional engagement that Whitney encourages between visitors and the enslaved population at Whitney is also evident, though the convoluted nature of such responses is also reflected in visitors' words. 'Everyone has a story to tell' said one. 'It's important that we listen with compassion and empathy. Let's be willing to be uncomfortable so transformation can occur'. Though it is impossible to know the exact discomfort this visitor advocates, the response is profound. Another response, which seems at first to be contradictory, sheds a little more light. 'My eyes were open to seeing <u>just slightly</u> the everyday lifestyle of the slave. I empathise to what they endured just to stay alive. I couldn't imagine it myself […]'.[51] The ability to simultaneously empathise but not imagine what it must have been like to be enslaved is perhaps the same kind of uncomfortable response described in the first quote. Whitney, through its focus on physical pain and violence, is primarily designed to emotionally engage visitors, to have them viscerally experience the history of slavery and so empathise with the brutality and hardship. Though it is important to teach this history, visitors to commemorative sites must also grapple with the knowledge that they can never know exactly what it was like. Rather than omitting problematic histories or contexts, the Whitney could seize the opportunity presented by their contested collections and artefacts such as the ESP testimonies or anti-slavery illustrations to foster conversations about

[51] Original emphasis.

white supremacy's influence upon visual culture and their own curatorial strategies that would encourage visitors to reflect upon their responses in more ethical and productive ways.

In many ways, though, Whitney does get it right. Unlike traditional plantation museums, which focus on the lived experience of white enslavers—on furniture, society, architecture, politics, gardens, and heritage—Whitney confronts its visitors with the violence that underpinned this existence and provides spaces in which visitors can remember enslaved people's lives and mourn their loss. In the words of Jonathan Holloway, speaking during an interview for the *New York Times* on the subject of Whitney's opening, 'the way they've turned the script inside out is a brilliant slipping of the skirt… The mad genius of the whole thing is really resonant. Is it an art gallery? A plantation tour? A museum? It's almost this astonishing piece of performance art, and as great art does, it makes you stop and wonder'.[52] As the previous chapter has shown, twenty-first century performance art has the potential to continually challenge audience modes of perception, induce discomfort, and break social mores by refusing to allow spectators to passively observe representations of slavery and racial violence.

However, the key for performance artists such as Dread Scott is their ability to personally embody and facilitate others' embodiment of resistance in previously hostile spaces and create their own narrative of Black history and culture free from white rhetorical control. Whitney's location within the previously hostile space of the plantation museum landscape is significant, but the site's ability to represent the resistance and strength of Black people and Black culture must be questioned in light of their focus on violence and reliance upon visual conventions that dehumanise enslaved people. The reliance, too, upon an archive

[52] David Amsden, 'Building the First Slavery Museum in America', *The New York Times Magazine* (26th February, 2015), <www.nytimes.com/2015/03/01/magazine/building-the-first-slave-museum-in-america.html> [accessed 19th/05/2020].

of oral testimonies that contributed to racial "othering" and was shaped considerably by the white gaze demand the site's memorials and guided tour be more critically analysed. For example, when Matthew Cook conducted research at Whitney, he approached an elderly African American man who was also on his tour. At first, the man was unwilling to share his thoughts, but when he decided to speak with Cook he explained how he felt the tour 'still subscribed to long-held racist beliefs that enslaved Africans were dumb and passive'.[53] 'Where is the discussion of slave resistance?', he asked. 'Where are the narratives about the ingenuity and depth of agricultural knowledge that Africans added to the plantation system?'[54]

These comments reveal the effect that Whitney's visual and performative strategies may have upon visitors. Though slave resistance is, to some extent, represented in the 1811 memorial, particularly on the information boards, the discussion of resistance is superseded by the gruesome facsimiles of bodiless heads. Whereas Dread Scott chose not to represent the violence meted out against the enslaved rebels from 1811 who were caught and put on trial, Whitney's memorial centres the executions in their narrative. Whitney's focus on the suffering and death of enslaved African Americans through the representation of children contributes further to the feeling held by Cook's elderly interviewee that enslaved African Americans are represented as 'dumb' and 'passive'. The representational trope is not too far removed from those in the eighteenth-century that portrayed enslaved Africans as childlike to validate the institution of slavery and highlight the benevolence of the paternalistic white enslaver. Ultimately, though it is evident in some visitor responses that audiences may individually connect what they see and hear at Whitney to what one visitor called the 'impact' of slavery in the past and present, little is done by the site itself to encourage this sort of

[53] Cook, 'Counter-narratives of Slavery in the Deep South', p. 305.
[54] Ibid.

connection nor educate visitors about the realities of racial inequality in the present. For example, the Pennsylvania steel jail, which was built post-emancipation, would have been an ideal place to discuss mass incarceration and police brutality as systematic forms of racial violence that originated with slavery. The jail could stand as a powerful representation of how the confinement and public assault of Black bodies continued after slavery and still threatens Black Americans in the present. Instead, it is used simply as a prop to encourage visitors to imagine the suffering endured by enslaved prisoners.

Cook concluded from his study of counter-narratives in the Deep South that the major area in which plantation sites must continue to 'work and improve upon is how to make these connections between the institution of slavery, the foundation of the USA, and slavery's impacts on present-day race relations more explicit to the public'.[55] His assertion is still a pivotal one. Whitney, as a commemorative site, could do more to encourage and host alternative forms of embodiment and celebrations of Black culture and resistance rather than focusing on violence. By drawing attention to present inequality and opening a space for celebration and the embodiment of the resilience of African American people, the site would rely less heavily on anti-slavery visual culture and the ESP testimonies.

Overall, though the Whitney is a welcome addition to the Southern commemorative landscape as a plantation museum that overturns traditional white narratives by focusing solely on the history of slavery, the site's focus on violence limits its potential to foster understandings of Black strength and resistance and fails to encourage visitors' reflections on present racial inequality. Whitney's memorials, drawing their inspiration from Maya Lin's VVM, mark the history of slavery both on the plantation and in the wider state of Louisiana by naming the individuals who were enslaved there and by centralising their experiences in

[55] Ibid.

Whitney's narrative. However, the incorporation of anti-slavery illustrations, engraved upon the memorials alongside these names, focalises violence and pained Black bodies in enslaved experience. Whitney's attempt to elicit emotional engagement from their visitors by presenting them with images of violence thus relies on visual tropes shaped by the white gaze that render Black people as passive receptacles of pain. And yet, Whitney's potential to foster conversations about Black strength and resistance in the face of structural inequality from enslavement to the present is clear. To begin this evolution, Whitney must engage in a process of self-reflection, identifying where their representational strategies risk the marginalisation and dehumanisation of enslaved people, exposing and communicating to visitors the history behind their images, artefacts, and testimonies in a way that encourages not only historical reflection but a consideration of present racial inequalities. In the following chapter, we turn our attention to the Moore's Ford Lynching Reenactment, as an example of a commemorative performance that more explicitly draws visceral connections between historical racial violence and present inequality.

Chapter 5

Wrenching the Past Forward: The Moore's Ford Lynching Reenactment

Dora Apel has written that reenactments such as the Moore's Ford lynching 'are powerful and wrenching emotional experiences, not because they return to the past, but, on the contrary, because they bring the past into the present'.[1] The distinction is important. Where reenactments such as the one at Conner Prairie discussed earlier in this study revolve around historical authenticity and aim to give participants a real sense of what it was like to actually be in the past, Moore's Ford brings the 1946 murders of Roger and Dorothy Malcom and George and Mae Murray Dorsey into the present to remind people of a history that is not yet over. As one Black female reenactor has said: 'When I'm lying down there in the mud by the bridge, it's like no time has passed. This could happen to anyone, my brother, my son, my grandchildren. This thing, it happened then, but it's still happening'.[2]

This chapter explores how the Moore's Ford lynching reenactment transforms the landscape of Walton County, GA, to create liminal spaces of loss in which reenactment performers can commemorate historical racial violence whilst raising awareness about present inequality. I argue that Moore's Ford's participants and spectators inhabit a palimpsestic version of the landscape that activates and animates both past and present violence. This inhabitation also has a transformative effect on the minds and bodies of participants and spectators that this chapter interrogates through witness accounts. The idea that the Moore's Ford lynching 'happened then' but is 'still happening' now permeates

[1] Apel, 'Violence and Historical Reenactment: From the American Civil War to the Moore's Ford Lynching', in Jurgen Martschukat and Silvan Niedermeier (eds), *Violence and Visibility in Modern History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 258.
[2] Ibid.

reenactor and audience responses. The past and the present thus flatten into one another at Moore's Ford and impress themselves upon the bodies of those who are inhabiting the reenactment's spaces. This chapter therefore examines Moore's Ford as a commemorative performance that facilitates a deeper emotional and visceral engagement with past and present racial violence. More importantly, it highlights how Moore's Ford facilitates this engagement in a way that does not position the pained bodies of lynching victims as historical relics of suffering but as victims of a violence that has been ever-present, from the time of slavery through the era of lynching and into the twenty-first century.

The reenactment, which takes place annually, commemorates the mass lynching of Roger and Dorothy Malcom and George and Mae Murray Dorsey, who were abducted, beaten, and shot on 25th of July, 1946. Two weeks earlier, Roger Malcom had wounded his landlord, Barnette Hester, after a fight the two of them had over Roger's belief that Barnette and Dorothy were having an affair. The Walton County Sherriff took Roger into custody after a mob formed, determined to take Roger's punishment into their own hands. For ten days, whilst Barnette Hester was in critical condition, Roger Malcom was held at the county jail. Dorothy, with help from her brother George and his wife Mae, attempted to raise the funds to pay Roger's bond and free him from the jail. They first turned to Dan Young, Walton County's Black funeral director and one of the leaders of the Walton County Civic League. Young was a stalwart of the local Black community and had recently been involved in the drive to convince Black Walton County residents to register to vote in the upcoming primary election. The 1946 gubernatorial primary election was hotly contested between two figures: Eugene, or "Ole Gene", Talmadge, a vehement racist and supporter of the Ku Klux Klan in his fourth term as governor, and James Carmichael, an Atlantan lawyer and businessman. Though Carmichael was also a staunch segregationist, Black citizens in Georgia viewed him as the more progressive candidate because Carmichael did not plan to revoke Black

Americans' right to vote in primary elections.[3] Dan Young, concerned that any affiliation with Roger Malcom's ongoing case would damage his reputation, refused to pay for Roger's bail. Roger's family thus turned to white cotton farmer Loy Harrison, who owned the land on which George and Mae Dorsey lived with George and Dorothy's mother, Moena. The family begged Harrison to pay for Roger's bail on provision of labour: upon his release, Roger would work off his debt to Harrison on the farm. For several days, Harrison refused the family's requests. Then, on the day that news spread of Barnette Hester's full recovery, Harrison agreed.

Dorothy, George, and Mae accompanied Harrison to the prison to release Roger. As Harrison was driving his four passengers along back roads towards the Dorsey farm a large group of armed men surrounded the car. The mob first took Roger and George from the car and bound them. After Dorothy reportedly cursed a member of the mob and identified them by name, the men also forcibly removed Dorothy and Mae from the vehicle. The mob then forced Roger, Dorothy, George, and Mae into a clearing in the woods next to Moore's Ford Bridge and shot them.

The policemen who first attended the murder scene collected souvenirs instantly, salvaging discarded bullets and pieces of rope.[4] Over the next twenty-four hours, more people arrived at Moore's Ford Bridge to gather whatever they could find. Scraps of clothing that had been torn from the bodies either by bullets or the eager hands of souvenir-hunters soon found their way into the homes of Walton County residents. People posed to have their images captured standing beside blood-stained patches of grass and next to the bullet holes which

[3] The *King vs Chapman et al.* ruling in October 1945 established that *Smith vs Allwright* — a Texas case which ruled the right to vote in a primary election was guaranteed by the Constitution and could not be denied on grounds of race — also applied to Georgia. Gene Talmadge planned to invalidate the ruling if he won the election.

[4] Peter C. Baker, 'A Lynching in Georgia: The Living Memorial to America's History of Racial Violence', *The Guardian* (2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/02/a-lynching-in-georgia-the-living-memorial-to-americas-history-of-racist-violence> [accessed 20/11/16].

had pierced the nearby trees. According to one report, a white student stopped by Moore's Ford Bridge on his way to class and found a tooth. He later gifted the tooth to a friend, who fastened it to her charm bracelet for luck.[5]

Though Roger, Dorothy, George, and Mae's bodies were first taken to the white-owned funeral home in the nearest town of Monroe, they were quickly reclaimed by the victims' families and transferred to the care of Dan Young. Both families consented to Young's open-casket display of the four lynching victims. They agreed that the public mourning ritual was required so the local community could 'witness the brutality of the murders' for themselves.[6] Young's decision to display the bodies in this way is further evidence, alongside the previously discussed funeral of William Biggerstaff in Helena, MT, that traditionally African-American open-casket funerals allowed the families and loved ones of lynching victims to reclaim the bodies of those who had been taken from them, to share their grief and loss with their local community.

Whilst Roger, Dorothy, George, and Mae's bodies were on display in Young's funeral home, rumours began to spread of atrocities committed against the four victims which had not been reported in the official records. Though none of the family members, Dan Young, his staff, nor the newspaper reporters made any mention of such, reports that Roger Malcom had been castrated, that Dorothy Malcom had been pregnant when she was murdered, and that her child had been torn from her womb began to circulate amongst the local community. Mary Alice Avery, the stepdaughter of a funeral parlour worker named Isaac Brooks, viewed the Malcom and Dorsey bodies whilst on a date with her boyfriend. She claimed the mob 'kind of lacerated Roger'. 'They had stuck him or cut him', she said, 'He was tortured for

[5] Laura Wexler, *Fire in a Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching in America* (New York: Scriber, 2003), p. 74.
[6] Peter Owen and Susan Ehrenhaus, 'The Moore's Ford Lynching Reenactment: Affective Memory and Race Trauma', *Text and Performance Quarterly*, Vol. 34 (2014), p. 81.

sure. The others just had bullet wounds, but he had been attacked. He *was* castrated, like the privates half cut off, something kind of hanging'.[7] Avery's account makes no mention of a pregnancy.

The damage done to the four bodies—caused by over sixty bullets—may indeed have left large wounds that could have been mistaken for purposeful maiming. For example, the *Baltimore Afro-American* detailed how 'parts of bodies had been blown away by shotgun charges'.[8] Another report from the *Chicago Defender* reported that the bodies had been 'gashed by knives' and 'torn with gaping bullet and shotgun wounds'.[9] Both Roger and Dorothy had significant portions of their faces blown away. George Dorsey had lost an eye, which Dan Young had covered with a bandage, and an ear, which had been re-attached by tape.[10] This level of damage would have been inflicted across the bodies of the four victims, and perhaps led to the rumours about what had happened to the two couples.

However, that some or all of the stories were not true was, in many ways, irrelevant. As Wexler surmises, 'those who told the stories and those who listened to them didn't need proof. The history of lynching made the stories believable'.[11] Though it will never be known whether Dorothy Malcom was pregnant at the time she was killed—a pregnancy made all the more controversial when one considers Roger's accusation of Dorothy and Barnette Hester's infidelity—the post-mortem mutilation of her body and the removal of her child was all the more believable because it was an act that had been committed against another Black woman in Georgia less than thirty years before.

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[7] Wexler, *Fire in a Canebrake,* p. 88.
[8] Cardell M Vickers, '$10,000 Reward by Arnall Spurs Statewide Manhunt', *Baltimore Afro-American* (3rd August, 1946).
[9] 'Defender Vows to Fight Until Lynch Evil Dies: Four Negroes Murdered by Georgia Mob; Horror Sweeps Nation Victims of Southern Insanity', *The Chicago Defender* (3rd August, 1946).
[10] Wexler, *Fire in a Canebrake,* p. 87.
[11] Ibid., p. 88.

In Lowndes County, in May 1918, Sidney Johnson, an African American labourer, killed a white farmer named Hampton Smith. Johnson had previously worked for Smith as part of a chain gang and had been beaten by him several times. Smith was notoriously cruel and struggled to find willing workers, which is why he took advantage of the convict leasing system in place in Georgia at that time.[12] In response to Smith's murder, a white mob killed thirteen Black Americans across several neighbouring counties. One of the thirteen people killed by the mob was a man named Hayes Turner, who had a troubled history with Hampton Smith. The mob accused Turner of Smith's murder and lynched him. Mary Turner, Hayes's wife, spoke out against the crime after learning what had happened to her husband, and threatened to report the alleged perpetrators to the police. For this, Mary Turner was also murdered by mob. A crowd of several hundred spectators gathered to watch as the thirty-three-year-old pregnant woman was tied by her ankles and suspended from a tree branch before being doused in gasoline and set alight. Walter White, the journalist, novelist, and Civil Rights activist, reported Mary's lynching in *The Crisis*:

> Her ankles were tied together and she was hung to the tree, head downward. Gasoline and oil from the automobiles were thrown on her clothing and while she writhed in agony and the mob howled in glee, a match was applied and her clothes burned from her person. When this had been done and while she was yet alive, a knife… was taken and the woman's abdomen was cut open, the unborn babe falling from her womb to the ground. The infant, prematurely born, gave two feeble cries and then its head was crushed by a member of the mob with his heel.[13]

Julie Buckner Armstrong has shown how Mary's story, despite generating 'widespread response during the late 1910s and 1920s', 'disappeared from the national spotlight by the early 1930s'.[14] For years, the memory of what happened to Mary Turner and her child was lost to the male-centric narrative produced by lynching's archive of photographs, postcards,

[12] Christopher Meyers, '"Killing Them by the Wholesale": A Lynching Rampage in South Georgia', *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 90:2 (2006), p. 219.
[13] Walter White, 'The Work of the Mob', *The Crisis* (September, 1923), p. 222.
[14] Julie Buckner Armstrong, 'Mary Turner, Hidden Memory, and Narrative Possibility', in Evelyn M. Simien (ed), *Gender and Lynching: The Politics of Memory* (New York: Palgrave, 2011), p. 16.

and newspaper accounts. The focus on Black men, either dehumanised as murderers and rapists who threatened white society or as the mutilated and charred remains of martyred victims, left little room for representations of Black women's experience during lynching's long reign. According to Armstrong, 'pamphlets in the 1930s refer to her [Turner] only as "a pregnant colored woman", lynched and mutilated in Georgia'. Then, in the late 1940s, 'urban legend…conflated Turner's story with another woman's lynching at Moore's Ford Bridge, near Monroe'.[15] Perhaps it was the similar circumstances in their murders which led to the amalgamation of Dorothy and Mary's stories. Like Mary, Dorothy had posed a threat to the white men that killed her husband. Mary threatened to report her husband's killers to the police, a clear intimation that she knew at least one of the mob members' identities. Dorothy, too, publicly identified one of the men present at the Moore's Ford bridge. In doing so, she demonstrated she would not allow the mob to remain anonymous nor their actions go unpunished. Both women were murdered to ensure their silence.

This silence, safeguarded by local whites' desire to protect perpetrating family members and neighbours, made the prosecution of the suspected killers in 1946 extremely difficult. Despite over two thousand people's having been interviewed in the original FBI investigation, none named any potential members of the lynch mob.[16] Only one Black resident of Walton County, a teenager called Lamar Howard, came forward as a witness. He claimed to have overheard a conversation in the icehouse where he was employed between two white men who were plotting Roger Malcom's murder. Two unknown white assailants brutally attacked Howard because of his statement, which he then quickly withdrew from the record.[17] The case remained at a stand-still for the next fifty years. It was not until 1991, when a man

[15] Ibid., p. 18.
[16] Matthew Bernstein, 'Nostalgia, Ambivalence, Irony: Song of the South and Race Relations in 1946 Atlanta', *Film History*, Vol. 8 (1996), p. 224.
[17] Baker, 'A Lynching in Georgia'.

named Clinton Adams came forward claiming to have witnessed the lynchings when he was ten years old, that the case was brought back to the attention of local media and activists. Adams's story was found to contain several gaps, and consequently could not stand up in court. Nevertheless, the new swell of attention—Adams revealed his story on an episode of NBC's *Dateline* and was subsequently invited to appear on an episode of Oprah alongside Mamie-Till Mobley and Myrlie Evers Williams, wife of Civil Rights leader Medgar Evers who was shot and killed in 1963—led to the establishment of the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee in 1997. By the end of the following year, the memorial committee had marked the four graves of the Moore's Ford victims.[18] Only six months later, with the help of the Georgia Historical Society, the Memorial Committee unveiled a roadside plaque to commemorate the Moore's Ford lynching. The plaque, which significantly cemented the

[18] George and Dorothy had a joint funeral and were buried at Mount Perry Missionary Baptist Church in Apalachee, Morgan County. Roger Malcolm was buried at Chestnut Grove Baptist Church in the same county. These three graves were marked with simple wooden crosses. Mae Murray Dorsey was buried at Zion Hill Cemetery in Monroe, Walton County. Her grave was unmarked, and the supposed area lost when a parking lot was built over half of the cemetery. The Moore's Ford Memorial Committee thus erected Mae's marker next to another Murray found in the cemetery.

rumour of Dorothy Malcom's pregnancy in the official commemorative record, was the first of its kind in the US.[19]

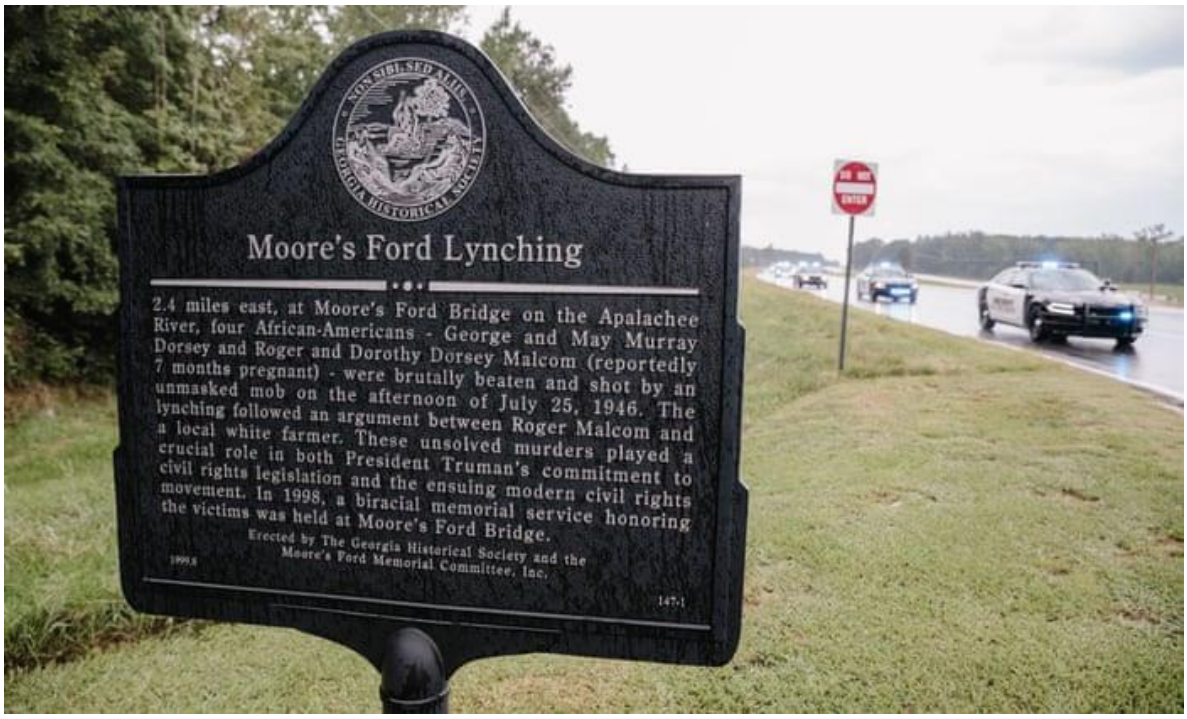

Figure 5.1. Photograph of Moore's Ford Lynching Marker. From Peter C. Baker, 'A Lynching in Georgia: The Living Memorial to America's History of Racial Violence', *The Guardian* (2016), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/02/a-lynching-in-georgia-the-living-memorial-to-americas-history-of-racist-violence [accessed 02/05/2020].

