May 2020

A “Wokeness” that Never Was: The Affective Economy of White Innocence and the Possibilities of Shame

Hannah Murray
Syracuse University

ABSTRACT:

This thesis critiques white liberal subjectivity, primarily through the work of Claudia Rankine. In Rankine's *The White Card*, she critiques white liberal subjectivity through the form of a play, a space of encounter. In the case of *The White Card*, the play's primary encounter *appears* to be about white people encountering Black people, but *in actuality* the encounter resides in white people encountering their own white liberal subjectivity. In order to further conceive of how white liberal subjectivity functions, I draw from Gloria Wekker's "white innocence" and Sara Ahmed's "affective economies" to craft the lens of an affective economy of white innocence. An affective economy of white innocence demonstrates how affects both comprise collectivities, such as the white liberal subjectivity, as well as stratify collectivities from one another. In addition to Wekker and Ahmed, I place Rankine's critique of white liberal subjectivity in dialogue with the works of thinkers such as Hortense Spillers, Franz Fanon, Sara Ahmed, and Saidiya Hartman. While the affect of guilt structures much of the white liberal subjectivity, I also consider how the affect of shame, as understood by George Yancy and James Cone, may access an otherwise to the white liberal subjectivity. Through these dialogues, I encounter the harms of white liberal subjectivities as well as an otherwise to white liberal subjectivities.

A "Wokeness" that Never Was: The Affective Economy of White Innocence and the Possibilities of Shame

by

Hannah Murray

B.A., Indiana University, 2016

Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Religion

Syracuse University
May 2020

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

"If you are white, and you are reading this letter, I ask that you don't run to seek shelter from your own racism. Don't hide from your responsibility…. After all, it is painful to let go of your 'white innocence,' to use this letter as a mirror, one that refuses to show you what you want to see, one that demands that you look at the lies that you tell yourself so that you don't feel the weight of responsibility for those who live under the yoke of whiteness, your whiteness." – George Yancy, "Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority"

It's November 2019, and I found myself on a paper deadline when I got an email from my friend listing all the initiatives for white allies to protest the latest white supremacist attacks on Syracuse University's campus, attacks that happened to get more press than the innumerable ones before.

"Are you going to the protest?" She asked me.

I'd donated money to the protest, I'd written my thesis on how futile the history of white antiracist efforts have continued to be, I'd shared whatever info I could on the protest and antiracism through my media platforms, I'd faced that paralyzing white ally fear of being called a racist after my Black and Latinx students called me a racist dozens of times when I'd taught Malcolm X and Martin Luther King in Chicago, I'd agreed to talk about race and accept whatever consequences would happen because, as my first Black educator pointed out, it just matters to not stop talking about how this country depends upon the death of Black bodies to function.

What else do you want me to do? I thought in exasperation. *Haven't I earned the status of white ally already?*

"They need other white bodies there," she said.

She went. I didn't.

Then the buzz of a possible shooter circulated, and I continued to not show up for my own safety. The consequences and my affects of shame for not showing up are ones I am responsible for wrestling with, but something that must be understood about my decision to place me in better proximity to safety is that this is not a choice Black bodies are given. This momentary proximity to trauma is one my positionality as white has prevented me from traveling toward. As Adrienne Rich says, "To locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva and clitoris and uterus and breasts. It means recognizing this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go."[1] The fear that consumed me at the possibility of being shot by someone —a fear of absolute, atmospheric terror that left me in a state of paranoid distrust where suddenly every person on campus had a gun in their backpack that could be aimed at me—is the exception rather than the norm for my life. Not for Black life. As Christina Sharpe argues in *In the Wake*, Black life is one that is shaped by "immanent and imminent death."[2] "Ms. Murray, did you ever have to worry about getting shot when you were walking home from school?" One of my Black students asked me after school back in 2016. He was curious, not accusatory. I'd said "no" then. For Black life, this is the everyday: police officer shootings, gang shootings, white supremacist harassment, and even the rapid-fire bullet point wounds from the daily micro aggressions by well-to-do white allies as Audre Lorde outlines in "The Uses of

[1] Adrienne Rich. "Notes Toward the Politics of Location." *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives Fourth Edition*, edited by Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, Routledge, 2017, 177.
[2] Christina Sharpe. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2016) 13.

Anger."[3] This is where we must start if we are to do any form of pragmatic action in this system that thrives on Black death.

White failure is both yours and mine, white allies. Accept it as unremitting. I don't care if you say you have friends or partners or neighbors or coworkers who are Black or you are somehow in love with Michelle Obama or you follow Rachel Cargle or Layla Said who tell you how you suck as a white woman or you went to a Black Lives Matter protest or you donate to Black causes or you memorized Audre Lorde. Black people do not owe you their validation of you as being one of the cool white people; believe me, I've tried to get it. Stop trying to claim or earn your innocence from racism. We never were innocent. Let's begin there.

[3] Audre Lorde, *The Uses of Anger*, (*Women's Studies Quarterly,* vol. 25, no. ½, 1997) 278-280.

INTRODUCTION

"What can I do for you? How can I help you?" (vii). A white man posed these two questions to Black woman poet, Claudia Rankine, after a reading of her novel-length poem on everyday racism, *Citizen*.[4] Rankine prefaces her play, *The White Card,* with her exchange with this man, a white audience member who stands for the familiar trope of a do-good liberal whiteness that assumes a knowledge, power, and capability *already achieved* to help or even save victimized Black bodies.[5] Drilling down on this assumption of achieved ability, Rankine refers to such sentimental gestures as the "often-meaningless reparative largesse of whiteness in the face of human pain and suffering" (viii). Such a sentimental gesture is meaningless because it serves to only further displace the white man's feelings of guilt around his complicity into a plane of agency: if only he can *do something* for the oppressed Blacks, then he can avoid considering or accepting his own complicity. In response to this familiar deflection of white guilt, Rankine replies: "I think the question you should be asking is what *you* can do for *you*" (viii). He receives her response with anger and defensiveness, feelings connected, as I will argue in Chapter 1, with what Gloria Wekker terms an affective economy of "white innocence."[6]

My project will not be revolving around questions of how white liberal subjectivity and agency, which thinks itself both innocent and capable, can save Black people in the U.S. Those positioned as white liberal subjects, such as the white

[4] Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric*, (Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2014).
[5] Claudia Rankine, *The White Card,* (Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2019).
[6] Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2016).

man at Rankine's reading, do not have the capacity or ability to even answer these questions. As I will argue in more detail, white liberal subjects who prescribe to a "white innocence" in the U.S. ordain the capacities of whiteness, operating as a kind of "religion of whiteness." Instead, my project revolves around questions stimulated by Rankine's preface and explored through the entirety of *The White Card*:

1. How does the refusal of "white innocence" produce white death, in the vein of James Cone's Black theology and George Yancy's "tarrying," for realistic action in opposition to socially structured and affectively disseminated racism?
2. What affects have white liberal subjects in the U.S. owned or disowned through an allegiance to what Gloria Wekker terms (in a different context) "white innocence"?

My thesis will critique what I term an "affective economy of white innocence" by (1) grounding myself in definitions for the establishment of my analytical lens, (2) closely reading parts of Rankine's play for its deployment of the affective economy of white innocence (e.g., Sara Ahmed, Franz Fanon, Saidiya Hartman, and Hortense Spillers), and finally (3) drawing on James Cone's Black theology and George Yancy's white shame to consider post-white innocence possibilities, including unremitting white failure.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter of my thesis will distinguish and clarify the terms I will be using in order to produce a coherent lens of analysis through which to understand

and engage with whiteness. In the first section of the chapter, I consider the research question, "What affects have white liberal subjects in the U.S. owned or disowned through an allegiance to what Gloria Wekker terms (in a different context) 'white innocence'?" I consider affects that comprise a white liberal subject. Then I consider how a critique of whiteness, and specifically white liberal subjects, may be a generative research methodology. In this consideration, I draw from Wiegman's definition of critique as a desire that motivates research. I also evaluate Wiegman's genealogy of Whiteness Studies to consider how previous critiques of whiteness fall short. Many of these critiques of whiteness fall short due to a desire to manifest a critical agency integral to white liberal subjectivity. I consider the question, "How does white liberal subjectivity commit violences upon Black bodies?" through drawing upon the circulation and accumulation of affects that white liberal subjectivity operates within. In order to organize more specifically how violence, white liberal subjectivity, and affect interrelate, I draw from Gloria Wekker's account of Dutch "white innocence" and Sara Ahmed's "affective economies" to develop an affective economy of white innocence.

In the second section of Chapter 1, I distinguish whiteness from white liberal subjectivity in addition to addressing the other research question I have posed: "How does the refusal of 'white innocence' produce white death, in the vein of James Cone's Black theology and George Yancy's 'tarrying,' for realistic action in opposition to socially structured and affectively disseminated racism?" I begin by considering Sara Ahmed's request to attend to the "stuckness" of whiteness as a dominant backdrop. I draw on Ahmed's "stuckness" as a means to reorient how to approach

whiteness, specifically a white liberal subjectivity, as an object of study. Such "stuckness" can deemphasize a desire for the triumph of a white liberal subjectivity to single-handedly abolish a racist system. I ground my research in the "stuckness" of white failure. This "stuck" white failure resides in the inability to enact reparations for the racist legacy of the U.S. nation-state. However, the solution to white failure is not triumph, but, paradoxically, acceptance of such unremitting white failure. I draw from Eddie Glaude's tragic pragmatism to consider how failure remains inevitable when accounting for the pervasively tragic social context of the U.S. I also turn to Black philosophical and theological thinkers like George Yancy and James Cone to consider how Yancy's "tarrying" in shame and James Cone's "white death" can serve as an intervention to consider an otherwise outside the affective economy of white innocence.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I will analyze elements in Rankine's *The White Card* through the two research questions I have posed. I select Rankine's play as a generative site for archetypal portrayals of "white innocence" in the U.S. Let me briefly summarize the plot. Rankine's *The White Card*, set in contemporary Manhattan, begins with a dinner party hosted by an affluent white couple, Charles and Virginia, who invite a Black artist, Charlotte, over in the hopes of purchasing some of her art. A conversation about race, representation, politics, and visibility unfolds, further amplified by the entrance of Charles and Virginia's activist son, Alex. The play ends in Charlotte's studio where Charles attempts to make amends. Instead, Charles finds himself encountering other affects of rage, defensiveness, and, ultimately, shame upon discovering that Charlotte has displayed him, particularly

images of his skin, in her recent pieces on white complicity. In Rankine's two-act play, a variety of white archetypes perpetuate their own form of blind racism in their allegiance to "white innocence."[7] Rankine illuminates in the play how white characters avoid or disavow the affect of shame through their attempts at "helping" Blacks.

I preface my later engagement with Rankine's piece by addressing how an academic analysis of *The White Card* poses potential dangers of "minoritizing" Rankine's thoughts. This "minoritization" might happen in two ways: (1) repeating the violence of minimizing Black work as an object of analysis in an academic setting and (2) usurping a local critique of whiteness through the use of transnational thinkers such as Wekker or Ahmed who critique whiteness outside of a U.S. context. To address the first concern, I consider how I engage with Rankine's work as not an analysis of an object, but a dialogue with an enfleshed text. I see this dialogue process between Rankine and theorists as similar to the dialogue in plays. I try to enact a play in my thesis as Rankine defines theatre: "a space for and of encounter" (ix). The text engages with me as much as I engage with it. An attempt at close reading such a play places Rankine's work and materiality prior to analysis. In other words, Rankine's material illuminates and theorizes in its own right just as much as the other institutional philosophers and critical theorists that I place in conversation with her. In addressing the second concern of transnational usurpation, I consider the universality of Blackness. Although Rankine's work may be grounded in Black

[7] Rankine engages in a literary tradition of a similar vein as *Invisible Man, Native Son,* and *A Raisin the Sun* where other forms of "white innocence" as it's manifested in white Marxists or white patronage reproduce the very hierarchal difference they seek to eradicate.

critical theory as lived and experienced by Black bodies in the U.S., this does not necessitate that Rankine's work be solely applicable to localized Black bodies or Black experience in the U.S. Rankine's work evokes a Blackness in its critique of whiteness that may in part influence, juxtapose, or add to transnational critiques of whiteness. To minoritize Blackness may actually be to limit Blackness's knowledges, truths, scope, and applicability to solely Black bodies. All disciplines and epistemologies can benefit from Blackness. I draw this concept of Blackness from Fred Moten vis-à-vis Hortense Spillers. Moten considers Blackness as a nothingness that explodes notions of identity tethered to a subject.[8] This nothingness stems from Spillers's notion of Black flesh as the "zero degree of social conceptualization" that extends beyond the European hegemonic production of Black bodies.[9] Through this reading of Blackness, I argue that the "nothingness" of Blackness is the very reason for its universal applicability to other academic disciplines such as, in this case, transnational critiques of whiteness.