It would be another six years before the first reenactment of the lynching took place. Less than two months after Edgar Ray Killen was convicted in June 2005 for the murders of Civil Rights activists James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner in 1964 Mississippi, the Black community in Walton County, GA, planned a reenactment in the hope that it would refresh local memory and raise awareness for the ongoing legal case in which there were still very few productive leads. One activist said, 'We need some shock therapy to move things forward. White folks are just in a state of denial on this case, and this'll be

[19] Mark Auslander, 'Contesting the Roadways: The Moore's Ford Lynching Reenactment and a Confederate Flag Rally, July 25, 2015', *Southern Spaces* (19th August, 2015), <https://southernspaces.org/2015/contesting-roadways-moores-ford-lynching-reenactment-and-confederate-flag-rally-july-25-2015/> [accessed 06/05/2020].

something nobody can ignore'.[20] One local white businessman, who provided financial aid to the first reenactment as well as to the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee, said of his white neighbours, 'sometimes [they] have to be hit by a two-by-four to pay attention to the real history of what was done to Black people in our country'.[21] A *New York Times* article reporting on the first reenactment described how the amateur nature of the reenactment, epitomised by the reenactors' use of Open Pit barbeque sauce as blood and firecrackers as gunshots, 'did not detract from the power' it had on participants and spectators alike.[22] The reenactors, all of whom were Black—the organisers had trouble convincing any local whites to take part in the first performance—wore 'white theatrical masks or sacks with "KKK" scribbled on the sides' to signal that they were the perpetrating Klansmen.[23] Alexander Ford of the *Atlanta Daily World* reported that performers 'used racially degrading language and struggled brusquely while portraying the angry mob'.[24]

That white locals refused to participate in the first reenactment performance is telling. Their resistance supports Sherrilyn Ifill's claim that often, when faced with past incidents of racial violence, 'whites fear or resent being branded as racist, or they simply refuse to see themselves as responsible in any way for incidents in which they were not involved'.[25] In the case of the Moore's Ford reenactment, perhaps it was both. To an extent, to physically embody white perpetrators would be to publicly own and embody the crime. Either from fear of being branded racist for willingly taking on the role of a mob member or in an outright refusal to acknowledge or accept the crime that took place in their community, local whites

[20] Mark Auslander, 'Driving into the Light: Traversing Life and Death in a Lynching Reenactment by African-Americans in a Multi-racial Setting', in David Lipset and Richard Handler (eds), *Vehicles: Cars, Canoes, and Other Metaphors of Moral Imagination* (New York: Berghahn, 2014), p. 183.
[21] Auslander, '"Holding on to Those Who Can't Be Held"'.
[22] Shaila Dewan, 'Group Lynching is Re-Created in a "Call for Justice"', *New York Times* (26th July, 2005).
[23] Alexander M Ford, '1946 Killings Reenacted to Raise Awareness, Urge Prosecution', *Atlanta Daily World* (28th July, 2005).
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ifill, *On the Courthouse Lawn*, p. 134.

refused this embodiment. As with the case studies in the previous chapter, then, the racial identities of reenactors in the present reinforce the complexities inherent in re-presenting historical racial violence in public spaces. The white (non-)reenactors in 2005, by refusing to participate, distanced themselves from the violence being commemorated. Conversely, in donning white masks to signify perpetrating Klansmen, the Black Moore's Ford reenactors forced a confrontation with white violence that is all the more significant when one considers the fact that the original mob did not wear masks when they assaulted and murdered Roger, Dorothy, George, and Mae. The 1946 lynching was a brazen act of white supremacy. Perpetrators knew their skin colour, and their community, would grant them impunity from the violence they committed. The white population of Monroe's refusal to own that past and join the 2005 reenactment decades later echoes their refusal to acknowledge the original crime.

Since 2005, the Moore's Ford reenactment has been based upon the same loose structure, divided into four sequences which are dramatised across Monroe and the town's surrounding areas. The first of these is the 'Prologue', which is intended to ground the reenactment in its historical and contemporary contexts. The Prologue is held at the First African Baptist Church of Monroe. Here, participants and spectators gather to attend a church service, witness the introductions of the actors for that year, and hear a series of talks from invited speakers.[26] These talks introduce the story of the lynching, the case which followed, and the continued fight for justice. Many additions to the historical narrative of the lynching itself foreground the continued fight against injustice. In the 2016 reenactment, for example, an actor playing the Black teenage witness Lamar Howard narrated the story of his testimony and subsequent attack. Afterwards, an elderly woman spoke about the ongoing appeal for

[26] Owen and Ehrenhaus, 'Affective Memory and Race Trauma', p. 79.

witnesses to the original case.[27] This deliberate pairing of speakers highlighted the dangers that previously faced and still threaten African American people for speaking out against racial violence.

After the Prologue, the reenactment itself begins. Visitors and reenactors travel in a motorcade through the different stages of the reenactment. Mary Babington, who attended the 2008 reenactment, called the motorcade a 'caravan of justice rolling through the town and countryside'.[28] As a visible reminder of historical racial violence which traverses the sites associated with the 1946 lynching in a highly ritualistic annual performance, the motorcade produces what Eatman calls 'a palimpsestic version of the area in which seemingly innocuous spaces hold traces of violence and grief'.[29] Sites in the town of Monroe that are otherwise unmarked, sites that dominant white narratives have neutralised by expunging any trace of the 1946 lynching, are reclaimed by the reenactment's vehicle trail and revealed as spaces of violence. Black residents, who were previously deprived of the wherewithal and the right to mark the landscape with monuments and memorials to lynching victims, thus preserve their own symbolic geography of reference points and produce a counter-narrative tied to the landscape that resists white-controlled narratives of lynching.

Spectators first attend the sites of the Malcom and Dorsey graves, where prayers and reflections from descendants or family members are shared. Introducing viewers to these sites before any of the reenactors perform the roles of Roger, Dorothy, George, and Mae highlights the importance of mourning as a central theme of the commemorative performance. Before any 'action' takes place, viewers are reminded of the loss experienced by the local community, by the families and friends and descendants of the two couples. The visit to the

[27] Eatman, 'Loss and Lived Memory at the Moore's Ford Lynching Reenactment', p. 158.
[28] Babington, 'Moore's Ford: A Site and Space of Praxis', p. 32.
[29] Eatman, 'Loss and Lived Memory at the Moore's Ford Lynching Reenactment', p. 161.

gravesites also provides an opportunity for reenactment organisers to share and promote the work of the Moore's Ford Memorial Committee—rebranded in 2016 as the Moore's Ford Movement—and remind spectators why the reenactment continues to be staged. Shortly afterwards, the motorcade arrives at the Hester farm, the site of the altercation which led to Roger Malcom's arrest. Reenactors play out the scene in which Roger and Barnette fight. The performance ends with Barnette falling to the ground before Roger is restrained and arrested. Susan A. Owen and Peter Ehrenhaus, who also studied and attended the 2008 reenactment, describe the instructions given by Bobbie Paul, the white female director of the reenactment that year, during performance rehearsals. 'Think of these tableaux performances as "postcard" or "snapshot" moments', she said.[30] 'Use exaggerated yet restrained body movement and gesture to convey moments of terror and violence. The artifice of slow-motion action gives actors and audience, alike, opportunity to reflect upon the intensity of the menace'. [31]

Bobbie Paul's choice of words here is significant. In encouraging performers to think of the reenactment tableaux as 'postcard' or 'snapshot' moments, she shows the influence that historical visual culture has had on commemorative representations of racial violence. The 'artifice of slow-motion action', or, as we will later see, frozen gestures performed by the reenactors, do more than allow for an opportunity to reflect. They trigger an association to a visual record with a convoluted and difficult past: the lynching photograph. The authority of the lynching photograph as a document that reveals the 'true horror' of lynching, despite the previously discussed problematic nature of such associations, is discernible in the Moore's Ford lynching reenactment as Bobbie Paul directed reenactors to almost replicate with their own bodies a 'postcard' moment for the audience. In fact, it is most likely that spectators will

[30] Ibid.
[31] Owen and Ehrenhaus, 'Affective Memory and Race Trauma', p. 82.

have physically captured the postcard moment for posterity themselves with their own cameras, creating their own visual souvenir to take away with them.

In yet another palimpsestic act, then, spectators mirror souvenir-gathering at sites of violence that characterised the lynching era. However, the environment in which this souvenir-gathering and photographing takes place is fundamentally different: attendees to the Moore's Ford reenactment are participating in a communal witnessing of the story of the 1946 lynching as presented by the Black Walton County community to raise awareness of the killings for which no one has yet been convicted. Thus, the act of photographing the reenactment's tableau echoes the historical visual culture that begot it. In choosing to re-stage the 1946 lynching and allowing themselves to be seen and photographed during that violence, the Moore's Ford reenactors invert the white supremacist violence that necessitated the commemoration in the first place in the same way that the newly emancipated population of Charleston, SC, signalled slavery's powerless by performing their mock auction in 1865.

After leaving Hester's farm, the motorcade travels to the Walton County Courthouse Annex building, the site of the Old County Jail. Here, the reenactment stages a campaign speech by Gene Talmadge. Only two weeks before the Moore's Ford lynching in July 1946, Talmadge had delivered one of his famous stump speeches on Monroe's courthouse lawn, warning white voters that Black people in Georgia were 'dangerously out of control'.[32] Violent racist rhetoric characterised the entirety of Talmadge's 1946 campaign. Wexler has noted how Talmadge publicly boasted about whipping and beating the Black people who worked on his farm in South Georgia and claimed to have chased a Black chauffeur with an axe because he had walked next to a white woman.[33] Talmadge's victory in the July 1946 primaries thus served to reinforce the strength of white supremacy in Georgia. Indeed, the

[32] Wexler, *Fire in a Canebrake*, p. 34.
[33] Ibid., p. 35.

Baltimore Afro-American began its front-page article on the Moore's Ford lynchings by connecting Talmadge and southern white supremacists to the villains in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* 'Gene Talmadge's "fellow countrymen"', it began, 'wearing their "Simon Legree" hats took over just outside this middle Georgia town last Thursday at sundown, and…committed America's worst lynching, snuffing out four lives, two of them women'.[34]

Erin Stoneking, who attended the reenactment in 2017, reported that the reenactor who played Talmadge—dressed in his distinctive red suspenders—recited from Talmadge's 1946 speech, proclaiming, 'As your governor, I shall see that the traditions that we fought for, and our grandparents fought for, are maintained and preserved'.[35] The inclusion of Talmadge's speech frames the Moore's Ford lynching in the wider narrative of nation-wide white supremacist violence by providing spectators with an insight into the political and economic oppression facing African Americans in 1946 Walton County. Yet, the tableau has reportedly been a somewhat jarring inclusion. In 2008, Owen and Ehrenhaus reported that Talmadge's speech was 'not as well orchestrated' as the other reenactment scenes; 'spectators seem[ed] confused by the purpose of Talmadge's racist politicking in the context of the lynching performance', they wrote. 'Some spectators appear[ed] offended by the script's race-baiting sentiments and language. Others laugh[ed] openly'.[36] Owen and Ehrenhaus do not provide details of the racial identities of those in the crowd who appeared to find Talmadge's speech comical, though they do at one point note the 'overwhelmingly Black' crowd of spectators to the 2008 reenactment. They do, however, add the following note to their study:

[34] Cardell M Vickers, '$10,000 Reward by Arnall Spurs Statewide Manhunt', *Baltimore Afro-American* (3rd August, 1946).
[35] Erin Stoneking, 'Reenactments: Embodied Encounters with the U.S. Southern Past', (doctoral thesis, Cornell University, 2019), p. 109.
[36] Owen and Ehrenhaus, 'Affective Memory and Race Trauma', p. 83.

> We speculate on the liminality created by the speech. Laughter suggests that some spectators chose to reenact the roles of "1946 white racists". Others' laughter may suggest a disparagement of those racist sentiments. In either/both cases, this Reenactment moment provides insight into the experiential space created by reenactment and its role in creating "affective memory".[37]

Without a clear indication of the racial identities and attitudes of those who laughed in the crowd, speculation is indeed our only option. Yet, in failing to recognise the importance of the racial identities of spectators and how this influences their responses, Owen and Ehrenhaus are not able to recognise the complexities inherent in the audience's ribaldry during Talmadge's speech. Returning to the example of Magelssen's description of the group of middle-aged white men and women who 'giggled' through Conner Prairie's underground railroad reenactment, such responses to the racial epithets hurled by the reenactor portraying Talmadge could have been a result of anything from defensive distancing—as with the whites who refused to participate in the 2005 reenactment—to purposeful trivialisation or unintentional misunderstanding of just how traumatic Talmadge's rhetoric could be for Black participants. There is also the possibility that those witnessing Talmadge's speech laughed openly because his words seemed to be a relic of the past. In this case, Black and white spectators alike would be joined in a collective repudiation of white supremacist ideals in the same way that reenactors in 1865 Charleston inverted racial hierarchies by reenacting a slave auction at an emancipation celebration. One must question if the problem in 2008 was that Talmadge's speech appeared irrelevant to the present, or all too relevant.

[37] Ibid.

Figure 5.2. Arrival of the car carrying the Malcolms and the Dorseys at Moore's Ford Bridge (2010). From Mark Auslander, '"Holding on to Those Who Can't Be Held": Reenacting a Lynching at Moore's Ford, Georgia', *Southern Spaces* (8th November, 2010), <https://southernspaces.org/2010/holding-those-who-cant-be-held-reenacting-lynching-moores-ford-georgia/> [accessed 06/05/2020].

After Talmadge's speech, the motorcade leaves the jail and heads to the Moore's Ford Bridge. The performance is often timed for this stage of the journey to take place at the exact time that Loy Harrison drove the Malcoms and the Dorseys from the jail and delivered them to the nearby mob. Viewers watch as a group of men, shouting racial slurs and threats, demand Roger and George be removed from the car. Dorothy shouts out that she recognises some of the members of the mob. A resigned groan from the crowd betrays some spectators' awareness of what comes next. The mob drag Dorothy and Mae from the car. Organisers ask viewers to remain where they stand in the road whilst the mob force the four reenactors to walk down towards the bridge. The crowd then follow the performance into a clearing, where Roger, Dorothy, George, and Mae are standing together, pleading with their captors. Gun shots echo as the mob opens fire. The reenactors fall slowly to the ground, covered in fake blood. On their way down, the reenactors freeze twice, following Bobbie Paul's direction to allow visitors the time and space to reflect upon the violence unfolding before their eyes.

The scene ends with a musical performance, a mourning song for the dead. In 2005, a woman dressed all in black performed Billie Holiday's *Strange Fruit*. Other chosen songs have included *Precious Lord*, performed for several consecutive years from 2006, and *A Change is Gonna Come,* performed in 2015. These songs connect the Moore's Ford reenactment to the larger contexts of anti-lynching campaigns and civil rights activism. Only after the musical performance has ended are those attending from the media allowed to step forward from the spectating crowd and photograph the bodies, still lying blood-soaked in the grass. Then Roger, Dorothy, George, and Mae rise from the dead. In the 2008 reenactment, Owen and Ehrenhaus heard the reenactor playing George say to his fellow reenactors, 'We come back to life now, we come back to life'.[38] The final stage of the performance takes the form of a benediction at the 1999 commemorative memorial marker, in which organisers, participants, and spectators collectively sound a final call for justice.

Ironically, the inclusion of Justice is also the most controversial aspect of the Moore's Ford reenactment, for 'Justice' is also the name given by the reenactment's organisers to Dorothy Malcom's murdered unborn child. As previously stated, there is little evidence to suggest that Dorothy Malcolm was pregnant at the time she was lynched. However, the child's excision from Dorothy's womb has become one of the most important sequences in the reenactment. Viewers are first introduced to Justice during the Prologue, where the child is officially named by the reenactor playing Dorothy that year. In the 2008 reenactment, Dorothy proclaimed, 'Ladies and gentlemen, he will forever live in the spirit of each of us so long as we stand for justice…And this day, we mark his name in history as Justice'.[39] For this particular performance, this was supposed to be the extent of Justice's involvement. Director

[38] Auslander, '"Holding on to Those Who Can't Be Held": Reenacting a Lynching at Moore's Ford, Georgia', *Southern Spaces* (8th November, 2010), <https://southernspaces.org/2010/holding-those-who-cant-be-held-reenacting-lynching-moores-ford-georgia/> [accessed 06/05/2020].
[39] Owen and Ehrenhaus, 'Affective Memory and Race Trauma', p. 81.

Bobbie Paul had sought to exclude the shockingly violent post-humous mutilation of Dorothy's body from the 2008 reenactment. However, Tyrone Brooks, a member of the Georgia House of Representatives, along with other reenactment organisers, ignored Paul's directions and included the scene. Owen and Ehrenhaus report that the director was visibly 'irate' with the decision, expressing anger at the fact that Brooks 'broke his promise to her that Dorothy's "disembowelment" and the ritual killing of the unborn child would be omitted from this year's performance'.[40] The white director felt that the naming of Justice and his inclusion in the reenactment's narrative, as well as providing a scene that could be potentially appropriated by patriarchal "pro-life" conservatives, took liberties with 'archival truth' and spectacularised Dorothy's death.[41] The reenactment committee's devotion to keeping Justice in the narrative was ultimately too much for Paul to contend with. After the 2008 reenactment, Paul's Georgia branch of Women's Action for New Directions ceased all affiliation and involvement with the reenactment.[42]

[40] Ibid., p. 86.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

Figure 5.3. Camera crews take photographs at the final scene of the Moore's Ford Reenactment (2016). From Peter C. Baker, 'A Lynching in Georgia: The Living Memorial to America's History of Racial Violence', The Guardian (2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/02/a-lynching-in-georgia-the-living-memorial-to-americas-history-of-racist-violence> [accessed 20/11/16].

Brooks and his fellow organisers did not see the lack of archival evidence as a reason not to represent this violence, for the murder of Dorothy and her child is an act that epitomises the brutal history of white supremacy in Georgia. Clearly, the post-mortem excision of Dorothy Malcolm's child echoes, if not directly replicates, Mary Turner's lynching. For the organisers and reenactors at Moore's Ford, the important thing is not who the trauma was inflicted upon but that the trauma was inflicted at all. The Moore's Ford lynching reenactment thus becomes representative not only of the lives and deaths of those killed by the social, economic, and cultural legacies of racial violence and inequality but also of the lived experience of African American women. For example, Jane, who played Mae for two years at the Moore's Ford reenactment, explained to Auslander that she took part in the reenactment to honor the memory of her own son, who was slain on the streets of Atlanta. 'All this killing, this lynching. It haunts us still. That's why we need to be here, to bear witness, to remember.

Otherwise, the killing just keeps going on'.[43] She continued to describe her feelings when she encounters the doll used to represent Justice:

> Each time I carry the doll…I remember carrying my son, I remember giving birth to him, and nursing him, and bringing him up. And I remember when I lost him. I can't ever forget that. But when I'm standing there in front of that firing squad, it's strange, I feel other children inside of me. Like I'm Dorothy, standing there, thinking on her baby. And other mothers before her, all the way back to slavery time… all of us, all us strong black women, we're all standing there, with our babies, staring down that gun barrel.[44]

Jane's words attest to how she shares in the grief but also in the strength of Black motherhood. Her use of phrases such as 'all of us', 'all us strong Black women', and her repetition of 'we', 'we're', and 'our', emphasises collective experience. Furthermore, Jane's use of the present participle 'staring', which implies a continued confrontation with the gun barrel, highlights Jane's belief in the continued collective strength of Black women in the face of slavery in the past and continued violence in the present.

Moore's Ford's commemorative approach thus provides evidence of what Eatman calls 'a generative politics of loss'.[45] Characterised by the feminine notion of reproduction, procreation, and the generation of offspring, Moore's Ford instils a generative politics of loss by shifting the focus of the reenactment to the loss experienced by Black mothers, Black families and Black communities who had cared for their children and for each other only to fall victim to white supremacist violence. In this respect, the reenactment functions in a similar way to the lynching plays written primarily by African American women in the early and mid-twentieth century. Koritha Mitchel's study *Living with Lynching: African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930* examines lynching plays as evidence of the broad social and cultural networks established by African American communities affected by racial violence. Lynching plays were mechanisms which prioritised

[43] Auslander, 'Touching the Past', p. 178.
[44] Ibid, pp. 178-179.
[45] Eatman, 'Loss and Lived Memory at the Moore's Ford Lynching Reenactment', p. 154.

mourning, family allegiance, and communal pride. They were often set in domestic spaces and emphasised the strength and resilience of the Black home, thereby shifting the focus onto African American families and communities rather than the violent deaths of victims and their alleged crimes. Whilst lynching photographs and news archives often portrayed narratives of Black male criminality and communicated that the victim's fate was, to an extent, a result of his own wrongdoing, the plays offered 'characters who [had] intimate knowledge and [could] testify to his honourable life': they provided 'examples of, and occasions for, community mourning'.[46] Like J.P. Ball's earlier use of the triptych to share the narrative of William Biggerstaff's life and death with those who mourned him in his community, lynching plays emphasised life and loss within Black communities terrorised by lynching. These texts refused to replicate the spectacular violence of lynchings themselves, of the photographs and postcards that captured the scenes, of the articles and artworks and moving imagery which retold and represented the horror. 'Deliberately out of step with mainstream theatricality and therefore of little interest to large audiences', writes Mitchell, 'lynching plays encouraged African Americans to value the affirming theatrical work that could take place in Black churches, schools, and homes'.[47]

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Participant and spectator responses to the Moore's Ford lynching provide critical insight into the complexities inherent in representing racial violence in public spaces. Peter C. Baker, reporting on the 2016 reenactment, detailed a conversation with Darrius Bradshaw, who was playing Roger Malcom. Bradshaw told Baker that after rehearsing the reenactment, which he described as largely consisting of 'older white men calling him "nigger", tying a noose around his neck, and pretending to shoot him repeatedly', he would often sink into depression or flare

[46] Mitchell, *Living with Lynching*, p. 37.
[47] Ibid.

into ‘sudden fury’.[48] Afterwards, Darrius said, out in the real world, he would find himself ‘back in those feelings, not even realising at first where they came from’.[49] His words are revealing of the emotional toll that participating in the lynching reenactment can exact. Just as reenactors at Colonial Williamsburg found the slave auction reenactment too emotionally draining to repeat, participants in the Moore’s Ford reenactment rarely stay in their roles for more than a few years. The experience may thus be ultimately too traumatic for both participants and spectators, especially those who have personal ties to the 1946 lynching. For example, Joseph Hunter, an 81-year-old African American man who was in the Walton County area in the summer of 1946, approached Baker to tell him what he could remember. He recalled being suddenly locked indoors by the aunt he was visiting when news of the lynching reached the family: ‘She closed the shades, she locked the door, and she said: “Stay”’.[50] His mother was in Connecticut, more than eight hundred miles away. As soon as she heard what had happened, she got in the car and drove continuously until she reached Hunter and his siblings the next day. ‘“She had to have us close”, he said’.[51]

Hunter, who has been at the reenactment every year since it began, told Baker that he has not yet been able to watch the entire reenactment because ‘It’s too easy for [him] to imagine Black people getting shot’.[52] In 2016, as the climax of the reenactment approached, Hunter reflexively turned his back on the scene and walked away: ‘I know it’s not real’, he told Baker. ‘I know. But…’.[53] He didn’t finish the sentence. As the crowd of spectators followed the re-enactors off the road and down to the clearing where the final scene would take place, Baker ‘watched Hunter pause and stare at the ground. After a few seconds, he

[48] Baker, ‘A Lynching in Georgia’.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

[Hunter] lifted his head and slowly walked toward the river'.[54] This is the danger inherent in reenacting scenes of racial violence. The possibility arises that the act of witnessing these events in person is too painful, too traumatic, to really engage with what the commemoration is trying to do. For those still haunted by the trauma, it can be too painful to look at all.