The second chapter of my thesis will engage with Rankine's play to explore how white characters have avoided the affect shame through two divergent modalities of white liberal subjectivity: white saviordom and "wokeness." I will begin by examining the archetypal white saviordom of Charles and Virginia, who actually perform a harmful white innocence. Charles and Virginia collect art from Black artists in their "entrepreneurial" effort toward racial reparations. As Rankine illuminates throughout the first act of the play, Charles and Virginia's self-

[8] Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)" (*Southern Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 112, no. 4, 2013) 737–780.
[9] Hortense Spillers "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" (*Diacritics,* vol. 17, no. 2, 1987) 64-81.

proclaimed position, as exemplars of "white innocence" in juxtaposition to Trump supporters, justifies their defensiveness over disavowed affects. By attending to the affective dynamics of disavowal in these white characters, I will demonstrate how their affects function to cover up four specific racist dispositions: (a) what Hortense Spillers terms "pornotroping" of Black bodies, (b) what Franz Fanon maps out as an analytic of non-recognition, (c) the fallacies of diversity and inclusion, and (d) the violence of relating. Both Virginia and Charles's capital investment in Black art maintains affective disavowal by their commodification of Black bodies, an economic commodification that also objectifies Black death. Charles and Virginia's attempts to garner empathy for Black bodies from a white voyeur embodies the affective economy of white saviordom. Such an affective economy only further distorts and objectifies Black bodies through memorialization of Black death. Affects such as empathy, as Saidiya Hartman references particularly on the part of white abolitionists during slavery, still function as an erasure of Black flesh in order to construct a Black (non)-subject as a projection of white subjectivity.[10] I aim to critique the pervasive hold of empathy over white saviordom so that more constructive non-disavowing affects such as shame may circulate through and onto white subjects instead.

Turning from Charles and Virginia's white saviordom, Chapter 2 also draws on Hartman to analyze Alex's "wokeness." The son's supposed "wokeness" is yet another defense mechanism, another form of white innocence, that functions in a

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

similar vein as his parents' white saviordom. Alex is introduced or presented as someone who protests for marginalized groups such as Black Lives Matter. Throughout Alex's appearance in the play, he dismisses both his mother and father's ignorance and white fragility, maintaining a stance of enlightened white anti-racist subjectivity. However, the play reveals how Alex co-opts the affects of movements such as Black Lives Matter to justify his own personal rage toward his family. In other words, as Rankine hints at in her preface, Alex exemplifies how to avoid doing what he can for himself or to further reckon with his own whiteness. Alex's attempt at a woke allyship prevents him from accepting his implication in Black death. Hartman highlights the ways in which historically white attempts at constructing a Black subject—on the part of slave-owners and abolitionists—remain only a projection of whiteness for further self-making. Alex's attendance at Black Lives Matter remains voyeuristic, I will argue, and the affective economy of his rage remains tethered not to the violation and torture as a condition of Black embodiment but rather his own desire for separation from his white savior parents. Black activism functions as a realm in which Alex may co-opt for further separation from his parents, a separation that he conflates with a separation from whiteness.

The third chapter will assess how the shedding of white innocence provides access to constructive affects of shame. Such access points to a sacred potentiality of vulnerability as outlined by James Cone. The second act of *The White Card* calls for white subjects to look at their whiteness—that elusive yet pervasive, all-encompassing yet unacknowledged position—through accessing affects of shame and self-disgust. This access to shame cannot come from what Hortense Spillers

terms “pornotroping” the Black body or “saving” the Black body (moves I will take up in Chapter 2), but instead must emerge from the impossibility to embody “white innocence” on a historical, positional, and affective scale. This chapter will consider realistic potentialities for action after acceptance of such subject impossibility. I draw from Black critical theory’s consideration for the potentialities of Blackness after an acceptance of the impossibility of subjectivity in the U.S. to apply to the potentialities for realistic action on the part of white subjects after their acceptance of the impossibility of white innocence as a subjectivity. As Rankine’s Black female protagonist, Charlotte, concludes in a conversation with Charles, “Go further into that hopelessness, and then we can begin to really see each other” (87). What does this hopelessness demand? How might this produce a “death to whiteness” as James Cone articulates? What sacred possibilities may unfold through “go[ing] further”? Can there be a post-“white innocence” and what might that look like? These questions I intend to consider further as I unpack my thesis.

In order to begin a critique of white liberal subjectivity, I will first establish my analytical lens of whiteness to define a white liberal subjectivity historically and affectively. Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for what we will consider the white liberal subjectivity as well as possibilities outside a white liberal subjectivity. Chapter 2 dialogues between my analytical lens and Rankine’s *The White Card* in order to generate a current critique of the white liberal subjectivity as it fits within an affective economy of white innocence.

CHAPTER 1: WHITENESS AND WHITE LIBERAL SUBJECTIVITY

I begin this chapter by returning to the two core questions which motivate this project:

1. What affects have white liberal subjects in the U.S. owned or disowned through an allegiance to what Gloria Wekker terms [in a different context] "white innocence"?
2. How does the refusal of "white innocence" produce an otherwise, in the vein of George Yancy's shame and James Cone's Black theology, for realistic action in opposition to socially structured and affectively disseminated racism?

My first section will consider the first question on white liberal subjects. I will (1) consider affects that imply a white liberal subject, (2) apply Wiegman's definitions of critique and Whiteness Studies to situate my own critique of whiteness, (3) delve into how these affects comprise Gloria Wekker's "white innocence", and (4) develop the theory of an affective economy of white innocence.

In my second section, I will attend to whiteness in addition to the second question's focus on a "refusal" of white innocence. I will (1) draw from Ahmed's whiteness as background to (2) consider how whiteness manifests in religious aesthetics in order to (3) illuminate the global pervasiveness of whiteness as well as (4) how a tragic pragmatism and Black theology may serve as an otherwise to whiteness's power as specifically manifested in the affective economy of white innocence.

White Liberal Subjectivity: Affects Owned and Disowned

Consider disavowal. A denial cloaked in veils of defensiveness. Consider innocence. A maintenance of ethereal purity untouched by responsibility. Consider triumphant agency. A victory of choosing correctly. Consider guilt. A nagging feeling of agential failure, which future actions may redress. Each of these affects—disavowal, innocence, triumphant agency, and guilt—imply an active subject who experiences them. This subject moves within an atmosphere of responsibility, responsibilities individually allotted or declined. I consider this particular subject, and its subsequent affects, the white liberal subjectivity.

This first question, ("What affects have white liberal subjects in the U.S. owned or disowned through an allegiance to what Gloria Wekker terms [in a different context] 'white innocence'?"), stems from a critique of a white liberal subjectivity and its supposed agential capacities. Through focusing my project on whiteness, a concern may arise as to whether my project contributes to the ongoing centering and privileging of whiteness in academic study. However, I situate my focus on whiteness through the methodology of critique. When considering how critique operates, I draw from Robyn Wiegman's definition of critique. In *Object Relations,* Robyn Wiegman asserts that the question of critique is a question of desire.[11] Specific desires, such as social justice, underpin academic critique. Wiegman's agenda does not include denying desire or crafting another desire, but instead examines how our desires shape what we critique. In my desire for a racial justice that demands an acceptance of unremitting failure on the part of white allies,

[11] Robyn Wiegman, *Object Relations*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2012).

I critique the white liberal subjectivity. Though my critique indeed focuses on whiteness as an object of study, my orientation toward such object of study is a desire for its death. By "death," I mean the death of the white liberal subjectivity's supposed agential capacities in the project of racial justice. I desire this death because, as I will articulate throughout my thesis, the white liberal subjectivity in fact contributes to racial oppression in the U.S.

I draw on Wiegman's *Object Relations* to consider not only her definition of critique but also her genealogy of Whiteness Studies. I consider how previous academic critiques of whiteness, as outlined by Wiegman, problematically reify the white liberal subjectivity rather than dismantle it. Wiegman examines how our desires shape not only what we critique but also the way we organize disciplinary fields through specific critiques. She writes:

> My purpose is not to expose or condemn the desire we invest in objects and analytics, but to pay attention to that desire, to the way it shapes the field's disciplinary form and generates both its and our critical capacities in order to learn something about the conundrum that accompanies a disciplinary apparatus that promises to make critical practice an agency for doing justice (89).

This type of desire for social justice influences how a scholar conducts a critique, the object of study, and what counts as an object of study. Through her examination of various identity-oriented departments, such as Ethnic Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, and Whiteness Studies, Wiegman highlights how the founding of these departments is rooted in particular desires for social justice. However, as indicated in the quote above, the issue with these identity-oriented departments is that they placed critical practice and social justice outcomes in the realm of an agential capacity. In other words, the desires of these identity-oriented department critiques

were rooted in assumptions about subjectivity. Subjects could both achieve social justice and attain a status of anti-racist. In the case of the Whiteness Studies of the 90s, such an identity study desired a woke or "anti-racist subject," which underpinned their critiques of whiteness. Rather than undermine the harms of a white liberal subjectivity, Whiteness Studies recapitulated them. Such critiques redirected white guilt into a plane of agency: Whiteness Studies desired "critical agency" where critical practices could "undo multiple effects of dominant identity formations by projecting an increasingly empowered self-knowing subject" (140). This "increasingly empowered self-knowing subject" is known as the "anti-racist subject." The issue of such a desire rests in an emphasis on how white liberal subjects can become successful at achieving an enlightened anti-racist subjectivity as the solution to affectively structured and disseminated racism. I bring Wiegman's genealogy of Whiteness Studies into the conversation to illuminate how desires tethered to subjectivity cannot successfully contribute to racial justice. Whereas these dated critiques of whiteness desire a critical agency or "woke" antiracist subjectivity, my critique maintains a desire to dismantle the current pervasive hold and power of the white liberal subjectivity.

Rather than focusing on the triumph of a white anti-racist subjectivity, I ground my project in white failure, particularly unremitting white failure to propose or enact reparations for the U.S. legacy of slavery, as a foundation for attending to a critique of anti-racist subjectivity. I desire a kind of social justice that grounds itself in a realistic, mistake-laden action that accepts failure as unremitting through critiquing white innocence. A belief in an anti-racist white liberal subjectivity stunts

a pragmatic possibility such as this.[12] Thus, my own thesis project will be grounded in a critique of a white liberal subject who operates in an affective economy of white innocence. (This critique will ultimately entail the death of anti-racist white liberal subjectivities, which will be further detailed in Chapter 3 when exploring the uses of the affect of shame.) Following Wiegman's charge to track the desires belied by our objects of research, I will put pressure on the desire of an anti-racist subjectivity. I will also track my own desire in making this subject the object of my thesis: a desire to cut through the disavowals of "white innocence." The approach of my thesis alters how whiteness is critiqued. Rather than critiquing how white subjects self-identify as racist, I will critique white subjects who self-identify as the anti-racist subject.

How does one go about a critique of white liberal subjectivity in the attempt at dismantling its power? I return to the affects we encountered at the beginning of this section: disavowal, innocence, triumphant agency, and guilt. Such affects manifest in both the structuring and operation of the white liberal subjectivity. Therefore, we must further interrogate how they interrelate and progress upon one another. I consider Gloria Wekker's own focus on the affect of "innocence" as it applies to a positionality she names "white innocence." Wekker conducts an anthropological assessment of the Dutch treatment of race in *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*. Through analyzing situated knowledges from Wekker's own upbringing, her own work for the Dutch government, and her exposure to Dutch popular and academic culture, Wekker unveils the ways in which

[12] I will further ascertain how this pragmatism will unfold in Chapter 3 with the guidance of Eddie S. Glaude Jr.'s pragmatism in *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America.*

"white innocence" as an integral component of the Dutch self is utilized. The white Dutch population utilizes this "white innocence" to prevent critical engagement with white complicity in racism. In her explanation of "white innocence," Wekker elaborates on the kind of rhetoric used by the Dutch nation:

> "We are a small nation, innocent; we are inherently antiracist; we do not have bad intentions" is shorthand to sum up this white sense of self. These defense mechanisms serve to preserve this ideal image of ourselves as deeply colorblind and antiracist. Questioning this most dearly held core of the Dutch sense of self means putting oneself above "us"; it also runs deeply counter to another strand in the Dutch sense of self, egalitarianism (79).

I will be using Wekker's account and critique of Dutch "white innocence" as a critical lens for examining American sensibilities. "White innocence" functions as a positionality that denies any complicity in systematic racism in its purportedly egalitarian colorblindness and the fact that "we do not have bad intentions" (79). In particular, while recognizing that the U.S. is not the Netherlands, I want to borrow her concept of "white innocence" to craft an American account of the shortcomings of whiteness. Both the U.S. and the Netherlands share an emphasis on considering racism a matter pertaining to the individual subject. The dilemma of situating racism in a realm of intentionality, in a similar vein as Wiegman's critique of Whiteness Studies' "critical agency" is that racism can be simply boiled down to individual choices. Again, as in Rankine's preface to *The White Card,* the flaw in maintaining racism as a solely individual and intentional endeavor is that it denies a focus on individualities complicit in larger affective systems. Racism does not simply germinate in an individual subject. Because it does not simply start in the subject it cannot also simply end in the subject. Rather, the affects that manifest as racist acts

in the world circulate and grow in histories and value, or, as Sarah Ahmed considers as "affective economies".[13]

I draw on Sara Ahmed's definition of "affective economy" to consider how the circulation and accumulation of certain affects inflict harms onto certain collective bodies. An affective economy, as Ahmed articulates in "The Organisation of Hate," is the circulation of affects "between signifiers in relationships of difference and displacement" (44). Contrary to psychoanalytic theory, affects do not originate from a subject's interiority but can stick to subjects externally as a nodal point in the economy. Likewise, affect does not reside in a single object or sign, but instead affect "is an effect of the circulation between objects and signs (the accumulation of affective value)" (45). Signs increase in their "affective value" as an effect of how frequently affects flow between them. Ahmed notes, "The fact that some signs are repeated is precisely not because the signs themselves contain hate, but because they are effects of histories that have stayed open" (65). Ahmed's "The Organisation of Hate" addresses how the affective economies of hate construct the contours of the Black body and Black people as well as the white body and white nation. Ahmed argues:

> In this way, hate creates the surfaces of bodies through the way in which bodies are aligned with and against other bodies. How we feel about others is what aligns us with a collective, which paradoxically 'takes shape' only as an effect of such alignments. It is through how others impress upon us that the skin of the collective begins to take shape (54).