This is not only the case for Black participants and spectators. Since 2005, when Black reenactors played members of the lynch mob wearing plastic masks, white residents of Monroe County and students from a nearby university have volunteered to help organise and take part in the reenactment. Yet, most white actors find the idea of reenacting these murders viscerally repellent, too, and many distance themselves from the role they are required to play. Mark Auslander relates how, during the 2008 reenactment, 'Arthur, a white man, tied a noose in a rope with consummate ease'.[55] He then suddenly stepped out of character to explain to Auslander that he had learned this particular skill as a boy in a Jewish summer camp: 'He spoke to reassure me, and presumably himself, that this unsavoury role centred on the disturbing object wasn't really who he is'.[56]

Auslander spoke with another of the white reenactors, Timothy, who seemed reluctant to fulfil his role. When asked to play the role of the lead Klansman who orders the murders, Timothy turned to Auslander and said, 'Let me not drink from this cup', before reluctantly consenting.[57] Timothy's extreme discomfort becomes all the more understandable when we learn that he has come to believe that his uncle may have been one of the Moore's Ford killers.[58] The varying degrees of ownership and felt responsibility which compel Timothy to resist his role whilst also contributing to his sense of obligation to fulfil it are worth considering. Timothy's suspicion that his uncle may have been one of the Moore's Ford

[54] Ibid.
[55] Auslander, 'Touching the Past', p. 175.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Auslander, 'Holding on to Those Who Can't Be Held'.
[58] Ibid.

killers heightens his urge to distance himself from the role of the lead Klansman to assert his own innocence and distance himself from the actions he believes his uncle committed. But Timothy's suspicions regarding his uncle simultaneously heighten his feeling that he owes it to the victims and the community to take ownership by participating in the reenactment. This internal conflict surrounding Timothy's perception of his personal responsibility as a white Walton County resident led to a deeper engagement with the reenactment's aims, as revealed in a later conversation with Auslander. Auslander continues that later in the day, as he and his wife approached Timothy with video cameras, he 'bristled' and appeared to have forgotten who they were. He angrily ordered the pair off the bridge and was not seen again until after the reenactment had concluded. Timothy 'explained that he couldn't recall what had happened throughout the reenactment. "It's a horrible thing to do", he said, "I was not there. I'd say it's a fugue state. I'm still a little bit in shock. It's not somewhere that you want to inhabit"'.[59] Rather than imagine that he could fully experience and understand what it must have been like to be at Moore's Ford in 1946, Timothy expresses a more complex and uncomfortable truth: 'the traumatic past is not somewhere that you want to inhabit'.[60] Unlike popular reenactments such as those commemorating the Civil War performances, Moore's Ford makes visible a more difficult and traumatic past that many people would prefer not to remember. For this white participant, experiencing this history was so horrific, so alien to him, that he feels he 'was not there', not fully inhabiting his own body.

But this form of emotional conflict in which reenactors are at once present and not present within themselves can create spaces of understanding. The process is not unique to Moore's Ford. For example, Auslander recalls that, after attending a reenacted slave auction

[59] Ibid.
[60] Dora Apel, 'Violence and Historical Reenactment', p. 229.

in St. Louis in 2011, he spoke to a young African American man about his experience participating in the performance. The man is said to have spoken quietly:

> I can't explain it, something happened to me up there, standing on that block. I looked out there, and it wasn't just my eyes I was seeing through. I was seeing what somebody else saw, a long time ago, being torn away from everyone they loved. I felt what my ancestors must have gone through… Up there on that same block, I guess you could say I was touching the past and, the past, well, it was touching me.[61]

In a similar way to the spring cart in nineteenth-century Charleston, the block this young man was standing on becomes 'redolent of every space upon which enslaved African Americans had been sold and separated forcibly from loved ones during the 250 years of chattel slavery in America'.[62] However, the block alone does not hold the power to transcend temporal restrictions, for the body of the reenactor inhabits the same space. His physical presence is fundamental. This response is similar to Jane's description of how her participation in the Moore's Ford reenactment led her to share in the grief and the strength of Black mothers 'all the way back to slavery time'.

Owen and Ehrenhaus have described this phenomenon as the creation of a 'liminal space' in which 'the halfway dead [come] halfway to meet the halfway living, halfway'.[63] In other words, the reenactment's power lies in its ability to create a space inhabited by the bodies of participants and spectators that is neither here nor there, neither present nor past. The process echoes Schechner's 'not me/not not me' theorisation of the state of the performer in the moment of performance.[64] Reenactors do not fully *become* the Malcoms and the Dorseys or the members of the lynch mob, but neither are they fully themselves. This process opens a space in which the reenactment can explicitly connect other historical incidents of racial violence to the 1946 murders and to systematic racial injustice in the present as well as

[61] Auslander, 'Touching the Past', p. 162.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 112.

incorporate local events and contemporary political contestations. In 2015, for example, the reenactment coincided—or, rather, was encroached upon—by a Confederate flag rally. Both events were scheduled to start at the same time. They also finished less than a mile apart. Auslander attended the reenactment that year. He reported the words of one local organiser: 'Well, the Klan just loves their motorcades, hooting and hollering and brandishing their guns and their rebel flags. So we'll have a caravan too, telling everybody we're not afraid anymore. These highways and byways belong to us, too. Nobody's going to stop us'.[65] The reenactment thus became a way for the local Black community to reclaim the roadways, the sites of their own heritage, in Walton County. By insisting that the reenactment proceeded as planned, despite the potential threat of an altercation or opposition, participants and reenactors cemented the history of racial violence and the narrative of the Moore's Ford lynching onto Georgia's landscape. Organisers at one point even halted the motorcade to purchase a Confederate flag from a roadside seller and used it in the reenactment. The flag was first waved by attendees to Talmadge's political speech outside the old county jail before it was draped over a tree branch above the lynched bodies in the final tableaux. Significantly, the use of the flag at Talmadge's speech fortifies the link between these two scenes whilst strengthening the connection between the lynching and the contemporary political landscape.

More compelling than this, though, was the 2016 reenactment organisers' decision to dedicate that year's performance to the memory of the 'Charleston Nine'—the nine African Americans killed by white supremacist Dylann Roof, who had posed with a Confederate flag on his social media site, in a mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in June 2015—and to the memory of Black Americans killed by police. Reenactors and organisers wore or carried signs that proclaimed their identification with African American victims of racial violence in the twenty-first century

[65] Auslander, 'Contesting the Roadways'.

whilst performing the mass murder from 1946. Once again, the space of the reenactment became a liminal one as past and present were sutured. One participant wore a sign which read, 'I am Michael Brown', a reference to the eighteen-year-old African American teenager shot in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014. Another participant wore a sign which read, 'I am Trayvon Martin', a dedication to the Miami-born seventeen-year-old shot and killed by George Zimmerman in 2012.

Frequent mention was also made of Sandra Bland's arrest, beating, and subsequent death in July 2015. Bland, a twenty-eight-year-old African American woman from Texas, was found hanging in her jail cell after being arrested during a routine traffic stop. The Harris County Institute of Forensic Science in Houston ruled Bland's death as a suicide. However, a number of failures on the part of the Texas State Police to follow the correct procedures and abide by policies in place to protect vulnerable inmates—Bland told police officers during her arrest that she had epilepsy—and eye-witnesses from the scene of the arrest who stated that Bland had been badly beaten by police officers before her arrest, have led to rumours that Bland was killed by police officers after she was taken to Waller County Jail. There was even speculation online that Bland was already dead when police captured her booking photograph.[66]

After Auslander reportedly commented upon the reenactment motorcade's 'likeness to a funeral procession' in 2015, an elderly spectator replied 'it wasn't just a reenactment, now, this time around. It really was a funeral procession, for all of them. For Trayvon, for Eric Garner, for the Emmanuel church people. For Sandra. We're here today for all of them'.[67] Auslander writes that other participants, too, 'spoke of driving out to Monroe as a form of

[66] Melanie Eversley, 'Social Media Speculates Whether Bland is Dead in Mugshot', *USA Today* (25th July, 2015), <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/07/24/sandra-bland-mugshot-dead/30647275/> [accessed 06/05/2020].
[67] Auslander, 'Contesting the Roadways'.

"time travel" that emphasized the painful synchronicity of past and present atrocities'.[68] In fact, the historian described how only a few days before the reenactment, he was witness to a 'striking' funeral eulogy given by Reverend Hezekiah Benton at Covington's Bethlehem Baptist Church, which has a number of connections to the Moore's Ford Movement as well as to local county activists. Reading from John: 21-25, and recalling the tale of "Doubting Thomas" who doubted Christ's resurrection because he had not seen it with his own eyes, Benton proceeded to speak about the 'martyred "Sister Bland"'.[69]

He first lamented over the reliance upon video evidence in Bland's arrest, and the fact that the truth about her death was dependent upon footage recorded by the police department's dashcam. This, Benton claimed –'is an insufficient form of witnessing'.[70] 'Real witnessing', according to the Reverend, 'can only occur by human beings, joined in a united group, responsible to one another, just as the united Apostles (constituting the first church) were able to transmit to Thomas, within a locked room, the capacity to witness that which he had not seen'.[71] He concluded, 'We are all obligated to look out upon the road ourselves, not just relying on the dashboard cam, to witness on behalf of Sister Bland and all our brothers and sisters'.[72] Those who had attended the sermon later told Auslander that Benton's words were intended as an 'admonition from the pulpit to join in the "witnessing" of the upcoming reenactment, to see with our own eyes the crimes committed upon the roadway'.[73] The reenactment, then, is representative not only of the 1946 lynchings but of all incidents of racial violence that preceded it and have followed since. It serves as a visual reminder that white supremacist violence is still happening.

[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

When Stoneking attended the 2017 reenactment a year later, as spectators continued to wear and raise signs referring to Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and Sandra Bland, Stoneking describes how, 'As the mob members [bound] the victims' hands with heavy rope', 'almost every spectator' began to record the reenactment on their mobile phones.[74] Rather than despair at the fact spectators were 'watching the events of the reenactment play out on a compact glass screen', Stoneking ventures that the 'widespread use of smartphones suggests that what matters most is not necessarily the existence or quality of an image of the reenactment, but the record of one's personal experience: this is what *I* saw, this is where *I* was standing'.[75] 'Recording spectators', she continues, 'were creating not just a document of what happened, but of their own participation, their own witnessing… the phenomenon was in itself an embodied practice: spectators were affirmatively answering a call to participate as witnesses, as citizen journalists'.[76] Stoneking's assessment references the recent phenomenon known as sousveillance, or surveillance from below, in which Black citizens can record, share, and document incidents of racial violence or racist behaviour online and through social media as a form of protection and communal solidarity. Though Stoneking's explanation is valid, her focus on the individual experience of spectators does not capture the fundamentally communal nature of the witnessing at Moore's Ford, a communal witnessing that is all the more potent when one recalls Reverend Benton's 2016 affirmation that 'real' witnessing can only occur when one is part of 'a united group, responsible to one another'.

The power of the Moore's Ford reenactment, then, is that the performance is representative not only of the horrific fate of Roger, Dorothy, George, and Mae as well as the thousands of African Americans who were tortured and killed during lynching's long reign;

[74] Stoneking, 'Reenactments', p. 111.
[75] Ibid. Original Emphasis.
[76] Ibid., p. 123.

it also signals the reality of this same fate being dealt to future generations.[77] It stands as a warning and as an explication of the continuing dangers facing African American communities. Rather than precipitating a kind of 'period rush' in which one is projected backwards through time and comes to believe the experiences of historical people can be felt today, the Moore's Ford reenactment wrenches the past forwards to bring about a confrontation not only with the reality of the event as historical fact but with its continuing effect in the present.

Rather than collapsing the distance between past and present as inhabitable spaces, Moore's Ford collapses the distance between the 1946 lynchings and the racial violence of today to situate participants and spectators in a space that facilitates a deeper emotional and visceral engagement. Like Dread Scott's 'Slave Rebellion Reenactment', Moore's Ford allows participants and spectators to work through historical trauma by occupying and performing within these liminal spaces of loss. Furthermore, Moore's Ford does not focus on the corpses of the Malcoms and the Dorseys, it emphasises mourning and Eatman's generative politics of loss to signal profound suffering and trauma. Unlike lynching photographs, which propagate a scopophilic 'fascination with the irretrievable body'—the body that is seen 'from below, hanging from trees, bridges, lampposts', the body that has 'become inaccessible' to those who wish to mourn and bury it—the reenactment grants access to the lived experience of Black Americans not only in the past but in the present.

[77] 'Legacy of Lynching', *Equal Justice Initiative Website*, <eji.org/racial-justice/legacy-lynching> [accessed 23/04/2019].

Chapter 6

Confronting a National Legacy: Representations of Violence at the National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Equal Justice Initiative's National Memorial to Peace and Justice and Legacy Museum

This chapter examines how representations of violence popularised by anti-slavery culture have been incorporated into national narratives at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) in Washington, D.C, and the Equal Justice Initiative's (EJI) National Memorial to Peace and Justice and Legacy Museum in Montgomery, AL. I argue that each site's attempt to address the challenges surrounding how one fits scenes of violence into America's national story in a museum setting has resulted in the NMAAHC and the EJI carrying two distinct narratives: from slavery to freedom, and from slavery to mass incarceration, respectively. Though the NMAAHC does refer to past and continuing struggle, it nonetheless emphasises uplift and progress through time, instilling a 'feel-good' narrative that celebrates African American contributions and achievements. The EJI is quite the opposite, it emphasises how slavery's evolution has left many African Americans incarcerated or dead.

The differences between the two sites' interpretive approaches are inherently tied to their conception. The Smithsonian Institution's NMAAHC, opened in September 2016, is a national museum institution. Highly visible in the nation's capital, the NMAAHC has been the subject of political debate since George W. Bush authorised the Museum of African American History and Culture Plan for Action Presidential Commission in December 2001. The Smithsonian, as the world's largest museum, education, and research complex funded by the US government, is positioned at the heart of the nation's capital in Washington, D.C.

Indeed, many of the Smithsonian's buildings, including the NMAAHC, are situated on the Washington D.C. Mall, also known as 'America's front yard'. In a 2015 *National Geographic* documentary, Kirk Savage spoke of the Mall as the place where 'people come to figure out what the United States is all about'.[1]

The fact that the Smithsonian's museums are intended to reflect the US national story has meant that new projects and exhibitions have been subject to eruptions of public and political criticism. Controversies over competing historical narratives in the past have therefore left their mark on the Smithsonian, whose directors and curators have been chastened by such public altercations.[2] For example, Lonnie G. Bunch, the first director of the NMAAHC and now fourteenth Secretary of the Smithsonian, was the National Museum of American History's (NMAH) Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs between 1994-2000. During this time, a proposed Enola Gay exhibition at the National Air and Space Museum was eventually replaced and scaled down after Conservative politicians and veterans voiced their outrage that the museum planned to couple the commemoration of the end of the war with an exhibit on the use of atomic weapons in the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Indeed, Bunch published his own reflections on the Enola Gay controversy, arguing that museums should be 'places where celebration can often co-exist with controversy'.[3]

As the history of slavery and racial inequality in America is still an extremely sensitive issue, the Smithsonian's NMAAHC had to strike a balance between historical accuracy and presenting, if not a feel-good story, at least stories that have a progressive or uplifting

[1] 'The National Mall: America's Front Yard', National Geographic (21st April, 2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sq7ue__yNQQ> [accessed 26/09/2022].
[2] Jennifer Wright, 'Exhibiting the Enola Gay', *Smithsonian Institution Archives* (25th June, 2020), <https://siarchives.si.edu/blog/exhibiting-enola-gay> [accessed 28/08/2022].
[3] Lonnie G. Bunch, 'Fighting the Good Fight: Museums in an Age of Uncertainty', *Museum News*, Vol. 74 (March/April, 1995), p. 37.

narrative arc that would tie nicely into America's national identity as the harbinger of freedom, liberty, and democracy. The EJI, on the other hand, was not under the same pressures as the NMAAHC. The EJI's National Memorial to Peace and Justice (NMPJ) and Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, which opened in April 2018, are owned by lawyer Bryan Stevenson's Non-Profit Organisation dedicated to providing legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted or unfairly sentenced. Funding for the museum and memorial projects came from private sponsors and organisations, including Google, HBO, Open Society Foundations, Coca-Cola, Microsoft, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Therefore, where the NMAAHC faced pressure from public and federal bodies not to dwell on violence or injustice and provide a fitting tribute to Black achievement, the EJI was free to dwell upon slavery, lynching, segregation, and mass incarceration as much as it wished. This chapter investigates how the two narratives established by the NMAAHC and the EJI incorporate, adapt, and shape representations of slavery and racial violence.

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Support for a national memorial building dedicated to commemorating the legacy of African Americans in America surged during the era of the Black Museum Movement (BMM) of the 1960s and 1970s. Based upon John Cotton Dana's theorisation of 'Democratic Museums'—sites that held 'ordinary objects' where 'the history of all men was valued equally'—the BMM aimed to bring African American history and culture into public educational spaces.[4] Though, as Woods points out, the Democratic Museum theory was 'not discussed specifically with people of colour in mind or in the room', minority museums that developed over the next several decades drew upon the template as their foundation.[5] The DuSable museum in

[4] John Cotton Dana, *The Changing Museum Idea* (Woodstock, VT: Elmwood Press, 1921), quoted in Cheylon Karrina Woods, 'Black Museums and Experiential Learning', *Research Issues in Contemporary Education,* 3:1 (2018), p. 60.
[5] Cheylon Karrina Woods, 'Black Museums and Experiential Learning', *Research Issues in Contemporary Education,* 3:1 (2018), p. 60.

Chicago, IL, the International Afro-American Museum in Detroit, MI, and the Anacostia Museum in Washington, D.C., are exemplary sites established during this movement. These museums dedicated themselves to supporting their local Black communities. For many sites, this also meant grappling with the history and representation of slavery in art and educational programming.

The rise of the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Arts movements in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s only served to boost the BMM and the establishment of African American museums. In fact, as Burns states, the Black Power movement could be labelled as both 'ancestor' and 'offspring' of the BMM, promoting Black cultural liberation alongside African-inspired fashions and traditions.[6] Thus, institutions formed during this period sought to counteract negative racial stereotypes by educating visitors about Black history and culture. As Woods writes, the attempt to foster 'empathy and a deeper understanding' for Black communities was central to this endeavour.[7] However, as Howard Dodson recalls—he was working during this period as Executive Director of the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta, GA—an awareness prevailed amongst these Black institutions that 'even though we had created a national network of African American libraries, museums, and cultural centres devoted to increasing public knowledge about the central and foundational role of Black people in the making of the United States, most of our efforts had focused on educating our respective Black communities'. A focus, according to Dodson, that 'only underscored the need for permanent, free-standing institutions devoted to fostering knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of African people's imprint on America'.[8]

[6] Andrea Burns, *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), p. 7.
[7] Woods, 'Black Museums and Experiential Learning', p. 58.
[8] Howard Dodson, 'A Place of Our Own: The National Museum of African American History and Culture', p.734.

The NMAAHC building itself was designed by the Freelon Adjaye Bond/Smith Group, who had previously designed numerous other museums, including two dedicated to African American history.[9] The NMAAHC is located between the Washington Monument and the NMAH on Washington D.C's Mall, the most prized location for memorials and museums in the US.[10] For this reason, the design and location of recent additions to the Mall have often been the centre of controversy, as debates over how the inclusion of new memorials or museum buildings may alter the physical appearance and symbolic meaning of the Mall itself dominate and delay the planning stages.[11] As the land designated to the NMAAHC was previously considered part of the Washington Monument's grounds, there was some debate as to how far the new museum's estate would stretch. The NMAAHC building's design was also contentious. Adjaye stated he wanted the NMAAHC building to be a 'punch', a desire Landsberg believes encapsulates the institute's 'disruptive, perhaps even combative' presence on the Mall.[12]

Drawing its influence from Yoruban sculpture, the NMAAHC is a three-tiered structure encased in a copper-coloured metal corona. The museum stands as what Edward Ball has called 'a brown blur next to the cream pencil of the Washington Monument', in a city whose monumental architecture creates a predominantly white marble façade for the cityscape.[13] In fact, the corona slopes upwards and outwards at a seventeen-degree angle, the same angle that the Washington Monument's pyramidion slopes upwards and inwards. The

[9] San Francisco's Museum of the African Diaspora and the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of African American History and Culture in Baltimore, MD (Freelon), and the Nobel Peace Centre in Norway and the Denver Museum of Contemporary Art (Adjaye).
[10] Lisa Benton-Short, 'Politics, Public Space, and Memorials: The Brawl on the Mall', *Urban Geography*, 27:4 (2006), p. 297.
[11] For more details on recent recent proposals for memorials and monuments on the National Mall in Washington and the controversies over design and location, see Benton-Short, 'Politics, Public Space, and Memorials: The Brawl on the Mall', *Urban Geography*, 27:4 (2006): 297-329.
[12] Alison Landsberg, 'Post-Postracial America: On *Westworld* and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture', *Cultural Politics*, 14:2 (2018), p. 207.
[13] Edward Ball, 'At Last, a Black History Museum', *New York Review of Books* (4th November, 2016).

NMAAHC is thus an echo and an inversion of the iconic marker dedicated to slave-owning white masculine authority. A striking juxtaposition against the white and grey stone of the NMAH's simplistic mid-century modern exterior, the NMAAHC, says Ball, 'looks like the Negro in the room'.[14] This appearance is intentional. The museum's proximity to the Washington Monument and the NMAH, together with its alignment along the Mall's east-west axis to the Capitol and the White House on its north-south, positions it as a prominent part of the nation's story, and a vital contribution to the conversation about American history in the nation's 'front yard'. As Adjaye explained, 'The building stands with, but against, the other institutions on the Mall with exactly this purpose: to say that this too is American history; this too is America'.[15]

These connections drawn between the place of African American history and culture, figuratively and physically, in the national narrative, continue inside the museum building. Panoramas of the Mall and views of the Washington Monument and the Federal Triangle buildings constantly greet visitors on the upper floors of the museum. Furthermore, the corona encasing the museum—shaped in a filigree design to honour work by African American metalworkers in South Carolina and Louisiana—filters the light entering the building and creates kaleidoscopic shadows and reflections. Curator Kevin Strait commented on how the changing colours are a gesture to 'the variations in Black American experience, from the rainbow of shades that tinge "Black" skin tones, to the diversity of cultural and geographic strains in the "Black community", and even to the changing collective lot of African Americans over time, through the trials of slavery and ambiguities of freedom, during moments of progress, setback, and backlash'.[16]

[14] Ball, 'At Last, a Black History Museum'.
[15] Charles Henry Rowell, 'Designing a Nation's Museum: An Interview with David Adjaye', *Callaloo,* 38:4 (2015), p. 765.
[16] Ibid.

This idea of 'progress' is the overall focus of the NMAAHC. Visitors enter the museum at street level, into the Heritage Hall. There, they find the Walmart Welcome Centre, a gift shop, and the Robert Frederick Smith Family Corona Pavilion, an orientation theatre for group events and public programmes. There are four levels below ground, including the three history galleries and the concourse level, which is home to the Oprah Winfrey Theatre and Sweet Home Café, which serves African American cuisines from several regions across the US. The upper floors, known as the Community and Culture galleries, are participatory spaces in which visitors can explore African American contributions to contemporary US life and research their ancestry. According to Jeffries these levels are the 'soul' of the NMAAHC: 'They pulsate with energy, providing not just a window through which to see Black creativity but a way to feel it as well'.[17]

When taken all together, the eight floors of the NMAAHC signal the overall message of progress that the museum radiates. The museum takes visitors on a journey that begins in the darkened below ground levels with the horrors of slavery and ends in the brightly lit upper floors with a celebration of Black community and culture in the modern age. As Ball reflects, 'It starts with trauma downstairs, but ends pretty well on the top floor': the museum is 'a place where the tragic story of Black America is folded into a happy coda'.[18] One journalist recalled being told by a tour guide to start on the lowest level and work his way up, 'because it would get easier as [he] went'.[19] Indeed, the history galleries themselves, buried beneath the building's Heritage Hall and Theatre, are a microcosmic reflection of the museum's overarching narrative. As the museum's guidebook explains, to start their 'journey', visitors

[17] Joanne Pope Melish, Marcia Chatelain, and Hasan Kwame Jeffries, 'Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington D.C.', *The Journal of American History,* 104:1 (2017), p. 160.
[18] Ball, 'At Last, a Black History Museum'.
[19] Jim Byers, 'D.C.'s National Museum of African American History and Culture Tells the Story of America', *Toronto Sun* (5th July, 2017), <https://torontosun.com/2017/07/05/dcs-national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture-tells-the-story-of-america> [accessed 15/12/2020].

'take the large glass elevator down to *Slavery and Freedom*', the lowest level of the museum, before they 'proceed upward through time, passing through *The Era of Segregation* and ending with *A Changing America'*.[20]As Ball describes, the idea 'is to move the visitor from the story of Black captivity, told underground in dark, tunnelling rooms, and to rise away from it, floor by floor, past stations of (gradual) entitlement, up through history, climbing a mountain into the light and space of the top floors, where Blackness is celebrated as America's gloried cultural capital'.[21]

To reach the start of the history galleries, visitors must take an elevator down to the lowest of the three levels. A timeline counts back the decades until the elevator touches ground zero: the year 1400. Visitors emerge into a dark, gloomy space. The walls and ceiling are black. Spotlights shine down onto the exhibits, whilst rays of light scatter across the floor as though sunbeams are filtering through floorboards above. Either side of the corridor are two display walls encased by glass panels. On the left, 'Europe and an Emerging Global Economy'. On the right, 'Africa and an Emerging Global Economy'. The NMAAHC thus educates visitors on Africa's economic, social, and cultural status prior to the expansion of transatlantic slavery.

The earliest phases of the slave trade are here described as the 'trauma of transition', a sequence that involved 'Kidnapping, Storing, Inspecting, Branding, [and] Transporting'. Transportation introduces the next phase of the exhibit, where visitors are confronted with the story of the Middle Passage. The first thing visitors see is a video installation, titled 'The Last Footfall', which the NMAAHC says presents 'the perspective of an enslaved African about to embark on this forced journey across the Atlantic, never to return'.[22] The video

[20] *National Museum of African American History and Culture,* Official Guide to the Smithsonian (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2017), p. 16.
[21] Ball, 'At Last, a Black History Museum'.
[22] *National Museum of African American History and Culture,* p. 39.

transitions between images of dungeons in African slave castles, shackles, waves, forts, and chains. Crashing waves thunder in the background. Dungeons and holds are shot from doorways to create a sense of confinement. A singular, high window or gap in the damp stone are the only hints of free, fresh air. Sounds of the Atlantic intensify the sense of imprisonment and the end of the life that enslaved people had previously known. The video installation is arresting, and is a clear attempt to viscerally engage visitors, to encourage them to imagine what enslaved people would have seen (dungeons, windows), heard (sea), and felt (trapped, confined).

The power of this experiential exhibit is reflected in visitors' responses. When describing these early stages of the museum, Vann Newkirk wrote that visitors are 'essentially deposited into the bowels of the slave ships that stole so many souls from the African coasts. Hushed, claustrophobic halls display the worst of the bloody origins of slavery'.[23] Indeed, the scattered spotlights that illuminate the exhibition space may well be reminiscent of rays of sunlight filtering into the bowels of the ship Newkirk describes. The NMAAHC guidebook further supports this, stating that its early exhibits are 'designed to evoke the hold of a slave ship, where artifacts and voices provide a powerful and poignant reflection on the brutality of the Middle Passage'.[24] Docents, who conduct Highlights Tours each day, also emphasise this message. During one of these tours in February 2020, a docent informed me that the first section of the exhibition was 'dark by design'. There is 'no natural light', they said. With Europe on one side and Africa on the other—a reference to the emerging trade displays either side of the corridor—the space was designed to 'look, feel, and sound like the belly of a slave

[23] Vann Newkirk, 'How a Museum Reckons with Black Pain: The Smithsonian's New Memorial of African American History and Culture is at Once Triumphant and Crushing', *The Atlantic* (23rd September, 2016).
[24] Ibid.

ship'. 'If you listen', said the docent, as the soundtrack from 'The Last Footfall' could be heard drifting from the end of the corridor, 'you can hear the water on the other side'.

Surprisingly, it seems that such a heavy emphasis on the Middle Passage experience was not the intention of the NMAAHC's curators. When questioned about the museum's representational choices, curator Mary Elliot said that the goal of the Middle Passage exhibit 'was to recognize rather than reproduce the experience of the passage'.[25] 'This isn't Slave Disneyland,' she explained, 'You aren't going to feel what they felt. Sometimes you have to be quiet with it'.[26] Landsberg agrees, writing that the Middle Passage display 'is not experiential in the sense of enabling some kind of reenactment. One does not enter a slave ship, or even the likeness of a slave ship; the experience is not literal'.[27] Evidently, there is a disjuncture between curators' vision for the space and what visitors see and feel. Landsberg is right, the NMAAHC does not literally recreate the hold of a ship. However, it goes far enough—with the sounds of waves, with the sense of darkness and confinement, with Europe on one side and Africa on the other—that Newkirk's interpretation of the space is an understandably common one.

Such a focus is not surprising, as representations of the Middle Passage have long been the cornerstone for depicting the torturous ordeal of slavery in museum settings. The Middle Passage was, according to Wood, the 'battle ground for pro- and anti-slavery propagandists', in that it could on the one hand represent the economic benefits of the mass movement and storage of slaves for trade and on the other was the epoch of human suffering and maltreatment.[28] Yet, the problem for curators materialises in the attempt to describe the

[25] Tiya Miles, 'Review: National Museum of African American History and Culture', *The Public Historian,* 39:2 (2017), p. 83.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Landsberg, 'Post-Postracial America', pp. 207-208.
[28] Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory, Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 14.

Middle Passage to an audience, to get them to understand the extreme conditions and violence that captive Africans were forced to endure. Many institutions, in a move that echoes anti-slavery visual culture's reliance upon images of violence and pained Black bodies to relate the horrors of slavery, often create highly emotional and experiential spaces that use light, space, image and sound to engage their visitors with its history.[29]

The NMAAHC's *Slavery and Freedom* display also draws upon many of the same tropes from anti-slavery visual culture we have previously encountered. For example, a display case at the end of the 'Enslaving Colonial North America' section presents visitors with a familiar image from anti-slavery tracts and narratives. William Blake's illustration 'Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave' from Stedman's *Narrative* is displayed as an example of the 'Human Cost' of slavery. Subtitled 'Flogging an Enslaved Woman in Surinam', the accompanying text describes the illustration as 'a first-person observation of the deadly treatment of enslaved Africans in the New World. The display highlights a quote from an observer stating that "whips cut at every lash and crack like a pistol"'.[30] This 'observer', of course, is John Stedman, though no reference is made to his *Narrative* nor to its ambiguous stance on slavery. Stedman's sexual encounters with enslaved women and his purchase of Joanna are also not mentioned. Instead, Blake's image and Stedman's narrative stand alone, and work in conjunction to render visible the horrors of slavery to NMAAHC's visitors much as they did when they were first published.

The NMAAHC takes this even further by displaying Blake's illustration alongside a planter's whip in the style of a cat'o'nine tails, as well as a first edition of Olaudah Equiano's

[29] For more on representations of the Middle Passage in American museums, see Derrick R. Brooms, 'Lest We Forget: Exhibiting (and Remembering) Slavery in African-American Museums', *Journal of African American Studies*, Vol. 15 (2011): 508-523; and, Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (Manchester: Routledge, 1999). For more on representations of the Middle Passage in British museums see also Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[30] NMAAHC display.

Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African.[31] In displaying the whip alongside Blake's illustration, the NMAAHC encourages visitors to imaginatively conjure their own sensorium of enslaved torture in which the violence experienced by enslaved people takes precedence. For example, Jim Byers, writing for the *Toronto Sun*, reported that the NMAAHC's displays on slavery contain 'sketches of white slave owners flogging a Black woman with a cat'o'nine tails that make you choke with disgust'.[32] Significantly, the whips in Blake's illustration are not in the style of the cat'o'nine tails at all. They are, in fact, single-tailed whips with long handles, as opposed to multi-tailed with a short handle. Byers, however, mentally supplants the NMAAHC's display whip into Blake's illustration. In his imagination, the NMAAHC's whip has caused the lacerations on the enslaved woman's body. Byers' response to 'choke with disgust' is the same response that Stedman and Blake's anti-slavery publishers would have desired from their eighteenth-century audience.

Another familiar feature of the NMAAHC's *Slavery and Freedom* display is 'The Story of Private Gordon'. The NMAAHC provides visitors with the following account:

> During the Civil War, Private Gordon's scarred back became a powerful symbol of the human cost of slavery. These images documenting Gordon's U.S. Army medical examination were widely sold and circulated to support the Union effort and assist self-liberated slaves. After being brutally beaten by an overseer, Gordon escaped in March 1863 and enlisted in the U.S. Army in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

As with the original *Harper's Weekly* triptych, three images accompany this description. The timeline begins with 'A fugitive', with the image of 'Gordon as he entered our lines'. The NMAAHC describes the image as a strategy 'used to raise public support for emancipation'. 'The Scourged Back' image comes second and is accompanied by the following quote from

[31] 'Cat o' nine tails planter whip', Object Listing, *The National Museum of African American History and Culture,* <https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2014.312.113?destination=/explore/collection/search%3Fedan_q%3Dwhip> [accessed 01/07/2022].
[32] Byers, 'D.C.'s National Museum of African American History and Culture Tells the Story of America'.

T.W. Mercer: ‘I have found a large number of the four hundred [new recruits] examined by me to be as badly lacerated’. Finally, there is the image of ‘A Soldier’, which the NMAAHC informs visitors required the illustrator to pose ‘Gordon standing up to reflect his freedom after enlistment’. The inclusion of Gordon’s story and the language used on the display which emphasises Gordon’s autonomy and agency in his story—‘Gordon’s scarred back’, ‘Gordon’s U.S. Army Medical Examination’, ‘Gordon escaped […] and enlisted in the U.S. Army’—goes further than those that use the Scourged Back image alone as a symbol of slavery and all that upheld it.

However, the NMAAHC is less successful at deconstructing the white-dominated narrative of redemption that limits Gordon’s representation. First, though it does emphasise his autonomy, the repetition of Gordon’s first name alone follows a nomenclature typical of the nomination of slaves, minors, and subordinates. Furthermore, Gordon’s story, and the image of his scarred back, are still presented within the same chronological parameters from slavery to freedom that the NMAAHC as a whole adheres to. That Gordon stands ‘to reflect his freedom after enlistment’ creates a narrative that begins with slavery as violent oppression and ends with freedom as, in this case, encapsulated by a Black masculine strength specifically tied to military status. Gordon as ‘A Soldier’ comes to represent everything Gordon as ‘A Typical Negro’ was not. The former stands, uniformed, armed, and confidently facing the audience whereas the latter sits, dressed in rags or half naked with his scarred back facing the camera’s lens. The homogenisation of enslaved African American experience in service of a redemptive narrative explored in the first chapters of this thesis therefore remains intact. Moreover, the NMAAHC display offers no information regarding the doubts over Gordon’s true identity, which was subordinated to the visual power that Black suffering could harness and the ‘thrill of horror’ that the spectacle of Gordon’s back provided audiences in 1863.

The NMAAHC's representation of the slave auction, another scene commonly used to encapsulate the horrors of American enslavement, also draws upon familiar anti-slavery tropes shaped by the white gaze. NMAAHC's star artefact in this part of the exhibit is a large marble schist stone used as an auction block in Hagerstown, MD. At the front of the stone, a small metal plaque reads 'General Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay spoke from this slave block in Hagerstown during the year 1830'. The block is not exhibited alone. Behind it, mounted against the back wall, are a slave collar and key. 'Wearing collars like this one', the accompanying information reads, 'enslaved people were restrained together as they were purchased and marched in coffles to the Deep South'.

Figure 6.1. Hagerstown auction block, slave key, and collar on display at the NMAAHC. Photograph taken by author (25th February, 2020).

One would forgive visitors who miss these items completely, for they are somewhat lost to the large background illustration of a slave auction in Richmond, VA. The illustration shows an enslaved family—a mother, who is cradling a young child in her arms, and a man, who stands next to the pair with his arms folded tightly across his chest. The trio stand barefoot on a block that bears the words 'Negroes for sale at auction this day at 1 o'clock'. An auctioneer stands on the steps beside them, one arm raised as he appeals to buyers. A small crowd of white men, well-dressed and smoking cigars, are gathered on the right. None

of them are looking at the block or engaging with the auctioneer. Two stand in discussion, whilst the gaze of one follows something out of frame, perhaps an enslaved person being examined or prepared for sale. His gaze is mirrored by a Black man, who leans casually against the block with his elbow. This man wears shoes and a waistcoat and tie. His long shirt sleeves are folded up above his elbows. Another, similarly-outfitted Black man sits at the bottom of the steps, with his back to the family being sold. His eyes look ahead, towards the other Black man. Perhaps the two men have been tasked with escorting enslaved people to and from the block and preventing escape. The information panel that accompanies this display is at the bottom of the case. In large letters, the title 'On the Block', precedes the following: 'The auction block was a site of fear, humiliation, and uncertainty where loved ones were separated for life. Auction blocks could be found from colonial times well into the antebellum period. They were often seen in the public square, slave-trading offices, hotels, at the docks, in jail yards, and at courthouses. African Americans endured being sold on the block and being devalued to mere labouring hands, feet, backs, and wombs'.[33]

Testimonies taken from the ESP collection which describe the experience of being sold or of having family members sold away play from a speaker installed above and behind the glass display case. The testimonies are quiet, which means that visitors must stand close to the block to be able to hear them. Though this decision may have been made to avoid causing disruption to other visitors exploring nearby exhibits, the proximity required to hear the testimonies forces visitors into an intimate engagement with the artefact, and with the testimonies playing overhead. However, there is no reference to the contested history behind the collection of the ESP testimonies. A small paragraph, titled 'Giving Voice: The Slave Narratives', provides the only background information: 'This audio features first-person accounts of formerly enslaved men and women as they recounted their slave trade experiences

[33] NMAAHC display.

to researchers employed by the Federal Writer's Project in the 1930s. These oral histories are known as the WPA Slave Narratives'. Like the Whitney Plantation, then, the NMAAHC draws from this oral history archive without any recognition of the dehumanisation and exoticisation of enslaved people through 'Negro dialect' nor of the racism that dictated the collection and translation of these testimonies.

The NMAAHC's display continues its focus on the horrors of the auction block. Headed, 'The Weeping Time', a large wall displays a quote from Henry Bibb's 1849 *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* in bold white text:

> After the men were all sold they then sold the women and children. They ordered the first woman to lay down her child and mount the auction block; she refused to give up her little one and clung to it as long as she could, while the cruel lash was applied to her back for disobedience. She pleaded for mercy in the name of God. But the child was torn from the arms of its mother amid the most heart-rending shrieks from the mother and child on the one hand, and the bitter oaths and cruel lashes from the tyrants on the other. Finally, the poor child was torn from the mother while she was sacrificed to the highest bidder. In this way the sale was carried on from beginning to end.

This display contains familiar anti-slavery rhetorical devices explored in the first chapter of this thesis. In Bibb's text, the enslaved woman's 'heart-rending shrieks' as her child is torn from her arms designate her as a sentimental object of both horror and sympathy, a nameless and voiceless body subjected to violent torture, trauma, and sale. To the left of Bibb's quote is the accompanying illustration from the 1849 *Narrative*. The auctioneer, his hand raised once again, appeals to his crowd of buyers and spectators. In his right hand he holds a small Black baby by the wrist. The child's knees are raised and twisted, as though struggling to rid herself of the auctioneer's grip. Directly below this, the child's mother pleads with a white man. She is on her knees, her hands raised up to the white figure, who in turn seems to have pulled his arm to his chest and out of reach. There are nine other Black figures shown in the illustration, all of whom are in distress: chained, weeping, praying, embracing family or friends. All but two are on the ground, on their knees, or sitting with their heads in their hands.

The visual dynamic of the images thus positions the majority of Black figures—of the two that are standing, one is only half-visible and out of frame while the other stands with his hands visibly chained — beneath the white figures in the frame.

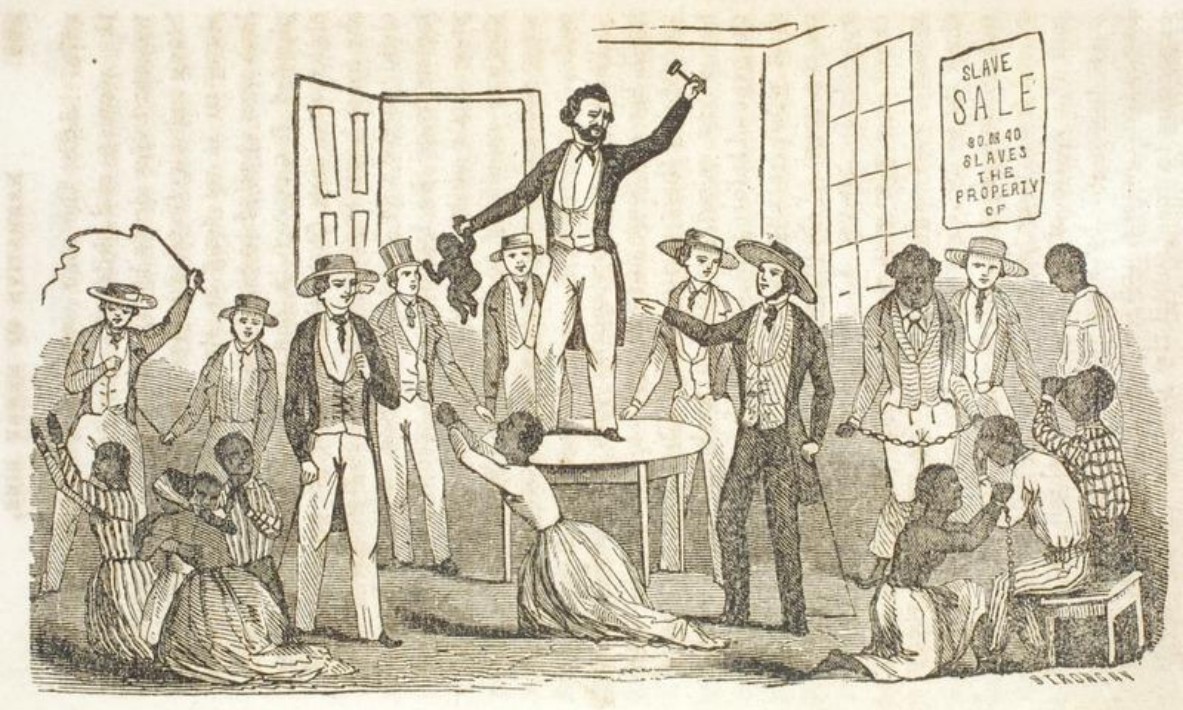

Figure 6.2. "Slave Auction, U.S. South, ca. 1840s", *Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora*, <http://slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/1940> [accessed 03/11/2020].

On the one hand, these expressions of emotion from the enslaved people about to be sold appeal to viewers' sympathy as well as to the oppressors in the scene. Were the Black enslaved people in the image shown to be emotionless, passive, or indifferent to the horrific situation they had been forced into, the image would fail to relate the very real trauma that auctions inflicted upon enslaved people. Yet, the relegation of Black bodies to the '"lower" realm of representation' in images such as this often also dehumanises enslaved people.[34] Though the NMAAHC uses the Bibb quote and illustration to relate the horrors of slavery to

[34] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 12.

visitors, they rely on a visual archive shaped by the white gaze that displayed spectacles of Black suffering to emotionally engage white western audiences without educating visitors about the damaging effects that these representations may have.