[13] Sara Ahmed, "Organisation of Hate," The Cultural Politics of Emotion (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2004) 42-61.

While Ahmed focuses on how affective economies of white hate create the collectivities of Black people and white supremacists, I maintain that the affective economy of white innocence create collectivities of Black people and white saviors. In both affective economies, harmful discourses are written onto Black bodies. Affective economies aid in the critique of individualism due to how affect is circulating and non-individual. Though individuals may perpetrate violences, these violences result from the individual partaking in the histories accrued from affective economies.

In "The Organisation of Hate," Ahmed specifically focuses on how affective economies of hate can explain the manifestations of many racist behaviors in the U.S. I replace an affective economy of hate with an affective economy of guilt, which serves as the apparatus for the manifestation and accumulation of white innocence in the U.S. Ahmed traces how the circulation of hate can lead to a distinction between collectivities, an ongoing discourse of "waiting," and undeclared histories. It is my argument that guilt functions similarly to produce the opposing collectivities of "broken Black bodies" and "white innocence."

As addressed earlier, affects in affective economies accumulate value in their circulation. In this way, affects do not begin and end in a subject, but rather serve as the medium for constructing bodies and figures. When speaking specifically about how the affect of "hate" operates, Ahmed argues, "Within the narrative, hate cannot be found in one figure, but works to create the outline of different figures or objects of hate, a creation that crucially aligns the figures together, and constitutes them as a 'common threat'" (44). In the case of the affective economy of white innocence,

guilt circulates and crafts Black bodies as the object of guilt. In this way, Black bodies are still viewed as a common threat to white innocence due to the bodies' presence as evidence of ongoing Black oppression in a white nation. The presence of blackness triggers 'guilt' in white subjects, who feel this guilt as unpleasant and work affectively (and in other ways) to disavow it or otherwise push it away.

Due to how affects circulate between objects, certain signifiers may accrue more value over time irrespective of a connection to any particular body. Ahmed writes, "So the figure of the bogus asylum seeker is detached from particular bodies: any incoming bodies could be bogus, such that their 'endless' arrival is anticipated as the scene of 'our injury'" (47). In the case of white innocence, the circulation of an image of the broken Black body is detached from any particular Black person: any incoming Black person could be a broken Black body such that their endless arrival is anticipated at the scene of white guilt. White guilt accumulates the more Blacks are encountered as evidence of a social structure that oppresses Black people. Thus, the broken Black body functions as the object for validation from white guilt.

For example, in *The White Card*, Charles's collection of art that depicts broken Black bodies provides a continual affective reprieve from his own guilt. He believes he is "helping" rather than recapitulating Black oppression with his art collection. He tells Charlotte that "if he collects [her] dead, they'll never have to be buried" (55). However, as Charlotte points out in the second act, collecting art that reifies Black people as "black victims" actually contributes to rather than assuages Black oppression (78). Charles' collection of Black death provides yet another way to

avoid confronting affects other than guilt, which will be considered more in Chapter 3.

This repeated need to validate one's self due to pervasive guilt constructs a form of waiting that coincides with Ahmed's outlining of "waiting for the bogus" in the case of an affective economy of hate. She maintains:

> The impossibility of reducing hate to a particular body allows hate to circulate in an economic sense, working to differentiate some others from other others, a differentiation that is never 'over', as it awaits others who have not yet arrived. Such a discourse of 'waiting for the bogus' is what justifies the repetition of violence against the bodies of others in the name of protecting the nation (47).

The impetus to "protect the nation" occurs as well in the affective economy of white innocence. As Wekker illuminates in the Dutch account of white innocence ("we are a small nation, innocent; we are inherently antiracist"), the swirling affect of guilt underpins the construction of a national identity that adamantly proclaims its innocence (79). This guilt circulates more each time Black bodies puncture white backgrounds to prove as evidence of a nation that is in fact not innocent. In order to maintain its differentiation as "innocent," a discourse of "waiting for the broken" continues to repeat as a justification for gestures of validation such as saviordom. Those positioned in white innocence engage in such gestures, justified by guilt, to maintain a differentiation as innocent and white from broken and Black bodies. These gestures only serve to further cement such collectivities and further accumulate discourses of oppression onto Black flesh. In Chapter 2, I will examine the oppressions that circulate and accumulate in the affective economy of white innocence as it materializes into the collectivities of white saviordom and "wokeness" in Claudia Rankine's *The White Card*.

Whiteness's Hold and Considering an Otherwise through a Theological Turn

Now that we have considered the white liberal subjectivity, it is worth considering how this concept differs from whiteness. Does "whiteness" carry similar agential capacities to white liberal subjectivity, or is it perhaps something more atmospheric? For Ahmed, whiteness functions precisely in how it is not noticed on the part of white positioned bodies until encountering bodies that are not white. The encounter of non-white bodies reveals less about the non-white bodies and more about whiteness itself as an orienting background that is an effect of affective economies.[14] On a situation where four Black women scholars entering into a conference at the same time, Ahmed argues, "The fact that we notice such arrivals tells us more about what is already in place than it does about 'who' arrives" (157). While Ahmed maintains that some critics question her focus on whiteness as stultifying in change, Ahmed advocates for a "phenomenology of whiteness" that helps us to "notice institutional habits; it brings what is behind to the surface in a certain way" (149). Ahmed argues for a focus not on what to do now but rather on how white positioned bodies may be stuck in their whiteness. Paradoxically, the continual focus on a "what to do now" maintains the stuckness of whiteness as background.