*

As Chapter 2 of this thesis showed, lynching photography also generated a visual archive of spectacular Black pain that was shaped by the white gaze. Though the Black press and Black photographers often re-purposed lynching photographs as documents that provided proof of white violence as opposed to Black criminality, lynching photographs and postcards still position dead and damaged Black bodies at their centre. Curators at the NMAAHC faced the task of deciding how to contextualise these images to generate intimate and emotional understanding whilst avoiding re-animating white violence and reinforcing the damaging white gaze. Curators also had to navigate the risks associated with re-victimisation, in which the bodies of Black lynching victims become voiceless receptacles of pain offered up as spectacles to the public.

The most direct discussion of lynching at the NMAAHC is found in a small section at the beginning of the exhibit titled 'Creating a Segregated Society'. Lynching is here described as a mechanism through which whites used terrorism 'to create a climate of fear and intimidation'.[35] 'A Climate of Fear' is, in fact, the heading used to display a series of lynching photographs in the exhibit. The photographs included are of the lynching of Elias Clayton, Elmer Jackson, and Isaac McGhie in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1920, and two are images of the lynchings of five unknown men. These latter images are titled, 'Man Lynched at Railroad Crossing, South Carolina, 1885', and 'The Lynching of Four Men'. A note explains how the four men are 'likely four sharecroppers murdered in Logan County, Kentucky, in

[35] NMAAHC display.

1908'. One was accused of murder and the others were hanged for not preventing the act. To the left of this trio of images is a small paragraph, titled 'Lynching'. The text explains that rape of white women was the most frequent pretext, as well as the fact that lynchings often occurred as public spectacles in front of large crowds. Accompanying this information are two images. The first is another lynching photograph that shows the death of Frank Embree. According to a note—the information for which, as well as the image, is attributed to the *Without Sanctuary* collection—Embree 'begged his captors to "hang me or shoot me, instead of torturing me"' before his death. The second image, a newspaper headline, reads 'Nine Blacks Lynched at Hemphill, Texas'.

Each lynching photograph has a red border. More than a strategy used to visually highlight the importance of the images, the red border is one of the NMAAHC's curatorial strategies. Mounted on the wall at the entrance to the small section on lynching, a notice warns visitors that 'Images outlined in red may not be suitable for younger or more sensitive viewers'. The red border is used throughout the exhibits. An identically styled wall—silver, with red and black text—headed 'The Battle Over Lynching', displays more lynching photographs and newspaper articles to teach visitors about these mass racially motivated killings. During my time in the NMAAHC's exhibit space, visitors—irrespective of race—engaged with the lynching photographs most, gathering and waiting their turn to capture each lynching photograph on their cameras.

The most prominent image on this display is Albert A. Smith's 1920 cartoon 'The Reason', which depicts a Black southern man fleeing to the north. In the same way that early Black photographers like J. P. Ball sought to reintroduce vitality and strength to their narratives of lynchings, Black cartoonists worked to challenge dominant visual conventions that objectified Black bodies and instead focussed on educating their audience on the extent of white brutality. By visually emphasising Smith's cartoon, the NMAAHC foregrounds

these Black authored political cartoons that displayed the explicit violence of lynching without circulating photographs of Black corpses.

The wall also features a newspaper headline: 'Woman Lynched by Brooks Co. Mob'. The NMAAHC thus introduces visitors to the story of Mary Turner's lynching. The printed 1918 article claims that Mary 'made unwise remarks…about the execution of her husband and the people in their indignant mood took exception to her remarks, as well as her attitude'. No mention of Mary's baby features in the report. However, the NMAAHC added a caption explaining that Turner was eight months pregnant when she was killed. Another clipping describes the lynching of Jennie McCall in Jacksonville, FL, who was killed when she attempted to prevent a mob from kidnapping her husband. Featured next to these clippings are references to Ida B. Wells' anti-lynching campaign and responses to lynching from the NAACP, as well as three more lynching photographs selected to demonstrate the prevalence of spectacle lynchings. Photographs of Jesse Washington, Laura Nelson, and Allen Brooks are mounted under the heading 'Murder by Mob'. As well as drawing visitors' attention to the Black artistic responses to lynching through Smith's cartoon, then, the NMAAHC also contextualises their lynching photographs by providing the details of when and where the lynchings had taken place and, where known, the names of those who were lynched. Furthermore, by including the stories of Jennie McCall and Mary Turner as well as the work of Ida B Wells, the NMAAHC highlights female victims and activism, both of which are often elided by the male-centric focus of exhibitions such as *Without Sanctuary.*

Still, there are elements of the NMAAHC's displays that risk perpetuating the dehumanisation and criminalisation of Black lynching victims. For example, the NMAAHC introduces their victims of spectacle lynchings by their alleged offences. Jesse Washington is described as 'a teenage farmhand [who] was found guilty of rape'. 'Allen Brooks was accused of molesting a three-year-old white girl', begins the plaque next to the photograph of Brooks'

body hanging from a telephone pole. Similarly, Laura and L.D. Nelson—the latter is not named—begins, 'Trying to protect her son, who was accused of murder, Laura Nelson pleaded guilty to the crime'. Introducing each victim by the suspected crime which led to their lynching risks criminalising these individuals as viewers connect them to their alleged crime. Though the accompanying text beneath the 'Murder by Mob' heading outlines that crimes were 'often unproven or even imaginary', this comment is eclipsed by the seemingly factual reports of their crime and punishment that the NMAAHC's display of lynching photographs provides.

Lynching photographs are also displayed as part of the NMAAHC's *Defending Freedom, Defining Freedom* exhibit, on an information board dedicated to mob violence and 'race riots', titled 'Punishing Success'. The display covers the Rosewood Massacre, the Tulsa Race Riot, and the Detroit Race Riot, and highlights 'The Economics of Lynching' in which African American economic success was often met with violence and resentment from whites. A photograph of the lynching of A.B. Young, whose body hangs from a tree as a crowd of white men stand looking at the body with their backs turned to the camera, is displayed above lyrics from Billie Holiday's 'Strange Fruit'. A remnant of rope used to lynch Matthew Williams in 1931 is also on display here. Photographer Paul Henderson, who reported on the killing, collected the rope from the scene of the murder. Henderson's accompanying note reads: 'Rope "souvenir" which was used by Salisbury, MD, mob to hang Matthew Williams, 25 year-old [citizen]. It is soaked with oil which was poured on his body

before the blood thirsty [showmen] burned the body beyond recognition. Thousands of women and children carried these souvenirs home to keep'.

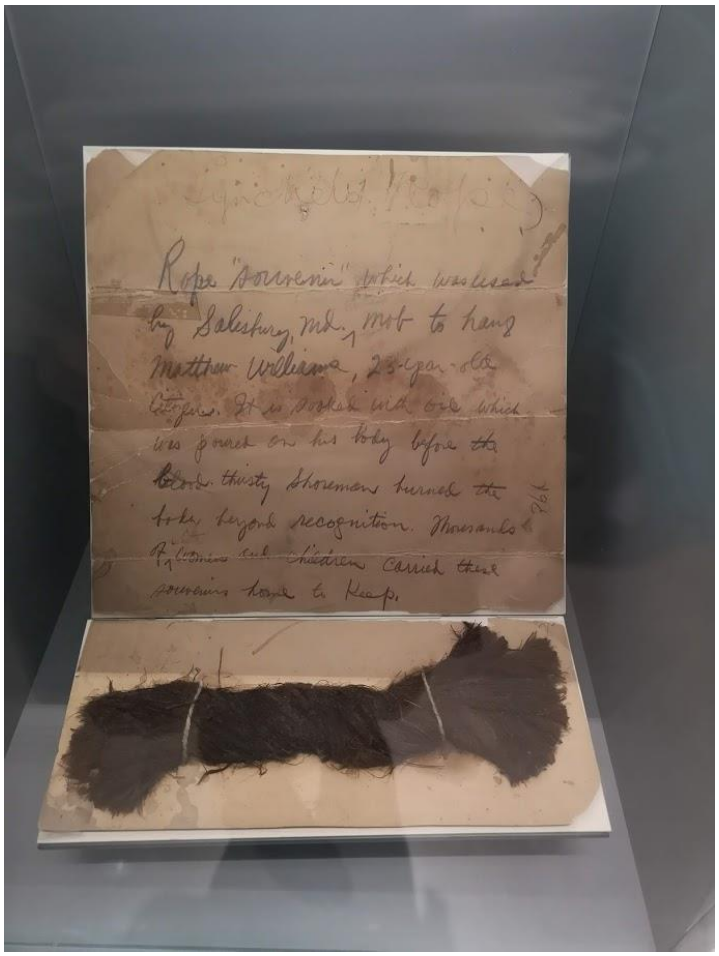

Figure 6.3. Rope segment used to lynch Matthew Williams on display at the NMAAHC. Photograph taken by author (10th March, 2020).

These displays, which are interspersed throughout the *Defending Freedom, Defining Freedom* exhibit, are most likely an attempt to signal historical continuity, a point which is further emphasised by the NMAAHC's decision to have these displays echo each other stylistically. Each wall displaying lynching photographs or artefacts has a light silver background, with large red and black text, whilst accompanying photographs are bordered in red as a warning to younger or more sensitive viewers. However, these connections are not immediately or strikingly obvious to visitors. My own realisation of the stylistic continuity came after my visit, when I had the time to review photographs I had taken of the exhibit

spaces. Therefore, it is likely that the visual connection between each display is lost to the wealth of information that visitors receive throughout the rest of the exhibit. Thus, in reality, these displays of lynching photographs and artefacts stand alone as shocking interjections of extreme violence.

Emmett Till's casket, also displayed in the *Defending Freedom, Defining Freedom* exhibit, is arguably the NMAAHC's most powerful acquisition. This may be why the museum designed the casket's exhibit space as explicitly experiential. As visitors approach the room in which Till's casket is held, a display wall provides some context to the response of the media to Emmett's murder. Either side of the headline, 'Nation Shocked, Vow Action in Lynching of Chicago Youth', enlarged black and white photographs of Emmett and his mother, Mamie Till Mobley stand out against the black walls. A smaller photograph of Mamie cradling a young Emmett in her arms is installed next to *Jet* magazine's feature article published after Emmett's death, as well as their report on his suspected lynching on 8th September, 1955.

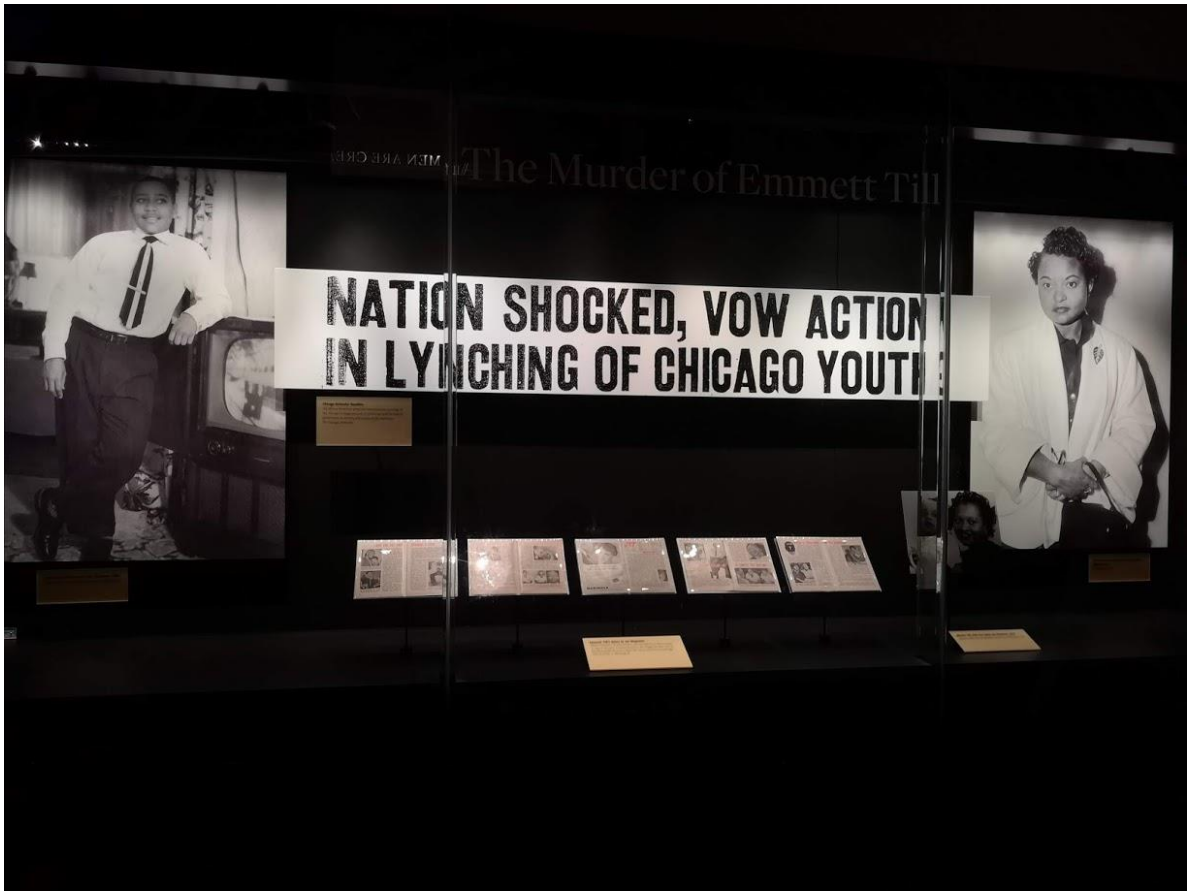

Figure 6.4. Emmett Till display at the NMAAHC. Photograph taken by author (10th March, 2020).

Signs instruct visitors that photography is not permitted as they enter the space where Emmett's casket is displayed. A NMAAHC employee stands nearby to reinforce this message in person and to help control the crowds of people entering the small room. A recording of a funeral choir performing songs such as 'Amazing Grace' and 'Precious Lord' can be heard drifting from within. As one enters the small, intimate room, the casket comes into view. It is the original in which Emmett was displayed and buried. It sits open, as it did during the 1955 service. Behind it, a large photograph of Emmett's funeral covers the back wall. It appears that the casket has materialised out of the photograph itself. In 2005, when Emmett's body was exhumed to extract the DNA evidence required by the state of Mississippi to reopen the case, the Till family made arrangements to preserve the casket for a planned memorial to Emmett and Mamie at the cemetery in which they were buried. However, soon after, Simeon Wright, Emmett's cousin, discovered that the original casket had been abandoned,

unpreserved, in a shed at the cemetery.[36] The family then donated the casket to the Smithsonian.

Viewing the casket is undoubtedly an emotional encounter. Jeffries called it 'a deeply moving experience'.[37] Many visitors, with the exception of school groups—who are somewhat quickly ushered through by teachers and chaperones who are clearly mindful of the potential disruption to other visitors—take the opportunity to sit and reflect upon the scene in front of them. Visitors rarely speak, and the words of the mourning ballads ring clear. Only after one leaves the casket room behind are the details of Emmett's death and the aftermath presented to visitors via video installations, photographs, testimonies, and news articles. This space is small and thereby limited; many visitors must queue and wait to read the information printed on the walls. Most choose instead to listen to the video installation, an excerpt from Keith Beauchamp's 2005 documentary *The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till*, from wherever they can find the space to stand. The NMAAHC uses archival material, testimony, image, and sound to provide a thorough contextual grounding for its representation of the violence Emmett endured as well as highlighting loss, mourning, and the strength of Mamie and the Till family in the aftermath of Emmett's murder.

Still, the display of the photograph of Emmett's mutilated face inside the casket elicits an understandably strong response from visitors. For example, during the time I spent in the space, one group of students attempted to lean up and peek into the casket. 'Is the body in there?', one asks. Once outside, a young boy turned to his friends and said 'did you see the dude's face?' 'No? Where's his face?', came the reply. 'Back inside', said the first boy, as he gestured back toward the Till exhibit. The group lined up again to go back inside. One

[36] Abby Callard, 'Emmett Till's Casket Goes to the Smithsonian', *Smithsonian Magazine* (November 2009), <smithsonianmag.com/art-culture/Emmett-tills-casket-goes-to-the-smithsonian-144696940/> [accessed 25/06/2022].
[37] Melish, Chatelain, and Jeffries, 'Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington D.C.', p. 156.

imagines that, were photography allowed inside the memorial space, visitors would queue to capture the image of Emmett's face as they do the other lynching photographs throughout the NMAAHC's exhibits. However spectacular or exploitative this choice may seem, though, the NMAAHC's use of the photograph adheres to Mamie Till Mobley's wishes, and continues the work that she started back in 1955. In 2017, Lonnie Bunch recognised that the display may seem 'ghoulish', and stated that he never wished to 'exoticise or exploit Emmett's murder'. 'But', he said, 'I kept hearing his mother's voice as she used to always talk to me about how important it was to her that Emmett didn't die in vain'.[38]

In many ways, then, Emmett's display is the star attraction of the NMAAHC. Separated from the other displays, manned by docents, and with its own set of behavioural rules and expectations, the exhibit is exceptional. Yet, the removal of Emmett's story from the museum's chronological narrative has led to criticisms such as Jeffries's that the interpretive touch in Till's display is 'too light'.[39] Jeffries suggests, for example, that the display does little to educate visitors about 'the Emmett Till generation', the young people who were inspired by what happened to Emmett to challenge Jim Crow.[40] 'It is especially important that the links between Till and the civil rights movement be made explicit because the rooms housing the exhibit are separate from the other civil rights installations', she said: 'Given the sensitive nature of the material, the decision to set the Till exhibition apart is understandable; but it also makes situating his death firmly within the context of the freedom movement that much more important'.[41]

[38] Jaleesa M. Jones, 'Why You Need to See the Emmett Till Exhibit at the Smithsonian', *USA Today* (21st February, 2017), <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/naton-now/2017/02/2021/Emmett-till-exhibit-smithsonian-national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture/95466126> [accessed 11/11/2020].
[39] Melish, Chatelain, and Jeffries, 'Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington D.C.', p. 156.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

This contextualisation, however, fails to materialise. Jeffries highlights a 'curious' video installation in the alcove next to the Till display, a space that provides the perfect opportunity to contextualise Till's story and in which visitors might expect to find 'a framework for understanding the Black freedom struggle'.[42] Instead, the installation—titled 'The Struggle for the Soul of America'—focuses heavily on violence. A warning that the video 'may not be suitable for younger or more sensitive visitors' accompanies the installation.

Images linger on the screen: a white man dangling a noose from the window of his car, a photograph of detainees on their way to the convention hall in Tulsa during the 1921 riot, Emmett Till's casket being loaded into a hearse, two distressed Black teenagers fleeing from police during a 1964 protest against police brutality in Brooklyn. The camera tilts down the full length of Gordon's scarred back, whilst a narrator's voice announces: 'The abolition of slavery in 1865 ended one form of aggression, but the rights of African Americans were still restricted'. The image switches to a young Black child drinking from a fountain labelled 'Colored'. The image switches again. The word JUSTICE adorns the scaffold where Henry Smith's torso can be seen above the crowd of white torturers. The camera tilts up again, where we see Smith's head, looking down to the ground. The video connects Smith's lynching and the era of segregation to contemporary movements when it cuts to a photograph of two people sitting together behind a poster asking 'What happened to Sandy Bland?' A young Black man is arrested whilst wearing a t-shirt printed with the words #staywoke. A black and white photograph of a white man attacking Black people with an American flagpole flashes on screen before a selection of photographs show grieving families outside of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, in the wake of the June 2015 mass

[42] Ibid.

shooting. ‘More than two hundred years after the declaration of independence’, the narrator says, ‘the struggle for full equality and real justice continues’.

The NMAAHC provides reflection spaces for visitors to contemplate the continued struggle for racial equality both inside and outside the history galleries. At the end of each gallery level, for instance, visitors may enter a ‘reflections booth’, where they can choose a question and record their response. The four questions posed at the end of the *Slavery and Freedom* exhibit are: ‘Does your family have ties back to slavery and, if so, how do they discuss slavery and the family history’? ‘After Emancipation, African Americans held annual celebrations. What traditions have passed down in your family? Do you know when and where they were first celebrated’? ‘Churches, schools, and other social organisations have held the African American community together during difficult times. What holds your family/community together during difficult times’? And, finally, ‘What portions of the exhibition you just walked through, *Slavery and Freedom,* are most memorable to you and why’?

Though only one of these questions requires visitors to speak directly about the exhibit—the other questions seem most likely to have been taken from the NMAAHC’s early oral history project, the ‘Memory Book’, where users could register to record testimonies about their heritage and history—recorded responses to this question which other visitors have shared give some indication of the key messages visitors take away with them. One recorded response from two Black middle-aged women revealed that for one the ‘most powerful’ moment ‘was hearing people react to the exhibit’. The other chose as her most powerful moment ‘seeing the whip’. There are, interestingly, two whips on display in the *Slavery and Freedom* exhibit. The first is the planter’s whip displayed next to the Surinam image. Another whip is also on display in the exhibit on the Domestic Slave Trade. The whip is encased in a large stack of cotton bales stamped with the words ‘King Cotton’. This whip,

a long rope with a leather and wooden handle—more akin to the whip in the Surinam image than the planter's cat'o'nine tails currently on display alongside it—is mounted against a background which shows an illustration titled 'The Lash'. The image depicts a white man holding a whip, identical in style to NMAAHC's artefact, and a Black enslaved man, his bare back dripping with blood turned to the viewer. He is tied by his wrists to a whipping post. The illustrator and editorial cartoonist Henry Louis Stephen created the original colour lithograph in 1863. These artefacts were particularly powerful to this visitor and elicited a visceral reaction. For instance, she claimed she could 'still see bits of blood' on the 'torture equipment' in the display.

To help visitors acknowledge and navigate these powerful responses to the displays, the NMAAHC provides another space for reflection as visitors exit the history galleries. The Oculus, or Contemplative Court, is 'one of the signature spaces of the museum', according to the guidebook:

> Centered around a waterfall that cascades down from a circular skylight, enclosed by amber-coloured glass walls that glow like a beacon above the History Galleries, the Contemplative Court offers a place to sit and reflect, to recharge, and to draw inspiration from the words of historical figures, including Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and journalist and activist Frances Ellen Watkins.[43]

Alluding to the Oculus as 'a beacon above the History Galleries' is both powerful and telling. The Oculus reflection space stands quite literally as a light above the 'darkness' of history. Implied is that figures such as King, Mandela, and Watkins symbolise the 'triumph' over the 'tragedy' of Black history that came before them. This again epitomises the progressive narrative the NMAAHC promotes.

[43] *National Museum of African American History and Culture,* p. 28

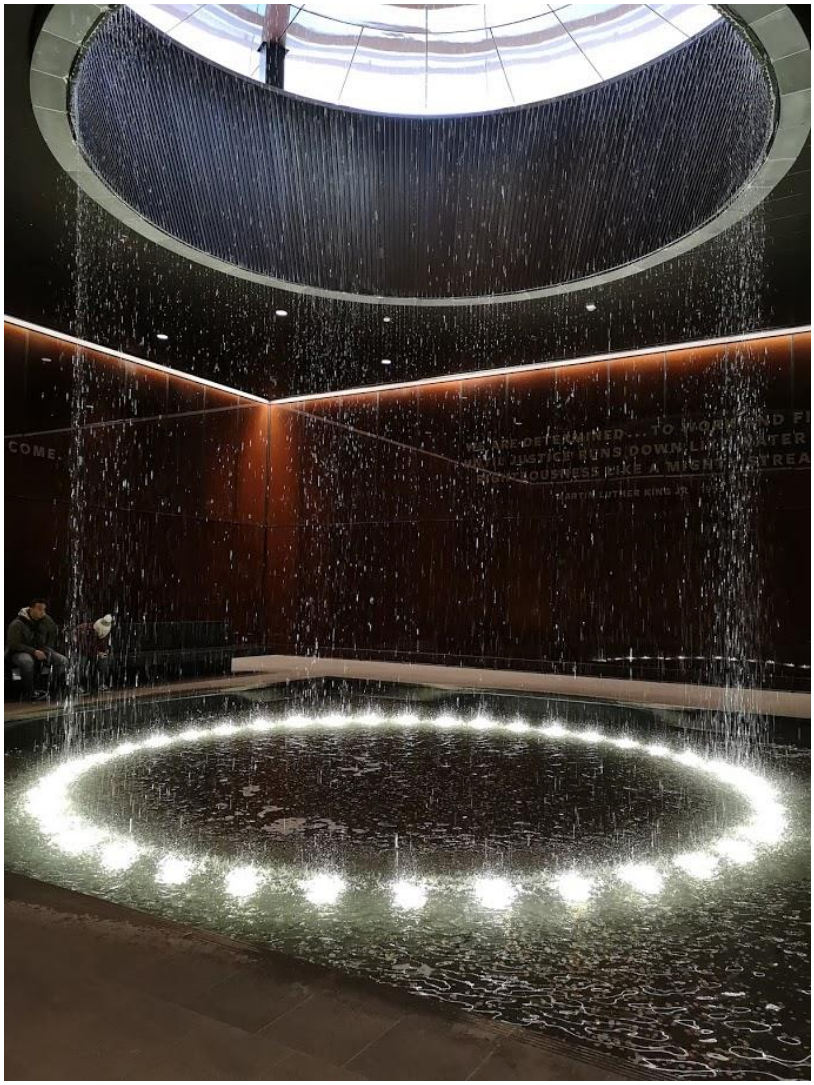

Figure 6.5. The Oculus at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Photograph taken by author (25th February, 2020).

This dynamic is only significantly disrupted by NMAAHC's docent-led tours. In February 2020, I joined the Highlights Tour for the *Slavery and Freedom* exhibit. Our docents introduced themselves and the exhibit, explaining that the Highlights Tour would be a brief walk-through of almost four hundred years of history, which would focus on a few artefacts rather than on the whole narrative of the exhibit. Significantly, though, our docents also told the group that they were going to introduce a theme, which would take the form of a question: 'What would you do to keep your freedom'? The docents explained this theme would be

reintroduced throughout the tour, and that we should consistently ask ourselves to reflect upon it as we walked through the exhibit. The first question came as we walked through the Middle Passage section. 'So what would you do for freedom when you're on a ship with no idea where you're going?', asked our docent. Visitors seemed at first reluctant to answer. 'Would you try to fight?', we were asked. The group nodded and murmured their assent, which led to a discussion of rebellions aboard ships, as well as the difficulty facing those who attempted to overthrow enslavers whilst fettered and without access to weaponry. After this, confidence and a willingness to contribute increased amongst visitors. The group discussed voluntary starvation, which docents explained was often met with force-feeding. Though each of these fates resulted in violence and/or death, by encouraging a discussion of what action enslaved people might have taken at this point, visitors were required to see enslaved Africans not as victims of pain/suffering/death but, in that moment, as subjects capable of action.

By the time our tour reached the section on domestic slavery exhibits, our original one-hour time slot was over. Only eight people from the original group of twenty-three stayed to the end. Significantly, on this docent-led tour, the auction block and the ESP testimonies are not the focus. The docent instead directed our attention to a small, embroidered sack. Known as Ashley's sack, the small cotton pouch was created by an enslaved woman named Rose, who passed the item to her nine-year-old daughter as a gift before the young girl was sold away. In keeping with traditional African conjure bags and medicine bundles which offered protection to loved ones, the sack contained a small dress, a lock of Ashley's hair, and three handfuls of pecans. The provenance of the artefact had been established through an oral lineage before Ashley's descendant Ruth Middleton stitched the story onto the sack in 1921.[44] Auslander calls Ashley's sack 'one of the most evocative objects' in the NMAAHC's

[44] For more, see Tiya Miles, *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2021).

collections.[45] As a symbol of the enduring bond between mother and daughter, and the strength of Black familial lineage, it is difficult to disagree.

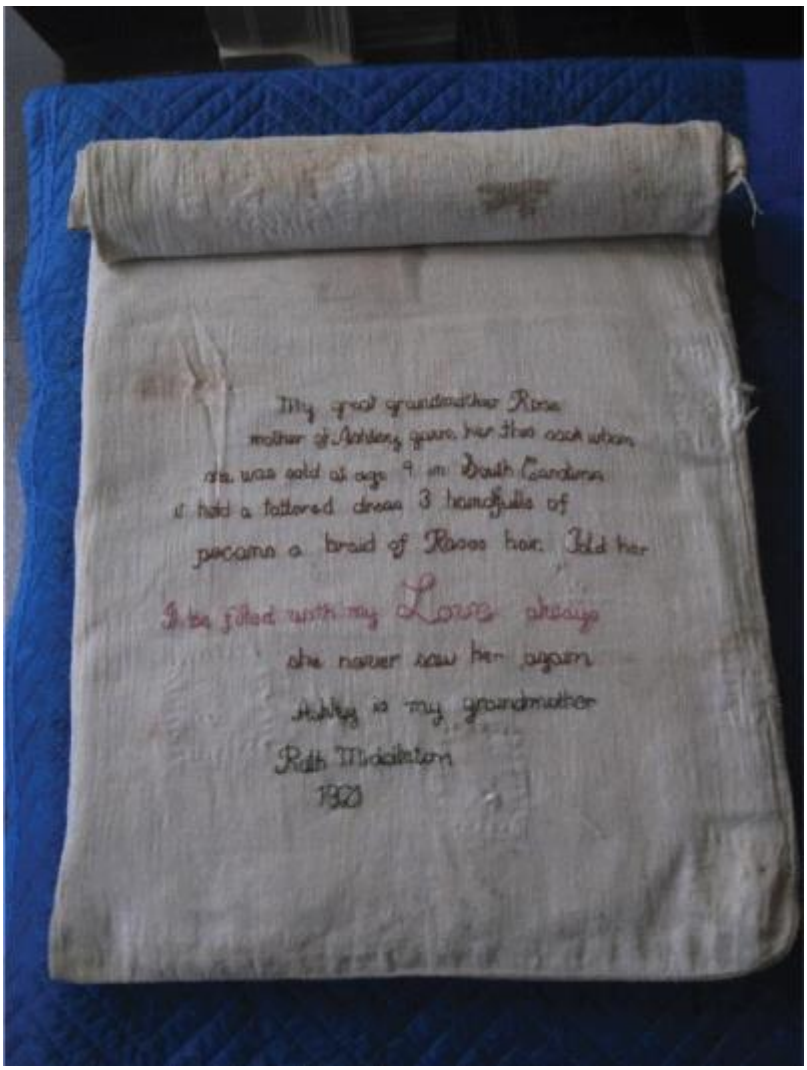

Figure 6.6. Image of Ashley's Sack, image taken from Mark Auslander, 'Rose's Gift: Slavery, Kinship, and the Fabric of Memory', *Present Pasts*, 8:1 (2017), p. 1, <https://presentpasts.info/articles/10.5334/pp.78/> [accessed 16/12/2020].

Visitor responses to the item certainly corroborate Auslander's assertion. He reports that, at a preview of the exhibition in 2016, a young Black woman overheard Auslander express his disappointment that the installation did not make the embroidered text more accessible to visitors by transcribing them in a larger format. The woman responded, 'No […]

[45] Auslander, 'Rose's Gift: Slavery, Kinship, and the Fabric of Memory', *Present Pasts,* 8:1 (2017), p. 1.

it is much better this way. Miss Ruth, you can tell, put so much work into this needlepoint to get the story just right. It's only fitting that we kneel down and put a little effort in, to hear her words again, after all the years. I wouldn't change a thing'.[46] An older woman who accompanied this visitor agreed: 'It is like she is whispering us the story…told by all those women through the generations. So it seems right to bend down and lean in close, for words like these'.[47] The Highlights tour also encouraged a close engagement with Ashley's sack through a reiteration of the tour's theme. 'What would you do to keep your freedom?', our guide repeated, 'What would you do to keep going? You tell your story'. Time constraints led our docents to skip past abolitionism, the story of private Gordon, and the Civil War. The tour ended in the space where the NMAAHC displays copies of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. Emancipation, explained the docent, did not free all enslaved people. Ratification was and remains a flawed process. The fact that Mississippi did not ratify until 2013 is cited to demonstrate the final point, that 'These amendments, and this history, are still living'.

When combined with the docent-led tour that emphasises Black agency and resistance throughout the history galleries, the NMAAHC's position in the commemorative landscape is an important one. In gathering artefacts from communities and building on the values established by the Black Museum Movement, the NMAAHC emphasises Black history *as* American history, using the African American story as a lens through which to view the national narrative. The fact that the museum inhabits such a symbolic space on the National Mall is also significant and serves to establish African American history as integral to the nation's story. Yet, there is room to question the impact of the 'progressive' narrative that the museum perpetuates overall and its effect on the museum's representations of violence.

[46] Mark Auslander, 'Rose's Gift: Slavery, Kinship, and the Fabric of Memory', *Present Pasts,* 8:1 (2017), p. 78.
[47] Ibid.

Placing the History Galleries at the bottom of the museum and framing the visitor's journey as one from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, culture, and celebration, represents the history of slavery and lynching primarily through moments of horrifying brutality against Black bodies. This is corroborated by the NMAAHC's use of anti-slavery images throughout their slavery exhibits. Representations of lynching, too, rely heavily on photographs of victims, often portraying the history as a series of shocking moments of extreme violence against Black people accused of committing a crime. Therefore, though the NMAAHC's collections and exhibits answer the calls for an institution that would be a fitting tribute to African American contributions and culture to the American story, the museum's overarching narrative presents slavery and racial violence as horrors that have mostly been surpassed. Instances of racial violence, such as Blake's whipping, Gordon's scars, and twentieth-century lynchings are presented as shocking interjections, as events that happened in the past but which could not happen again.

*

At the EJI, the narrative is different. Both the museum and the memorial site, located in Montgomery, AL, focus on leading visitors not from slavery to freedom, but from slavery to mass incarceration. Montgomery's dichotomous history as the simultaneous 'Cradle of the Confederacy' and birthplace of the civil rights movement cements the city's centrality to the history of slavery, desegregation, and voting rights. Though it was home to Jefferson Davis's First White House of the Confederacy, the city was also the site of Dr Martin Luther King Jr.'s first ministry at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church as well as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Selma to Montgomery march, central events in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The EJI's first memorialisation project in Montgomery began in 2013 when researchers identified sites associated with the slave trade in the city and erected historical markers to document a history that had long been ignored in the commemorative landscape.

For example, a marker detailing the history of 'The Domestic Slave Trade' was erected next to the city docks, commencing a short walking tour downtown that leads to another marker explaining 'Slave Transportation to Montgomery'. On Commerce Street, a marker titled 'Warehouses Used in the Slave Trade' documents sites where enslaved people were 'marched in chains up the street from the riverfront and railroad station to the slave auction site or to local slave depots'. This additive history project, which inserted commemorative markers within an already marked landscape, created a counter narrative that challenged people's perceptions of the city most associated with Jefferson Davis's Confederacy and the civil rights movement.

Figure 6.7. Equal Justice Initiative Memorial Markers in Downtown Montgomery, AL. Photographs taken by author (18th October, 2018).

The history of lynching was central to the EJI's narrative from slavery to mass incarceration, and over the next couple of years, a team of EJI researchers studied national archives and newspaper collections to find and record reports of lynchings across the nation. Overall, the EJI documented over four thousand lynchings in the US between 1877 and 1950.

Almost eight hundred of those murders were previously undocumented, and more than three hundred occurred outside of southern states.[48] The EJI published their findings in the 2015 report, 'Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror'.[49] Together with the Boston-based MASS Design Group, the EJI used their research to design the National Memorial to Peace and Justice (NMPJ), dedicated to all lynching victims. MASS Design Group, also a non-profit organisation, was established in 2008 and prior to their collaboration with the EJI had designed and built the Butaro District Hospital in Rwanda, as part of the Rwandan Government's rebuilding of the nation's health system after the 1994 genocide.[50] Indeed, as Stevenson frequently visited Rwanda's genocide museum whilst in the country, it is likely this was where he found MASS Design Group as the perfect candidate to work on the EJI memorial.

Though the link between the Rwandan genocide and America's history of racial terror may seem on the surface a tenuous one, the connection is at the heart of Stevenson's vision for his memorial and museum. On PBS NewsHour in December 2016, Stevenson was asked what he hoped to achieve in dedicating the EJI's memorial spaces to the victims of lynching. He replied:

> The Holocaust memorials are very powerful places. You walk through them, you understand things, you come out and you say never again. And I think we need to create spaces in America where we begin to confront this history of racial inequality and we walk out and we say never again. We want them to be sober places. We want them to be informational places, but we also want them to be places where there's beauty, where there's hope, where there's the chance for transformation.[51]

Stevenson's repetition of 'Never Again' shows the influence of Holocaust memorialisation on his conception of the EJI memorial and museum. The phrase was first used in April 1945

[48] Jane McFadden, 'Equal Justice Inititaive Legacy Museum: "From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration", *Journal of American History,* 106:3 (2019), p. 704.
[49] Equal Justice Initiative, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror* (Montgomery, AL: Equal Justice Initiative, 2015).
[50] 'Butaro District Hospital', MASS Design Group Official Website, <https://massdesigngroup.org/work/design/butaro-district-hospital> [accessed 19/12/2020].
[51] PBS NewsHour (broadcast 19th December 2016), PBS NewsHour Productions [accessed 20/12/2016].

by inmates at Buchenwald concentration site, who held handwritten signs heralding the words as they were liberated by Allied forces. Since then, 'Never Again' has expanded to encompass numerous global atrocities, and has become what Baer and Sznaider call a 'new temporality', a 'reverse utopia that projects the catastrophes of the past onto the future' to avoid them happening again. The clarion call of 'Never Again', then, is to 'remember atrocity, honour the victims, and learn for the future'.[52]

The EJI's accompanying guidebook for the NMPJ also confirms the inspiration provided by commemorations in Africa and Europe. In Stevenson's introductory statement, he opens with his recollections of a visit to Berlin, where he writes that he was 'struck by the density of markers, monuments, and dedications to the victims of the Holocaust'.[53] He reports a similar proliferation of memorials in Johannesburg when he visited the apartheid museum. Stevenson felt that this institution had a 'commitment to truth-telling that does not spare visitors from witnessing the violent oppression that Black Africans endured'. 'In Kigali, Rwanda', he continues, 'there is a Genocide Memorial so determined to express the grief of the nation that it holds human skulls'.[54]

Stevenson thus demonstrates his belief that a refusal to shy away from the violence in a nation's past is vital for future progress. The EJI's Legacy Museum, the second half of the EJI's twin project alongside the NMPJ memorial, was therefore 'modelled on important projects used to overcome difficult histories of genocide, apartheid, and horrific human rights abuses' such as those in Africa and Europe.[55] This commitment to commemorating difficult histories explains why the EJI's narrative—the journey on which they take visitors—ends

[52] Alejandro Baer and Natan Sznaider, *Memory and Forgetting in the Post-Holocaust Era: The Ethics of Never Again* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), p.5.
[53] Bryan Stevenson, *The Legacy Museum,* Guidebook (Montgomery, AL: Equal Justice Initiative, 2018), p. 6.
[54] Ibid.
[55] 'The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration', *EJI Website,* <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/museum> [accessed 13/09/2022].

with mass incarceration rather than freedom. ‘We want to tell not only the story of how destructive and traumatising slavery was but also the story of how it evolved’, Stevenson explains. ‘Rather than ‘focusing on the ‘feel-good story’ of ‘courageous civil rights activists’, the EJI wanted to show ‘the brutality and cruelty we have allowed in this country’. ‘It can be painful and uncomfortable’, Stevenson writes, ‘but we ignore it at our peril’.[56]

[56] Stevenson, *The Legacy Museum,* p. 6.

Figure 6.8. The EJI's National Memorial for Peace and Justice. Photograph taken by author (17th October, 2018).

Figure 6.9. Exterior of the EJI's Legacy Museum, image taken from the EJIs Website, <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/news/2018-04-03/full-schedule-peace-and-justice-opening-week> [accessed 15/11/2020].

While the focal point of the NMPJ remains the first national memorial to lynching victims in America, there are five other memorials—including one memorial 'grove'—on the site. The path leading to the lynching memorial structure begins with a series of information panels that link slavery, emancipation, and the failure of Reconstruction to the heyday of what the EJI call "racial terror lynchings". The first sculpture visitors encounter on this path is Ghanaian artist Kwame Akoto-Bamfo's *Nkyinkyim* installation, which shows an enslaved family in chains. The *Nkyinkyim* memorial thus symbolically solidifies slavery's place at the start of the narrative.

The EJI's central memorial uses abstract sculpture to evoke lynching's violent spectacle. The memorial consists of over eight hundred corten-steel monuments, each representing a county in which EJI researchers have documented lynchings. As visitors leave the main structure, they walk through a monument park containing a replica of each column installed in the memorial structure. The EJI's intention is that the monument park will be a dynamic visual record of those communities that have confronted their lynching history—and, more importantly, those that have not.

Further along the park sits Dana King's Guided by Justice*;* depicting three women, the foot soldiers of the Montgomery bus boycott, who stand just beyond the Ida B. Wells Memorial Grove. Together, these elements underscore the role of Black women in the anti-lynching crusade and the mass movement that gained momentum in its wake. As they head down the hill towards the exit, visitors are confronted with Hank Willis Thomas's Raise Up, which commemorates police brutality and racial inequality in the justice system. Willis Thomas, who is the son of historian Deborah Willis, based Raise Up on a photograph taken by Ernest Levi Tsoloane Cole. The image showed a group of South African miners during Apartheid who had been stripped naked and forced to stand facing a wall with their hands raised above their heads. Willis Thomas's sculpture recasts the heads, arms, hands, and

shoulders of these Black men in bronze. The memorial thus evokes the 'hands up, don't shoot' slogan and gesture that has been a central part of the protests against police brutality since the 2014 shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO. The artist's decision to crop the naked bodies of the miners out of his sculpture came from a desire to display the violence ethically. 'I'd always felt it was exploitative looking at the photograph, like I was in some way complicit', Willis Thomas said. 'I wanted to represent it in a way that was ethical, if that was possible'.[57]

As visitors exit the NMPJ site, a polished, black granite column, similar in shape and size the to the corten steel columns, is engraved with Elizabeth Alexander's poem 'Invocation'. The memorial displays the following words: 'Ancestors, you will find us still in cages / Despised and disciplined / You will find us still mis-named / Here you will find us despite / You will not find us extinct / You will find us here memoried and storied'. Alexander's words encapsulate the fundamental difference between the narrative created by curators at the EJI and that of the NMAAHC. Her repetition of 'still', which emphasises the endurance of oppression, hate, incarceration, and maltreatment, exemplifies the EJI's central contention that slavery did not end but evolved, that mass incarceration rather than freedom is the present, where the narrative ends. Yet, Alexander's words, 'Here you will find us despite…You will find us here memoried and storied', signify the EJI's mission with its memorial and museum: to tell the story, to raise awareness of the persistence of inequality, and to challenge white supremacy. In a similar way to Dread Scott's 'Slave Rebellion Reenactment', this emphasis on Black strength and resistance despite all that has come before

[57] Andrew Goldstein, '"History is Waiting to Be Told": Hank Willis Thomas on How Artists can Reshape the Narrative of the United States in Real Time', *ArtNet* (15th July, 2020), <https://news.artnet.com/the-big-interview/hank-willis-thomas-interview-art-angle-1893389> [accessed 13/08/2022].

is ultimately a celebration of freedom and Black culture in the face of enslavement in the past and continued injustice in the present.

The Legacy Museum, the second half of the EJI's twin project, was purposefully built around one mile away from the memorial on the site of a former warehouse where enslaved people were imprisoned, between a historic slave market and Montgomery's main river dock. Visitors are first greeted by the words: "You are standing on a site…where enslaved people were warehoused". At either side are display boards which chart the local history of slavery alongside written first-hand accounts of what it was like to be held in Montgomery's prisons whilst waiting to be sold. From the entrance, visitors walk down a ramp that leads to a dark corridor lined with five cell doors, designed as replicas of slaveholding pens.

The main exhibition hall is divided into the four chronological 'chapters' upon which the EJI base their narrative: enslavement, lynching, segregation, and mass incarceration. Along the left-hand wall is the 'Slavery Evolved' timeline. Visitors can explore each chronological section in more detail in the extensions from this timeline across the rest of the exhibition hall. For example, advertisements for slave auctions printed on satin strips hang from floor to ceiling as one first enters the exhibition hall and appeals for the recapture of runaways are printed on the wall by the entrance. Discriminatory shop signs and statutes from the Jim Crow era are displayed in the space dedicated to the era of segregation alongside video footage of Civil Rights demonstrations. The mass incarceration section features a wall of letters sent to the EJI by incarcerated people asking for help. Another particularly compelling installation in this section is a cluster of four video screens, designed to resemble prison booths, where visitors pick up a telephone to hear an incarcerated person's testimony of cruelty, violence, and assault in the twenty-first century.

In the section devoted to lynching and racial terrorism, a station of touchscreens allows visitors to view video testimonials from the descendants of lynching victims and explore the lynching data amassed by the EJI in 2013 via interactive maps. On an adjacent wall of shelving, 320 labelled glass jars hold soil reclaimed from lynching sites across the US collected as part of the EJI's Community Soil Collection Project. The EJI partnered with community groups across Alabama to gather soil samples from known lynching sites and display them in glass jars bearing lynching victims' names. Across 2015-2016, the EJI hosted community remembrance events with invited guest speakers including historians, civil rights activists, and family members of lynching victims. At the end of these events, EJI staff assigned specific lynching sites to community group members, provided a glass jar inscribed with the name of the victim and the date and location of the lynching, before members embarked upon a journey to collect soil from the site to add to the collection.[58]

Figure 6.10. The EJI's Legacy Museum, image taken from the EJI Website, <https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/museum [accessed 16/11/2020]> [accessed 15/11/2020].