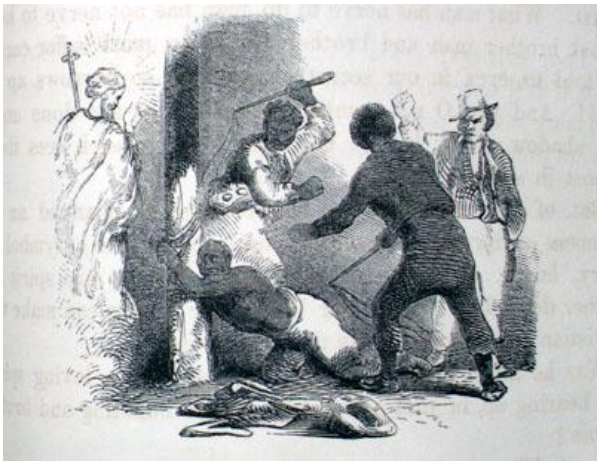
Though Ahmed's "whiteness as background" grounds itself in the phenomenological, I argue that the phenomenological account of "whiteness as

[14] Sara Ahmed "Phenomenology of Whiteness," (*Feminist Theory,* vol. 8, no. 2, 2007) 149-168.

background" can also be considered religious. Ahmed's "whiteness as background" in conjunction with historical representations of the divine as white in Blum and Harvey's *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* functions as a pervasive yet invisible religious-like force.[15] To practice the religion of "white innocence" is to ordain white benevolence as supernatural in ability while simultaneously denying whiteness's implication in the very system built for it. Blum and Harvey detail how historic depictions of Christ in abolitionist literature and art set the tone for how whiteness became associated with "innocence" and "divine" in the U.S. imaginary. Blum and Harvey maintain:

> The growing American fascination with Jesus imagery ran directly in the slavery debates as well. There, the embodied white Jesus became a complicated symbol of resistance and passivity. Visions and images of Jesus were part of the antislavery crusade (117).

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as illustrated by Hammatt Billings, depicts a white, ethereal Jesus overlooking slaves and slaveowners.



Billings, Hammatt. Illustration for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. John P. Jewett & Company, 1853. http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/interpret/exhibits/tom_leg.html.

[15] Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America*, (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

He displays his displeasure without actually doing anything about the scenario. Blum and Harvey link such a depiction to further artistic portrayals of white redeemers, stating, "By having Black men kneel before a white savior, Billings set the stage for sculptors after the Civil War to place Black men beneath white redeemers—whether in the form of Jesus, Abraham Lincoln, or Union soldiers" (119).

I apply Ahmed's "whiteness as background" to an American historical context like the one above due to whiteness's global hold. In order to consider how Ahmed's "whiteness as background" in addition to Wekker's "white innocence" (from the previous section) apply to a U.S. context, I will frame their transnational focus as a critique of a Northern European mythos of whiteness that extends simultaneously into a U.S. and European context. Both Nell Irvin Painter's *History of White People* and Winthrop Jordan's *White over Black* trace the historical construction and transmission of the mythos of what we now understand as "whiteness." While Painter traces the historical construction of the Saxony mythos across European regions and into the U.S. imaginary, Jordan considers how English colonizing encounters with Blackness transmit into a U.S. context.

In *History of White People,* Painter details how the romanticization of a Greek past and a development of Saxonies as a superior conglomerate contributed to the current mythos about "whiteness" across Northern Europe.[16] This mythos reached a significant culmination through German Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's hypothesis

[16] Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People*, (New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2010).

of human taxonomies as a widely accepted norm among European scientific communities during the latter half of the 18th century (75). This taxonomic theory included justifying whiteness—then Caucasian—as scientifically superior in beauty through the practice of measuring skulls (84). This German "renaissance" of thought emphasized cultural regions known as Saxonies as their context for the residency of advanced peoples. Germany mapped out three Saxonies: one in the eastern German province, one in known as the western Lower Saxony, and one between Denmark and Sweden (101). The mythos of Saxonies spread across Northern Europe and remain intact as a foundation for whiteness superiority that translates from homelands and into colonized regions as seen in the present-day Dutch landscape as well as in the current U.S. nation-state.

In *White over Black*, Jordan details how English standards of "properness" serve as a classification of man, which then Europeans would use to historically view Black religion, appearance, and sexuality.[17] This classification, not unlike Sylvia Wynter's "genre of man," produces the bestial comparison of Black bodies as being Other from civilized man.[18] In the case of Wynter, the "genre of man" remains a Western category that socially distinguishes humans—white subjects—from non-humans—raced Other bodies. These standards extend into both philosophical as well as scientific discourses that craft a "transparent subjectivity" in juxtaposition to

[17] Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, (Baltimore, Penguin Books Inc, 1968).
[18] Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves In Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désêtre: Black Studies Toward the Human Project," in *Not Only the Master's Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice (Cultural Politics & the Promise of Democracy)*, eds. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 107-169.

bodies that are considered more embodied or affectable as Denise Ferreira da Silva outlines in *Towards a Global Idea of Race*.[19] For Ferreira da Silva, a "transparent subjectivity" or "transparent I" is a knowing subject that determines itself rather than being determined by its exteriority or material conditions. Such a "transparent I" maintains standards of objectivity and unaffected epistemologies. These standards, as Painter also argues, both retain resonance in their European context presently while also transmit into a U.S. imaginary landscape. I consider how Jordan's account of English encounters with Blackness serves as a crux to connect Wekker and Ahmed's own accounts of whiteness in a European context to a focus of whiteness in a U.S. context.

I return to the second research question I have posed ("How does the refusal of 'white innocence' produce an otherwise, in the vein of George Yancy's shame and James Cone's Black theology, for realistic action in opposition to socially structured and affectively disseminated racism?") in order to consider an otherwise to "white innocence." I consider in particular the refusal of the affect known as "triumphant agency." One particular flaw in the desire for a white anti-racist subjectivity is the emphasis on a promise of triumph. To focus on triumph, as manifested in the desire for success of a white anti-racist subjectivity, is actually to recapitulate the very systems and affective economies at play in producing Black bodies.[20] This is in part because of a refusal to encounter the world as it is now, the fact that failure is

[19] Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
[20] By Black bodies, I draw from Spillers's definition of Black bodies in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," as the Black flesh branded by social legacies of exploitation.

inevitable in the process of attempting social justice, because of our investment in a promise for the future. As Sara Ahmed notes, "It is by showing how we are stuck, by attending to what is habitual and routine in 'the what' of the world, that we can keep open the possibility of habit changes, without using that possibility to displace our attention to the present, and without simply wishing for new tricks" (165). There lacks a focus or gaze on the reality of tragedy in the now when fixated only on a promise of triumph in the future. My aim is to develop a critique that may achieve a social justice politics grounded in a kind of pragmatism.

I draw from Eddie Glaude's pragmatic sense of tragedy to consider how a focus on tragedy may shift our "stuck" emphasis off of the achievement of a white anti-racist subjectivity. Glaude's pragmatism maintains that "the problems of race in the United States are best dealt with by confronting our past and the tragedy therein precisely in order to invade intelligently in the future" (20). Dealing with racism rests not in maintaining an enlightened state detached from its manifestation, but, rather, living in the wake of the tragic legacies that carry history into the present. When considering tragedy as the default material condition, there cannot be an innately good choice to make. For Glaude, this intelligence about tragedy as the default American condition matters so that Americans "never succumb to the illusion of innocence and optimism that carries it forward" (44-45). Such "innocence" and "optimism" construct the pervasive vehicle of "white innocence" in the U.S.