[58] For more information, see the EJI's published report *Lynching in America: A Community Remembrance Project* (Montgomery, AL: EJI, 2016).

The EJI has accumulated attention because of its deviation from the common progressive narrative and its focus on historical continuity. Despite this, representations of slavery at the EJI's Legacy Museum and NMPJ share many common features with the NMAAHC's *Slavery and Freedom* exhibit. In the museum, for example, the image of Gordon's scarred back serves as a visual aid on the 'Slavery Evolved' timeline. Gordon's image is displayed as an example of the violence and punishment enslaved people faced. The wall reads: 'Enslaved people suffered extreme physical violence as punishment for running away, failing to complete assigned tasks, visiting a spouse living on another plantation, learning to read, arguing with whites, working too slowly, possessing anti-slavery materials, or trying to prevent the sale of their relatives'.[59] There is no information about Gordon's life, or his career in the US Army. Thus, the EJI, more than the NMAAHC's display, relies on Gordon as a literal body of evidence. His scars are left to speak for themselves, to symbolise slavery and all that upheld it whilst Gordon's individuality is subordinated to the emotional power that images of Black suffering elicit from visitors.

At the NMPJ, the scarred backs of enslaved people are more fully corporealised. Kwame Akoto Bamfo's *Nkyinkyim* installation—*Nkyinkyim* being an Adrinka symbol which translates as 'twisted' and evokes the proverb 'life's journey is twisted'—'confronts visitors at the entrance with striking beauty and wrenching pain', according to the guidebook.[60] The cement sculpture depicts seven figures, three men, three women, and one child, all bound in iron shackles. A set of shackles lies on the ground, tied to the ankle of the woman who holds the child in her left arm. The empty shackles represent an enslaved person who has already been sold, according to Bamfo.[61] This may explain the woman's agonised expression, and

[59] Legacy Museum 'Slavery Evolved' timeline.
[60] EJI Memorial Guidebook, p. 11.
[61] Erica Ayisi, 'Lynching Memorial: Ghanain Artist Hopes Sculpture Captures Shared Pain Between African Americans and the Motherland', *The Root* (7th May, 2018), <https://www.theroot.com/lynching-memorial-ghanian-artist-hopes-sculpture-captu-1825817044> [accessed 02/11/2020].

her attempt to reach out to the man who stands in front of her. The man, however, 'turns away in shame, as he is 'not able to grant the protection and security that he would have loved to give to the woman'.[62] Another man kneels on the ground with his hands shackled behind him. His back, which faces visitors, is covered with scars.

Figure 6.11. Kwame Akoto-Bamfo's *Nkyinkyim* installation at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. Photograph taken by author (15th October, 2018).

The EJI commissioned Bamfo to create the installation as a companion piece to his *Nkyinkyim* installation in Ghana, a collection of over 1300 ceramic heads. Bamfo's idea for the sculptures was inspired after he learned about the funeral tradition of *nsodie*, practiced by the Akan people of West Africa. Sculptors would create clay busts which were then installed

[62] Ibid.

in cemeteries to preserve 'the memory and the likeness of the dead'.[63] Bamfo's likenesses, both real and imagined, are designed to memorialise African histories and identities.

In the recent BBC documentary *Enslaved with Samuel L. Jackson,* Bamfo was featured speaking about the installation.[64] 'The head represents everything, your soul, your being, it has your eyes' and is 'considered the seat of your soul', he said. He continued to describe how the faces contain identity and humanity, that each head has a story, and that he hopes viewers 'can relate to them': 'Hopefully you can see your uncle in there, you can see your kid brother, and then you can also see your mother'. Bamfo, then, is appealing to his audience's empathy. He wants people to see the humanity behind each sculpture by encouraging audiences to imagine their own friends and relatives. When Bamfo's sculptures represent only the head, they capture the African tradition of *nsodie,* and work within African funerary traditions to mourn the enslaved with a sense of humanity and individuality that, for example, the clay heads at the Whitney plantation's 1811 memorial do not.

However, Bamfo's Nkinkyim installation at the EJI site incorporates the pained bodies of enslaved people, bodies that are shown to be scarred, chained, and in distress. This inclusion of pained Black bodies creates a new dynamic between the viewer and the viewed. When speaking about his installation at the EJI site, Bamfo said, 'I want white people to see [the sculptures] as human beings and not Black people. That is the realism that I tried to put into the work. I want them to feel the pain that these people felt and the emotions from the hands through their feet'.[65] Bamfo's reference to realism here is telling. He implies, with the addition of scarred, chained, and distressed Black bodies, that for white people to see the

[63] Jareh Das, 'Kwame Akoto Bamfo's Sculptural Installation in Ghana Re-Narrativises the Transatlantic Slave Trade', *Cultured Magazine* (29th July, 2020), <https://www.culturedmag.com/kwame-akoto-bamfos-sculptural-installation-in-ghana-re-narrativizes-the-transatlantic-slave-trade/> [accessed 01/11/2020].
[64] "Episode One", *Enslaved with Samuel L. Jackson,* directed by Simcha Jacobovici, *BBC* (11th October, 2020), Television Broadcast.
[65] Ayisi, 'Lynching Memorial'.

sculptures as human beings and not as Black people they would have to be shown Black suffering. His words are reminiscent of John Cummings' declaration to a white visitor at the Whitney Plantation that he wanted to have the innocence of enslaved children at the heart of his narrative to open the hearts of white people and help them to hear Whitney's message. Both approaches replicate and draw from an anti-slavery visual culture shaped by the white gaze that used pained Black bodies as vehicles to encourage a primarily white audience to emotionally engage with enslaved experience.

When I visited the EJI memorial site, visitors were moved by the physical signs of distress on the bodies of the enslaved family. For example, many people pointed out the scars etched onto the back of the male figures; "Look at them. They're in pain", explained a father to his child. As a group of four white Americans walked past, one woman commented that the memorial is 'so powerful'. 'Look at this little baby crying', she said. 'Doesn't it break your heart?' A group of three Black women who passed the memorial stood in silence until one said quietly, 'It just makes me want to cry'. In recognition, perhaps, of the emotionally charged content of Bamfo's memorial, the EJI prohibits the taking of selfies next to the *Nkyinkyim* installation. Some visitors had to remind themselves of the rule. School groups in particular discussed the prohibition in detail, perhaps in shock over the banning of such a popular and normalised practice. However, as with the Emmett Till display in the NMAAHC, the EJI's decision did seem to prompt groups to engage more closely with Bamfo's sculpture. 'It's understandable, though,' said one student, after standing alongside several others from his class who had debated in hushed tones the rules about taking selfies. 'You can see the marks on his back, look'.

The EJI also attempts to foster this kind of emotional engagement with enslaved suffering in the Legacy Museum. Before entering the open museum space, visitors must walk through a dark corridor. Along the right side of the corridor are replica slave pens. As the

museum is situated on the site of a former warehouse in which enslaved people were held before being taken to auction, this part of the exhibit is intended to be an immersive space in which visitors are placed at the heart of Montgomery's slave trade. Significantly, though, there are Holograms of actors portraying enslaved individuals confined within each cell. The holograms are activated by a sensor placed directly above the iron bars of the cell door, requiring visitors almost to press their faces against the bars to hear each actor's plea. In a similar way to the Hagerstown block and ESP narratives displayed at the NMAAHC, this strategy encourages a more intimate engagement with the display. Visitors must physically confront the holograms, and it is difficult to turn away from the characters as they address you directly.

The characters at the EJI include a woman who has had her children taken from her; a woman who is to be sold away from her elderly mother; and a man who laments over his lost wife. The final cell contains two young children—presumably belonging to the woman encountered in the first cell—who ask visitors if they have seen their mother and if they can help to find her. The darkness, the confinement, and the emotional pleas and testimonies from the holograms are clearly an attempt to relate the experience of being sold in a more viscerally engaging way for visitors than if they were to simply read testimonies from an information board. They are designed to encourage audiences to imagine for themselves what it was like to be sold away from their family; to lose their parents, children, or spouse.

Silke Arnold-de Simine has shown in her study of the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool how the use of video testimonies such as these to elicit empathy for enslaved people has its roots, like so many cultural forms of trauma representation, in the context of Holocaust memorial culture. Testimonies in this earlier commemorative context were prioritised as a response to the imminent passing of survivors, as it was felt that these audio-visual records could provide direct encounters for future generations and to let survivors tell

their own story in their own words. The holograms, too, are an attempt to tell the story of those who were enslaved from their own perspective. This strategy, and these stories, attempt to counteract the deep-rooted image of enslaved African Americans as passive victims and insist instead on their human dignity. They work, writes Arnold-de Simine, 'to defy visual-verbal traditions that were born of and are very much part of the same ideology that justified slavery in the first place'.[66]

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Commemorative representations of lynchings are central to the EJI's NMPJ and Legacy Museum. Visitors approach the main memorial structure via a winding path. The memorial, composed of over eight hundred pillars of Alabama-forged corten steel, one for each county with documented lynchings, leads visitors through an immersive journey. The EJI's manipulation of space at the memorial is central to this. As visitors first enter the memorial space, the steel pillars stand at ground level, connected to the ceiling via black metal poles. Visitors must navigate their way through the steel forest, often finding themselves face to face with another county, another list of murdered people.

[66] Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum*, p. 99.

Figure 6.12. Steel pillars at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. Photograph taken by author (15th October, 2018).

The colour of the corten steel varies from pillar to pillar. As Pete Candler describes, each 'has a unique personality of its own in hues—cocoa, chestnut, burnt umber, ochre—as varied as the skin tones of the victims it represents'.[67] This use of material, which varies depending on the lighting and time, is similar to how Adjaye describes the metal corona encasing the NMAAHC. The homage to Black skin is thus essential to each structure's design. The EJI's memorial, however, takes this even further. Over time, as the steel pillars are exposed to Alabama's extreme weather, they will oxidise. Some already have red trails of rust running down their sides. For many visitors, this creates the illusion that the pillars are

[67] Pete Candler, 'Names of the Lynched', *The Christian Century,* 135:13 (2020), p. 23.

dripping with blood. Noelle Trent, writing for *The Public Historian,* conjured the same image when she wrote that the memorial is constructed so the rain will 'wash the russet tones down the monuments staining the wooden floor beneath, enforcing the staining legacy of lynching in America'.[68]

As visitors turn a corner and begin to walk down the second stretch of the memorial, the floor starts to descend, and the monuments rise. This transformation further immerses visitors in the history of lynching, as the steel pillars come to evoke hanging bodies. Visitors, who must now look up at the suspended pillars, are thus positioned to share a historical space with those who perpetrated the lynching as well as those who mourn(ed) the dead. This emotional engagement constitutes the climax of the EJI memorial's space, and visitors are provided a space to sit and reflect upon their response.

Figure 6.13. The National Memorial for Peace and Justice. Photograph taken by author (17th October, 2018).

[68] Noelle Trent, 'The National Memorial for Peace and Justice', *The Public Historian,* 41:1 (2019), p. 137.

The stories of more than ninety Black men, women, and children who were lynched also line the corridor. Plaques provide visitors with details of the variety of trivial reasons Black people were lynched: Henry Patterson was lynched in Labelle, FL, in 1926 for asking a white woman for a drink of water. Laura Woolf was lynched in Barber, NC, in 1930 after a white merchant said she stole a ham. Compared to the NMAAHC display of lynching photographs which introduced Jesse Washington as a teenage farmhand found guilty of rape and Allen Brooks as a man accused of molesting a three-year-old child, the EJI's plaques emphasise the insubstantiality of many of the reported crimes white perpetrators used to justify lynchings. Though the accusations of more serious crimes would have stirred up considerable anger and a desire for "justice" amongst white civilians, and may indeed have contributed to the often celebratory and carnivalesque atmosphere that characterised spectacle lynchings, at the heart of these mass racially motivated murders was not a desire for justice but a desire for domination. Whether accused of rape or transgressing established racial behavioural codes by asking for a drink of water, the fate was the same. By drawing attention to the more trivial "crimes" that white perpetrators used to justify lynchings, the EJI educate their audiences about the quotidian nature of white supremacist rhetoric and violence that had carried from slavery into the laws and social norms of the US in the twentieth century.

Around the corner, a water wall bears an inscription: 'Thousands of African Americans are unknown victims of racial terror lynchings whose deaths cannot be documented, many whose names will never be known. They are all honoured here'. In the middle of the memorial's four corridors, a grassy hillock provides views of downtown Montgomery and the river that once transported ships carrying enslaved African Americans. This space, in which one is both viewer and viewed, evokes the public spaces such as courthouse lawns where many lynchings were perpetrated. In the present, though, this

visibility presents a challenge. Stevenson pointed out to Campbell Robertson of the *New York Times* that 'when standing here, you are on view as well, faced on all sides by the names of the thousands who were run down, instantly judged and viciously put to death. "You might feel judged yourself," he said. "What are you going to do?"[69] The memorial itself offers a possible solution to Stevenson's challenging question. As visitors leave the main structure, they walk through a monument park containing a replica of each column installed in the memorial structure. Laid side by side, the duplicate monuments are waiting to be acknowledged by and erected in the counties they represent.

Figure 6.14. Central hillock at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. Photograph taken by author (17th October, 2018).

[69] Campbell Robertson, 'A Lynching Memorial is Opening', *The New York Times* (25th April, 2018).

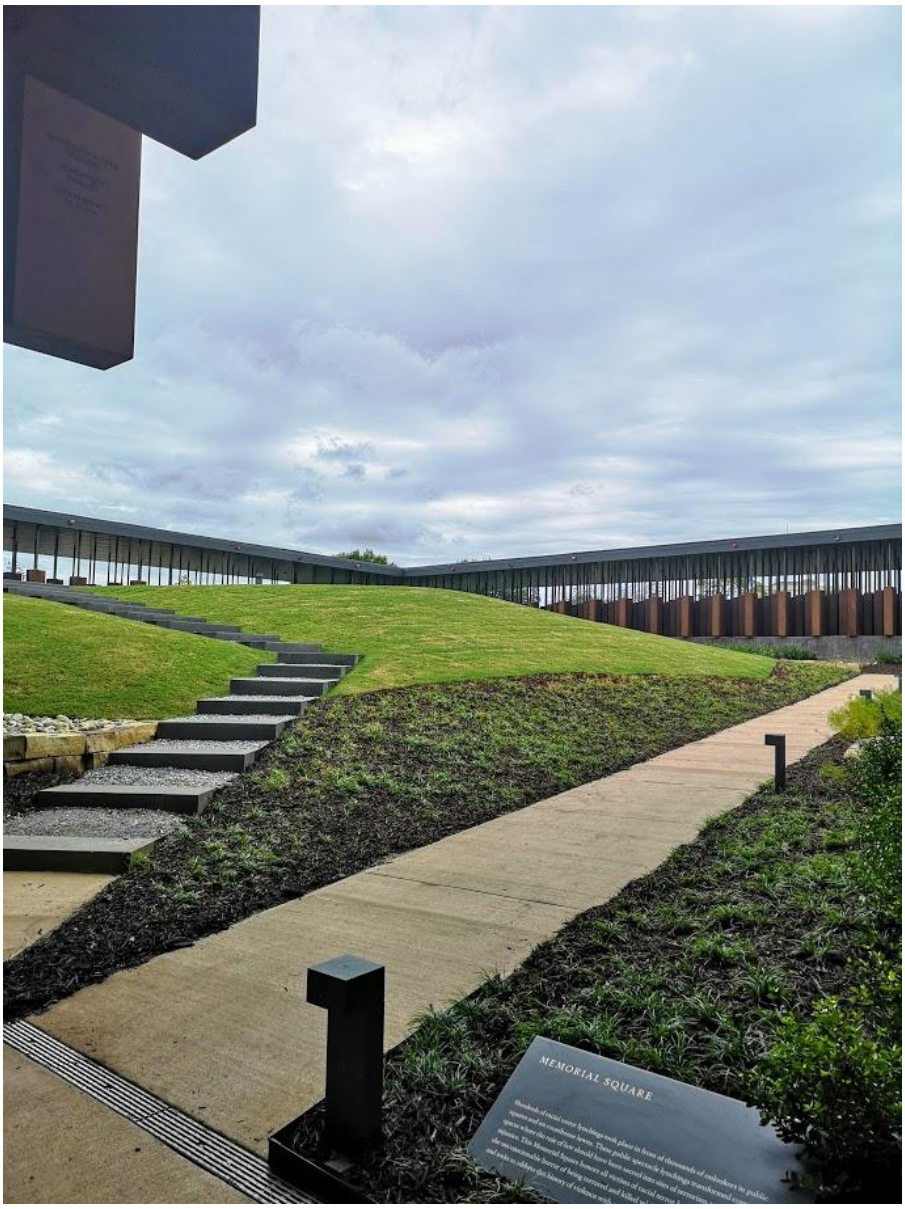

Figure 6.15. Rows of memorial pillars waiting to be claimed by US counties at the EJI's National Memorial for Peace and Justice. Photograph taken by author (17th October, 2018).

Where lynching photographs are absent completely from the main memorial site, the museum does exhibit several on its 'Slavery Evolved' timeline and offers the opportunity to view more at an interactive station. However, the photographs at this station are initially blurred out. Visitors can decide whether they wish to view the photograph clearly. If they do so, the image blurs out again after ten seconds. By denying visitors a prolonged view of the photographs with an active intervention, the EJI forces visitors to question their own desire

the view the photographs again, to see them for longer, or to see more of them. This may be an attempt to prevent prolonged voyeurism or the gathering of visitors to capture the photographs themselves, a phenomenon which is often seen at the NMAAHC, but it also encourages introspection. Visitors, who must decide whether to press the button again, are encouraged to question their own desire and reasoning behind the action they plan to take. Why do they want to see more of the photographs? Why do they want to see a specific photograph again? This kind of attempt to foster self-reflection is not found at the NMAAHC, where lynching photographs are shown in their entirety on display walls, allowing visitors to view them unchallenged for as long as they like and capture their own photographs for posterity.

However, the EJI do not use this strategy on the three lynching photographs incorporated into the *Slavery Evolved* timeline. The first is the photograph of Laura Nelson and L.D. Nelson, which is displayed next to an enlarged photograph of Lige Daniels's lynching, the same image printed on the cover of the *Without Sanctuary* collection book. Both images, however, are displayed in such a way as to shift the emphasis away from the lynched body. Lige Daniels' image, for example, is enlarged to the extent that visitors stand at eye-level with white bystanders in the photograph. This sets up a confrontational encounter, and the viewer has no choice but to study the white faces in the mob; some impassive, some smirking, some searching for the camera's lens. Furthermore, of the three images that exist of Laura and L.D. Nelson's lynchings—two are postcard images of each body, the other an image of the mother and son hanging from the Canadian River Bridge in Okfuskee County, OK—the EJI and the NMAAHC display the latter, in which the Nelsons themselves are barely visible, their bodies indiscernible as anything other than two small shapes hanging above the river's surface. The viewer's eye is more immediately drawn to the bridge, and to the crowd that stand shoulder to shoulder along its length. Similarly, further down the timeline, a portion

of Henry Smith's lynching photograph is also displayed. Once again, the image is enlarged. This time, though, the viewer's eyeline is level with the word 'JUSTICE', painted in bold white text on the scaffold. The majority of the space in the image is occupied by the crowd that dominates the foreground, their backs turned to the viewer. Visitors, in a similar way to the NMPJ memorial space when the pillars are raised to evoke hanging bodies, are thus positioned to share a historical space with perpetrators and/or mourners.

One of the alternative ways the EJI museum represents lynching is through video animations created in conjunction with artist Molly Crabapple. Three videos, 'Slavery to Mass Incarceration' and 'Terror Lynching in America', which are narrated by Bryan Stevenson, and 'Reconstruction in America, 1865-1878', narrated by Tera DuVernay—the EJI's Deputy Director of Museum and Memorial Operations and sister of filmmaker Ava DuVernay—can be viewed online. The fourth, a video documenting the lynching of John Hartfield in 1919, is only available to view inside the museum. Crabapple paints images and phrases to illustrate the EJI's narrative. For example, Crabapple illustrates Jeff Brown's lynching in 1916 from the moment Brown accidentally bumped into a white woman on his way to catch a train, through his beating, hanging, and the sale of his lynching photograph as a souvenir. Crabapple's animations are reminiscent of the cartoons used in the twentieth-century Black press to show the violence of lynchings without displaying photographs of beaten or murdered Black bodies. Though this strategy does not diminish visceral responses—for example, one African American woman in the museum, upon viewing the video that narrates John Hartfield's lynching in Ellisville, MS, 1919, left at the point when the video began to describe the severing of Hartfield's fingers—it does avoid an over-reliance on a visual archive that risks the dehumanisation of lynching victims. Lynching photographs are thus a relatively small component of the EJI museum's representational strategies. Visitors can choose whether to see the majority of them, and when they are displayed, they

are curated, to an extent, to direct visitors' attentions to white crowds as opposed to tortured Black bodies.

Figure 6.16. Screen shot taken from Molly Crabapple's 'Terror Lynching in America' video, *YouTube.com* (2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aS61QFzk2tI&list=PLPOd-qkn83XoKGzJ-hC22KXwZ3De16X3d> [accessed 16/12/2020].

The Legacy Museum also memorialises lynching victims through the display of jars of soil collected from known lynching sites as part of the EJI's Community Soil Collection Project. According to the guidebook, the project 'aims to transcend time and altered terrain to bear witness to the devastation these murders wrought upon individuals, families, communities, and our nation as a whole'.[70] Like the Moore's Ford motorcade that creates a palimpsestic version of the sites associated with the 1946 lynching, the EJI's Community Remembrance Project allows the families of lynching victims who were previously deprived

[70] Equal Justice Initiative, *The Legacy Museum,* p. 42.

of the wherewithal and the right to mark the landscape with monuments and memorials to their loved ones to create a counter-narrative tied to the soil on which their family members were killed that resists white-controlled narratives of lynching. Displaying the names of over three hundred individual lynching victims on the wall of jars is once again reminiscent of Maya Lin's VVM. As opposed to being etched upon a black granite wall, though, these names are inscribed upon the burgundy, brown and golden hues of various soils. Like the corten steel pillars of the NMPJ and the reflections cast by the copper corona encasing the NMAAHC, the range of colours on the Community Remembrance Project's shelves are a homage to the individual skin colours, the bodies, and the lives of lynching victims. The land upon which these African Americans were lynched has been reclaimed and physically kept in their names, a process which symbolically transfers ownership of this history from perpetrating, silent white communities to the communities and descendants of the victims.

Figure 6.17. The Community Remembrance Project's jars of soil inside the EJI's Legacy Museum, *Architectural Record* (2018), <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/13394-national-memorial-for-peace-and-justice-by-offers-powerful-haunting-experience> [accessed 15/12/2020].