To live in the wake of tragedy, as racism pervades and mediates through systems and bodies, requires an acceptance that white subjects fail to ever achieve

an anti-racist subjectivity. The shame of the past is deflected, projected, and denied when white subjects desire "critical agency" rather than "tragic pragmatism." By taking seriously the material realities of the tragic as outlined by Glaude and other Black scholars, the tragic may ground pragmatism for white subjects who still desire justice, but one that decenters their own capacities for innocence and triumph. A "critical agency," as Wiegman outlines, cannot accept the inherited shame of white positionalities. However, a "tragic pragmatism," like Glaude articulates, demands an acceptance of shame on the part of white subjects so that action may happen anyway. As Glaude maintains, "Tragedy remains. We must know it and act anyway" (20). The acceptance of such harms inflicted upon the Black body that "white innocence" commits might generate or give rise to a praxis of realistic action that opposes hegemonic whiteness by something like a white death. By an acceptance of such harms of "white innocence," there is the potentiality of pragmatic action in opposition to the hegemonic within a white death that remains dependent upon resisting an ideal antiracist white subject.

I have framed the chain of concepts in this chapter with the two research questions I have posed. The first question considers the connection between the white liberal subject and affect. The second question delves into how to consider an otherwise outside whiteness's persistent hold. In the first section, I identify the affects at play in the conception of the white liberal subjectivity while also drawing on the pitfalls and possibilities of critiquing whiteness as a research methodology. Then I map out how affect manifests in positions like white innocence and circulates in affective economies. Finally, I trouble the affects and agency of the white liberal

subject with conceptualizing the theory of the affective economy of white innocence. In the second section, I consider how whiteness functions as a pervasive effect of the affective economy of white innocence while also turning to how a "refusal" of white innocence may occur. I track whiteness's culmination in religious aesthetics to the global hold of whiteness. I also draw from tragic pragmatism as well as Black theology to consider how a death to whiteness may open up an otherwise to white innocence and ultimately the white liberal subject.

Ultimately, the chain of concepts as outlined in this chapter link to the argument in my next two chapters. In Chapter 2, I will delve into what kinds of violences are enacted onto Black bodies through the affective economy of white innocence. I will dialogue with Claudia Rankine's *The White Card* for insight into how these violences manifest due to affects such as disavowal, innocence, triumphant agency, and guilt that comprise the affective economy of white innocence. In Chapter 3, I will consider an otherwise outside of the affective economy of white innocence through the affect of shame. Ultimately, this shame results in the death of the white liberal subject and the possibility of considering an otherwise to the affective economy of white innocence.

CHAPTER 2: GUILT

In *The White Card*, Rankine illuminates how the affects of disavowal, innocence, triumphant agency, and guilt motivate white characters Charles, Virginia, and Alex to commit violences against Blacks. These affects comprise the affective economy of white innocence. Charles, Virginia, and Alex uphold and move within the world as white liberal subjects. While Charles and Virginia's form of white liberal subjectivity manifests as white saviordom, Alex's form of white liberal subjectivity materializes as "wokeness." As white liberal subjects, they enact attempts to "help" Blacks, attempts that actually contribute to violences toward Blacks. Though their violences may vary depending upon the form of white saviordom or "wokeness," both forms of white liberal subjectivity are motivated by capable agency and resistance to guilt. Rankine details how their acts such as circulating violated Black bodies online, collecting Black art, diversity and inclusion initiatives, empathy, and allyship to Black causes function as violences white liberal subjects inflict upon Black people under the guise of advancing Black people. I place thinkers such as Hortense Spillers, Franz Fanon, Saidiya Hartman, and Sara Ahmed as dialogue partners with Rankine to illuminate how the actions of Charles, Virginia, and Alex harm Black people. Ultimately, I consider how these actions result from the affective economy of white innocence that accumulates violences precisely in the denial of the white liberal subject's agential failure.

Spillers: The Failure of Pornotroping

I begin this section by drawing out a scene from Rankine's *The White Card*. Charlotte has just detailed how her most recent art piece will depict a reenactment of crime scenes after the Charleston shootings. She has chosen to do this, in part, because of how the Charleston shootings of Black bodies have largely been censored by political leaders. This censorship exemplifies the repeated erasure of Black violation from America's imagination of history. In this section of the text, Charlotte, Alex, Charles, and Virginia consider how the circulation and consumption of images depicting black death may disrupt or contribute to further violation of Black bodies:

VIRGINIA:	There really weren't any pictures from Charleston?
CHARLOTTE:	Not of the crime scene.
VIRGINIA:	I ask Charles this all the time, why would you want to subject an audience to these horrors? I think evidence is important, but why do we need to see endless videos on television, on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, every place we look…
ALEX:	Innocent people of color are every place, even if you're trying not to look.
CHARLES:	Actually, Virginia, it depends on how you look at it. Think back to the death of Emmett Till in 1955. His own mother wanted the photographs of his open casket to be shown. It energized the civil rights movement.
ALEX	(*cuts in*): A fourteen-year-old black kid—murdered for whistling at a white woman.
ERIC:	Didn't I just read in the *Times* that the accuser lied about what happened?
ALEX:	No fucking way.
VIRGINIA:	Watch the language.

CHARLOTTE: Are you surprised?

ERIC: Old-age confession sort of thing…straightening out the accounts before Judgement Day.

CHARLES: You must think photography could have the same impact now.

CHARLOTTE: I don't know. It seems like our American pastimes are sports and forgetting. We assimilate; we appropriate; we move on.

VIRGINIA: But haven't social media changed our general amnesia? I have watched so many killed. I can call up their dying moments on any device in my possession. The phrase "I can't breathe" will never detach itself from Freddie Garner.

ALEX: Freddie? No, Eric Garner. Freddie Gray and Eric Garner, already they've become one body for you.

Rankine, Claudia. *The White Card*. Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2019, pp. 36-7.