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The Legacy Museum's 'Reflection Space' takes the form of a small, square room at the exit of the museum's main exhibition hall. The walls are composed of bronze-coloured metallic plates, which reflect the lights and create a dazzling, dancing effect. On three of the walls are the names and faces of those who have led the fight against slavery and racial inequality. On the fourth wall is the following quote from civil rights activist Mary McLeod Bethune: 'If we have the courage and tenacity of our forebears, who stood firmly like a rock against the lash of slavery, we shall find a way to do for our day what they did for theirs'. According to the guidebook, this 'Reflection Space' honours these individuals whilst also 'providing visitors a place to pause and reflect on their museum experience'.

Though it may be expected that this celebratory space honouring Americans who have fought against racial injustice would constitute the end point of the visitor's journey, keeping in line with the uplifting narrative that is typical of the NMAAHC and other Black History museum exhibits, the Legacy Museum uses its exit corridor to remind visitors of existing challenges. The corridor is lined with a series of questions, accompanied by photographs, artwork, and sculptures, that confront visitors with contemporary issues related to local and national commemoration and inequality in the justice system. 'Should slavery be completely abolished in the United States?' asks the EJI, referring to the thirteenth amendment's loophole that only abolished slavery except as a punishment for crime. 'Should Dr Sims be honored with statues or should they be removed?' comes next, a reference to the contested memorial on Montgomery's Capitol lawn which honours J. Marion Sims, whose early advances in gynaecological medicine relied upon Sims' experiments on enslaved Black women.[71] 'Should very young children be prosecuted as adults?' and 'How do we eliminate the presumption of

[71] See Deidre Cooper Owens, *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2017).

guilt assigned to Black children?' follow next. 'Should we do more to publicly acknowledge our history of racial injustice?' 'Do churches and people of faith have a special obligation to address the history of racial inequality?' and 'Should the US Supreme Court formally acknowledge its role in authorizing and sustaining the enslavement of Black people and apologize for overtly racist rulings?' are the final three questions which address contemporary reluctance from many American institutions to recognise their role in upholding racist systems and laws.

An interactive station at the end of the hallway poses the question "What Do I Do Now?", and offers information on voter registration, ongoing petitions, and opportunities for volunteering. Next to this are another set of interactive screens. Here, visitors can explore the EJI's response to two questions: 'Why this Museum?', and 'Why a Memorial?' The two videos are particularly telling of the experience the EJI hopes to provide for visitors. Firstly, the 'Why this Museum?' video covers the history of slavery in Montgomery. EJI workers testify to the power they believe the museum has to 'expose the narratives' that have shaped US history and marginalised the stories of enslavement and racial violence.

The 'Why a Memorial?' video features less narrative, and runs instead through the series of images displayed on the 'Slavery Evolved' timeline. First, the Zanzibar memorial, a reminder of the African sites that inspired Stevenson and the EJI to build the NMPJ. Second appears Gordon, followed in quick succession by an enslaved family, a crowd of incarcerated people, an image of a prisoner tied to a pickaxe, the photograph of Elizabeth Eckford's first day at Little Rock Central High School in 1957 where she was verbally assaulted by white women and students, a video of a Black man being kicked and pushed down a street, Bull Connor's fire hoses being turned on Black teenagers during a Civil Rights demonstration in Birmingham, AL, the white crowd attending Lige Daniels lynching. Daniels's feet are briefly visible amongst the white faces before the video transitions to an image of chained feet,

belonging to a group of young incarcerated Black men. Stevenson's only narrative comes at the end. 'We've been silent about lynching', he says. 'It's time to end the silence'. The video ends with a photograph of the NMPJ. 'Why a Memorial?' is thus similar in style and content to the NMAAHC's video installation 'The Struggle for the Soul of America'. Both videos start with slavery. Both feature Gordon's photograph, as well as those showing lynchings and the violence faced by Black people during the Civil Rights movement. Both videos also draw visual connections between slavery and the present, the NMAAHC through the attack in Charleston, SC, and the death of Sandra Bland, the EJI through mass incarceration.

Yet, the positioning of these videos within both museum's overarching narratives significantly influences how they present scenes of violence to visitors. The NMAAHC places their video in the history galleries, next to the Emmett Till memorial. Therefore, the 'Struggle for the Soul of America' is ultimately a struggle that visitors leave behind them as they continue their journey upwards through the museum. The EJI, however, place their video at the very end of the Legacy Museum, and so use these images to remind visitors that the struggle is ongoing, that this violence not only happened in the past but is happening still. This pairing of past and present can be found throughout the Legacy Museum's exhibits. For example, the slave pens containing holograms at the entrance to the museum are mirrored at the end by another hologram installation. Designed as a set of four prison phone booths, visitors can pick up a phone and listen to the testimonies of incarcerated people. The 'Voices from Inside' exhibit, according to the guidebook, invites visitors 'to bear witness […] by hearing directly from courageous EJI clients in simulated prison visits. Testimonies include Anthony Ray Hilton's story, who spent thirty years on death row in Alabama. He was released in 2015 after the EJI proved his wrongful conviction in court. Monica Washington also testifies to the sexual abuse that she has faced whilst incarcerated. She was raped and

impregnated by a prison guard before being forced to give up the child the day after it was born.

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Jason Morgan Ward, writing for the *American Historical Review,* ventured that '[p]erhaps the greatest accomplishment of EJI's twin-pronged project is its ability to create a narrative arc of violence that holds even without literal depiction or re-creation'.[72] For the most part, this is true. The Legacy Museum and NMPJ together emphasise that the history of racial violence is not composed of single moments captured in the scores of photographs of mutilated Black bodies but is instead a national and social reality, one that is grounded in the history of enslavement and is inherent in today's endemic mass incarceration. The NMPJ does this by positioning their national lynching memorial at the centre of a narrative—which visitors physically map as they traverse the memorial site—from slavery to mass incarceration. In the Legacy Museum, the dialectical mirroring of images of family separation in the slave pens to Monica Washington's harrowing sexual assault and separation from her child; the disproportionate numbers of Black Americans who were lynched to the disproportionate number of Black Americans incarcerated and sentenced to life imprisonment or death, echoes the same message. Historical racial violence is not presented as a moment in time, a dark stain on a chronological timeline of progression. At the EJI, racial violence *is* the timeline, and is presented as a continuum, an ever-evolving social blight.

The NMAAHC is both similar and dissimilar. Situated on the National Mall, the museum marks an incredible achievement: the insertion, permanently, of Black history and culture into the symbolic heart of the national narrative. Community engagement projects on a national scale endowed the NMAAHC with an impressive collection of artefacts such as

[72] Jason Morgan Ward, 'The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration; The National Memorial for Peace and Justice', *The American Historical Review,* 123:4 (2018), p. 1272.

the *nkisi* sack that represent enslaved strength, resistance, and community. Allowing visitors to view the nation's story through the African American lens also grants a previously undermined authority to Black perspectives on the founding of America, the declaration of independence, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Furthermore, the NMAAHC's vast resources offer opportunities for new genealogical and historical research that focus on African American history and experience.

However, the NMAAHC's narrative structure frames the history of slavery and racial violence in a way that relegates it to a 'dark' past that is ultimately overcome by American progress. Newkirk described the overall sensation when he wrote that the descent to the NMAAHC's history galleries and the following ascent through history achieves 'an effect similar to Dante's harrowing journey in *Inferno*, and the walk upwards through Reconstruction, Redemption, the civil-rights movement, and into the present day is a reminder of the constant push and pull of horror and protest'.[73] Extending Newkirk's analogy, though, reveals the implications of the NMAAHC's narrativisation of slavery and racial violence. Slavery, as the lowest level, becomes inferno, a space full of hell's torments; it is the level that visitors must endure before reaching Reconstruction (purgatorio), and, following this, the civil rights era (paradiso). The community and culture galleries, the top two levels and the beating heart of the museum, thus constitute the spheres of heaven. Though dangers still threaten the visitor in the present and in these higher realms, the feeling overall is that slavery's inferno has been overcome and left behind. At the EJI, however, the visitor never leaves inferno. Instead, they are asked to traverse and remain within the circles of hell (slavery, lynching, segregation and mass incarceration). Their only way out, along the

[73] Newkirk, 'How a Museum Reckons with Black Pain'.

museum’s final corridor, is through the interrogation of racial violence and inequality in the present.

Conclusion

Refusing the Gaze, Redressing the Past

At the beginning, this study asked if the oft-represented spectacle of Black pain simply rehearses the dehumanising and objectifying white gaze, or if it is possible for representations of Black pain to challenge and resist it? By consistently referring to the work that has been done and continues to be done by Black artists and activists, this study has shown how both institutions and expressive culture can challenge the dominant white gaze and avoid the spectacularisation of Black suffering through processes of self-reflection and the re-introduction of life, loss, and the celebration of Black strength into their narratives of slavery and racial violence. The introduction of such narratives in the face of slavery in the past and continued racial violence in the present proved imperative to my discussion of commemorative sites and performances. The Dread Scott reenactment in particular emphasised the need to connect the past to the present to move the focus away from prioritising spectacular violence and privileging white modes of looking at Black pain.

Like Dread Scott's 'Slave Rebellion Reenactment', the Moore's Ford lynching reenactment also allowed reenactors to participate in embodied acts of counter-narrative production. By dedicating the reenactment to Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and the 'Charleston Nine', the reenactment wrenched the past forward to confront audiences with the realities of racial violence in the twenty-first century. This thesis advocates this method of centring the past's constant and ever-evolving impact upon the present in commemorative practice. When commemorative sites or performances offer audiences access to some form of "period rush" or emotional encounter with scenes of violence from a fixed or static past, they become more vulnerable to the risks associated with the spectacularisation

and dehumanisation of African American victims of racial violence. Failure to communicate the continued effects of slavery and racial violence in the present therefore risks instilling a sense of moral superiority in audiences who witness scenes of racial violence as horrifying remnants of a past that could not happen again in twenty-first century America. Thus, remembering slavery and racial violence in visual commemorative culture, be it through museum exhibits, reenactment performances, art, literature, or photography, should be difficult, painful, and should continually act upon and interrogate the present. In the words of one Moore's Ford reenactor, the traumatic past should not be 'somewhere that you want to inhabit'.[1]

One particularly striking commemoration that exemplifies this unsettling and disturbing mode of interrogation is Doreen Garner and Kenya Robinson's 2017 exhibition 'White Man on a Pedestal', which involved Garner's recreation of a monument to J. Marion Sims.[2] The monument Garner recreated was the same one moved from its original site in New York's Central Park in April 2018 and relocated, without its pedestal, to the cemetery in Brooklyn where Sims is buried. Proclaimed as the father of modern gynaecology, Sims is revered for performing the first vesicovaginal fistula repair and was honoured as the president of the American Medical Association and American Gynaecological Society for his pioneering work. What was less known in this history of medical advancement was the fact that Sims's technique was perfected, over many years, on the bodies of African American enslaved women. These operations were performed without consent and without anaesthetic.

Garner first came across Sims whilst researching the life of Henrietta Lacks, a young African American woman who underwent treatment for cervical cancer at the Johns Hopkins

[1] Apel, 'Violence and Historical Reenactment', p. 258.
[2] Kenya Robinson's contribution to the exhibition was a sculpture titled 'Twelve Thousand Maniacs!', which featured twelve thousand miniature white men wearing suits and carrying briefcases. Robinson etched the word 'share' onto the back of each figure, symbolising how all white people benefit from white supremacy.

Hospital in Baltimore, MD, in 1951.[3] Whereas previously, cancer cells collected by medical professionals at the hospital died after a period of time too short to allow for adequate study, Henrietta's cells doubled every day. Now known as "Hela" cells in modern medicine, Henrietta's cells have been used to test 'the effects of radiation and poisons, to study the human genome, to learn more about how viruses work', and they also played a crucial role in the development of the polio vaccine.[4] They are still used in medical research on cancer cell growth and the effects of drugs, hormones, and viruses.

Garner's research on Henrietta Lacks led her to discover the role enslaved women were forced to play in the advancement of gynaecological medicine. In response, she designed 'White Man on a Pedestal', the part exhibit, part performance displayed at Pioneer Works in Brooklyn, NY. In the exhibit, which opened in November 2017, Garner featured a foam replica of her recreated monument to Sims, alongside surgical tools and body parts. Writer and performer Toniann Fernandez attended the exhibition and described how viewers were met at the entrance with various gynaecological medical tools from the nineteenth century, including Sims's Vaginal Speculum. Garner had also created the visceral and evocatively titled *Rack of Those Ravaged and Unconsenting,* a 'giant meat rack laden with masses of brown flesh' made from 'silicon casts of real women of colour, adorned with pearls and beads'.[5] Beyond this stood Sims himself, a three-dimensional fifteen-foot-tall foam version of the monument, that used to stand in Central Park. Garner had painted Sims in 'blood-red polyurethane'.[6] The pedestal Sims stood upon, which Garner had kept the grey-white colour of stone, had the word 'Poneros', meaning 'Evil One' in Greek, etched across it in sharp,

[3] Forrest Muelrath, 'Memory and Ritual: An Interview with Doreen Garner by Forrest Muelrath', *Bomb Magazine* (22nd November, 2017), bombmagazine.org/articles/memory-and-ritual-an-interview-with-doreen-garner [accessed 21/07/2022].
[4] 'Honoring Henrietta: The Legacy of Henrietta Lacks', Johns Hopkins Medicine Website <www.hopkinsmedicine.org/henriettalacks/index.html> [accessed 21/07/2022].
[5] Toniann Fernandez, 'White Man on a Pedestal', *The Paris Review* (29th November, 2017), <www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/11/29/white-man-pedestal> [accessed 21/07/2022].
[6] Ibid.

hand-written lettering.[7] For this viewer, the inscription evokes the word ‘Justice’, which was painted on the scaffold upon which Henry Smith was lynched in 1898 Fitchburg, MA. At the heart of this justice, though, was not the desire for domination but the desire for retribution and redress.

Figure 7.1. Doreen Garner, ‘Poneros’ (2017), Installation View at Pioneer Works, NY. Image taken from Toniann Fernandez, ‘White Man on a Pedestal’, *The Paris Review* (29th November, 2017), www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/11/29/white-man-pedestal [accessed 21/07/2022].

[7] Ibid.

In a move that redirected the trauma inflicted by Sims upon enslaved women's bodies back onto the white surgeon, Garner's February 2018 performance that accompanied her display brought Sims together once again with his surgical tools and the procedure which brought him wealth and fame. Along with a group of Black female performers, Garner reenacted a vesicovaginal fistula repair. This time, though, Garner performed the procedure on J. Marion Sims himself. She created a silicone skin cast of the body from the monument and reenacted the procedure in front of a live audience. The work was entitled 'Purge'. An endoscopic camera allowed spectators to view the entirety of the internal operation. When questioned over the violent nature of her work, Garner said, 'It's not about creating a gruesome work. It's about creating a work that has subtle nuances where you don't completely know how to feel. And maybe that's why it stays with you'. [8] She continued: 'When you think about the ways in which Black people have been used in this country, it does just come down to a body. Extra sets of hands to do tasks, people to take out your anger and frustration on, people to do experiments on, just disposable bodies'.[9]

Garner's hope that her reenactment 'stays with' her audience, precisely because they do not 'completely know how to feel', indicates how her approach aims to disrupt and unsettle viewers. Rather than creating a space in which her audience come to believe they can experience for themselves the history Garner is memorialising—that they can understand the pain felt by the enslaved women forced to endure Sims's experiments—she generates what Carolyn Pedwell has called a 'confrontational empathy', a form of emotional engagement that can accommodate the 'anger, rage, [and] bitterness that is not easily healed or

[8] 'Doreen Garner Sculpts Our Trauma', *Art 21* (21st February, 2018), <https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/doreen-garner-sculpts-our-trauma/?utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=Art21_Twitter> [accessed 21/07/2022].
[9] Ibid.

redirected'.[10] The subtle nuances at the centre of Garner's work create a space in which the viewer's position is disrupted and challenged. She presents Black bodily pain in a way that is undeniably gruesome to emphasise the disposability of the bodies of Black enslaved people throughout American history. However, as Garner redirects the specific historical and physical trauma at the centre of her narrative back onto the body of the white male—onto Sims himself—she avoids any direct form of representation or reenactment of Black female historical trauma. Audiences to the reenactment are thus positioned as witnesses to Sims's experiments in a way that forces a confrontation with their own expectations, fears, and desires. What was it that they expected to see? What was it that they wanted to see? And why?

In a November 2017 interview, Garner spoke in more detail about how she felt that artists often did not show the Black body 'the way it is used in real life', '[c]ompletely dehumanised, chopped apart' and 'just used to benefit…white people'.[11] She went on to say that her interest lay 'in using that image in a different way, with sculpture' to 'transform the material to read more as uncanny relating to the way we view or experience human bodies on a daily basis'.[12] Thus, whilst recognising the prevalence of images of abject Black bodies and drawing attention to their dehumanising effects, Garner's use of gruesome imagery is intended 'to read more as uncanny': to affect, to haunt, and to unsettle her audience as they are confronted with the daily reality of violence against Black people. When asked whether she felt the Sims performance was a direct memorialisation for the women who suffered extreme violence at his hands, she replied: 'I guess. I kind of read it to be more of a ritual—I

[10] Carolyn Pedwell, 'Affect at the Margins: Alternative Empathies in a Small Place', *Emotion, Space and Society*, 8 (2013), p. 20.

[11] Muelrath, 'Memory and Ritual'.
[12] Ibid.

don't read it as memorialising. I think what I'm trying to do is to expose a lot of things that people never even really knew. So it's not necessarily new information, but a resurfacing'.[13]

A resurfacing. A redressing. A revitalisation. This ritual reenactment of Black female trauma is one which, as with the nineteenth-century auction reenacted by the newly emancipated African American population of Charleston in 1865, subverted and destroyed white rhetorical and physical control over the Black body. Yet, Garner's ritual did not solely represent the violence Sims inflicted upon African American enslaved women; it also signified 'the way [the Black body] is used in real life' to this day. Furthermore, by having a group of Black women perform the surgery on Sims, Garner redirected the memory of traumatic violence. She created and participated in an embodied act of counter-memory that commemorated Sims's victims without re-animating the violence inflicted upon their bodies. Garner explained that her aim with the reenactment was to 'create a traumatic experience'.[14] She wanted the audience to walk away 'feeling like they can't unsee what they just saw. Something that is burned in and lasts, and you can never get rid of it'.[15] She explained: 'Most of the time I'm trying to sculpt a trauma…so that people aren't forgetting about the stories associated with the work… To burn the images and feelings into people'.[16]

The traumatising nature of Garner's performance is undeniably extreme, and there is a case to be made that the process of subjecting audiences to viscerally traumatic encounters with the history of slavery and racial violence in this way could limit its appeal to wider audiences. Yet perhaps this kind of audience experience also offers an antidote to the problematic forms of emotional engagement cultivated by the reliance on scenes of spectacular racial violence we have inherited from anti-slavery visual culture. Rather than

[13] Muelrath, 'Toppling the White Man on the Pedestal', *Hyper Allergic* (21st December, 2017), <hyperallergic.com/418503/toppling-the-white-man-on-the-pedestal/> [accessed 21/07/2022].
[14] 'Doreen Garner Sculpts our Trauma', *Art21*.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Muelrath, 'Toppling the White Man on the Pedestal'.

reenacting scenes of violence in which suffering Black bodies are rendered vessels or receptacles of pain to be processed and inhabited by white liberal conscience, commemorative reenactments of racial violence might collapse temporal, physical, and emotional distance without obliterating Black experience. Defined as an abnormal connection between two hollow spaces, with particularly corporeal connotations, perhaps what must be sought by commemorative representations is, in fact, a fistula: a suturing of death and life, past and present, documented and embodied forms of memory that wrench the past into the present in order to recognise and redress the still pervasive forms and effects of racial violence.

*

This thesis does not claim to provide a comprehensive history of the anti-slavery movement, of commemorative representations of slavery and racial violence, nor of public responses to these representations. Yet, through an interweaving of each of these strands, this project has forged new paths that, when followed, provide critical insights into how public visual displays of Black pain have been used throughout American history to simultaneously reaffirm and challenge white supremacy, build and maintain identities, establish dominant narratives, and suppress alternative ones.

Furthermore, the vast scope of this thesis and its examination of various forms of activism and modes of commemoration across the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries has opened up considerable space for further avenues of research. Firstly, there are many other arenas of commemoration which I have not had the space to discuss. For example, an investigation of creative responses from artists and activists such as Fred Wilson, Kara Walker, and Carrie Mae Weems would provide further illuminating insight into how Black artists and activists have worked to reveal the effect of the white gaze in shaping present commemorative representations of slavery and racial violence. These artists' interactions

with museum spaces and their collections often challenge the dominant white gaze through disruptive techniques. A study of this kind would thus guide museum curators, showing them how collections can be used to educate audiences about the history of slavery without having to rely solely upon visual and visceral representations of violence against Black bodies. Relatedly, the decisions made by directors and curators during the design stages of museum exhibits are an aspect of this study that could have been explored in further depth. A more detailed understanding of how and why certain choices were made in regard to the design of each of my case studies would shed further light on how approaches vary across institutions and how commemorative practice is often shaped by contemporary politics and the economic landscape.

Finally, a study of confrontational or unsettled empathy and attempts to generate this specific response to representations of slavery and racial violence in museum and memorial spaces would be a logical next step from this study's interrogation of audience responses to commemorative displays and performances. Such an investigation would provide further insight into the significance of the case studies examined in this thesis whilst providing a framework in which to investigate others and evaluate the effectiveness of empathetic unsettlement in other commemorative spaces. Where this study has demonstrated how commemorative sites in the present can free visual representations of Black historical suffering from the constraints of an archive primarily shaped by and for the white gaze, a deeper focus on specific audience responses that show evidence of confrontational or unsettled empathetic engagement would allow for a more comprehensive and sustained focus on the complex and layered responses to representations of violence uncovered in this thesis.

This study has exposed the pervasive influence of the white gaze on visual representations of Black pain whilst opening spaces for conversations on better and more ethical ways of publicly presenting racial violence. There is no single answer to the problem.

Yet, in highlighting how artists and activists have and continue to resist and challenge the dominant white gaze, this thesis has demonstrated how commemorative sites can rehumanise their representations of historical Black suffering by drawing connections to continued violence and injustice in the present. Reenactment performance in particular is a mode of commemoration in which place-based practice allows for a ritualistic reclaiming of landscapes scarred by racial violence and how those living and remembering in these spaces today can take back control of the historical narrative. This study has therefore shown that public representations of Black pain have been a constant battleground on which the multidirectionality of memory is visible as a palimpsest of artistic, literary, performative, photographic, and scholarly representations of a history that is still acting upon the present. Crucially, rather than focussing upon one particular battle, this thesis has purposefully sought to uncover the war, in the hope of providing a more nuanced picture of how popular forms of visual commemorative representations of slavery and racial violence came to be established, how they have been received by audiences, and, most importantly, their repercussions in the present.

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