In this section, I will focus specifically on how Virginia's own voyeurism to Black suffering serves as a form of mutilation to Black bodies. The comprehension of how white saviordom functions as a reproduction of the mutilation of Black bodies first requires a definition of "mutilation" as well as a distinction established between body and flesh. Mutilation is the positioning of an object as desirable by a subject. A subject experiences self-satiation through the consumption of an object. Hortense Spillers conceptualizes this practice of consumption of Black bodies as "pornotroping." Spillers argues that pornotroping arises from the colonial-slavery context where the captor's "externally imposed meanings and uses" situate the captive body in "a category of 'otherness'" (67). For Spillers, this act of constructing social discourses is the very act of marking and transmuting Black flesh. For Spillers, Black flesh is the "zero degree of social conceptualization" that extends beyond any

European hegemonic discourses of exploitation. Black bodies, on the other hand, are the amalgamation of European hegemonic discourses branded onto Black flesh.[21] By pornotroping, Spillers means the ongoing legacy of the objectification of Black flesh into Black bodies as receptacles for the white subject's, or in this historical context the white captor's, sensual excess. Simultaneously, such Black bodies, in their rendering as an object of being, become reduced to sexualities that remain physically and biologically othered from white subjects. This category of otherness serves as the site for further branding of the white subject's impulses: sensual as the most common and sexual as the most severe. Pornotroping serves as one of many mechanisms of oppression in rendering Black flesh into the Black body. Spillers distinguishes Black flesh from Black body by stating that Black flesh is the "zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography" (67). Flesh serves as the foundation and pervasiveness of Blackness that extends beyond any material social discourses that may brand or mark a body for the purposes of the captor. Pornotroping directly applies to the flagrant historical and contemporary white subjects who acknowledge themselves as captor in their literal branding, owning, raping, and lynching of Black bodies. However, I argue that white subjects who attempt to deny such a position as captor in favor of the term "ally" engage in their own practice of pornotroping of Black bodies.

[21] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," (*Diacritics*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1987) 64-81.

In *The White Card*, both Virginia and Charles pornotrope Black bodies through two mediums: social media and art. We see this pornotroping through social media in the scene mentioned earlier in the chapter. When asked if Charlotte's art will help in changing larger political conversations around race, Charlotte remains skeptical, noting that America's pastimes "are sports and forgetting" (37). Virginia challenges Charlotte, saying, "But haven't social media changed our general amnesia? I have watched so many killed. I can call up their dying moments on any device in my possession. The phrase 'I can't breathe' will never detach itself from Freddie Garner" (37). The proliferation and access to Black bodies in pain through media devices do not get white subjects any closer to seeing Black flesh, however. Rather, as Virginia's son, Alex, points out, Freddie Gray and Eric Garner have collapsed into one body through the circulation and consumption of Black bodies' splicings on footage (37). The proliferation of social media does not undo the violent oppressions written onto Black bodies, but instead reproduces the same social discourses of merging and blurring names. This merging and blurring of names in turn reproduce the same collective Black body absent of subjecthood. In this case, Virginia's loop cycle of re-watching Black bodies dying where she merges names and spoken words into one body merely does not differentiate her from a blatant white racist who watches with conscious pleasure. Both operate on a plane of seeing Black flesh as only Black body, that is as something to consume. Charlotte notes that for Americans "we assimilate, we appropriate, we move on" (37). This process of Black body consumption known as pornotroping relies on the "white innocence" of white

saviors to continue circulating. As long as they view or circulate such images, they can validate their own guilt.

In addition to pornotroping through social media, both Charles and Virginia engage in pornotroping through collecting art that depicts Black death. At the conclusion of the first act, Charles unveils the latest piece of art he has purchased: an autopsy report of Michael Brown:

VIRGINIA:	It's Michael Brown's autopsy report!
CHARLOTTE:	(*to herself*) Michael Brown?
ALEX:	(*quietly*) I can't even…You can't own Michael Brown.
CHARLES:	Wait. It's not Michael Brown.
ALEX:	It's not? A minute ago you said you were collecting Charlotte's dead. "They'll never be buried." Remember?
CHARLES:	I mean it metaphorically. This is a representation of the violence against Brown.
CHARLOTTE:	What do you mean it isn't Michael Brown?
CHARLES:	Well, it's a photograph of a diagram. That diagram documents the violence inflicted on a black man. Isn't that the purpose of art—your art—to make the invisible visible?
CHARLOTTE:	Michael Brown's body was on the street for hours. Isn't everything that happened to him visible? Isn't everything that happened to him visible? This (*gestures toward the piece*) is not revealing anything we haven't seen.
CHARLES:	For me, to see exactly where and how many bullets entered the body of this man, who is only a year younger than Alex…was, to say the least, upsetting.
VIRGINIA:	I have to tell you, I feel sick. The entire incident was so violent and so unnecessary.

CHARLOTTE: It made you sick. It made you said. And you bought *this*?

VIRGINIA: It affected us far more than all the accounts on television.

CHARLES: This autopsy is only about one thing. It gestures toward structural racism.

CHARLOTTE: And what does it mean?

CHARLES: It means the Ferguson police department was systemically harassing and arresting black citizens in Brow's neighborhood for years. This piece points to Officer Wilson. If it's a portrait of anyone, it's a portrait of him.

ALEX: It's Brown's autopsy.

CHARLOTT: But according to you, Charles, the only way to get to Officer Wilson is through Michael Brown's body?

CHARLES: That body is a portal to the inhumanity.

CHARLOTTE: (*under her breath*) We're not going to get anywhere with this kind of…this kind of American sentimentality.

Rankine, Claudia. *The White Card*. Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2019, pp. 56-7.

The piece is described ambiguously: a sculpture without depicting a body at one point, a photograph of a diagram that depicts the autopsy report of Michael Brown's death at another time (56). This repeats the tendency of social media to splice and reproduce the molding together of various art forms (i.e., sculpture and photograph) with various dimensions of mediation (i.e., a sculpture of a photograph of a diagram of an autopsy) serve to distance and erase any flesh of Michael Brown in place of the convergence of social, historical, linguistic, and psychological realms written about him. Earlier, when the art dealer asks to see the piece, Charles asks that they wait until his son arrives because, "[they] had acquired it with him in

mind" (24). Again, the patronage system is serving to satiate whiteness's unmet needs through the purchasing of a Black body. This example of collecting art also demonstrates a form of pornotroping due to the monolithic white gaze splicing and molding Black flesh into Black bodies.

When Blackness serves as an object, whiteness upholds Blackness only in relation to what Blackness may reveal about whites. This body, according to Charles, "is a portal to the inhumanity" for whites (57). Michael Brown serves as object, source, and—in Charles's words—"a portal" of sensual feeling in order to gain a better understanding of whiteness: whiteness's own self-identity based upon the construction of the Black body as its oppositional object. In this way, whiteness cannot be confronted for itself. Whiteness's own ineptitude, own shame cannot be examined so long as it remains the examiner, the purchaser, and the consumer instead of the object depicted in itself.

The affect that underpins such actions of pornotroping—circulating images of Black death on social media and collecting art depictions of Black death—is guilt. The guilt that motivates Virginia to keep rejecting and looking and Charles buying and selling Black death does not reside solely in their white bodies. Guilt establishes the differentiation between white innocent collectivities and broken Black bodies. This differentiation, not housed in any singular body, continues a differentiation that is never over as Ahmed articulates about affective economies of hate. Guilt "awaits others who have not yet arrived" such that a waiting for the broken is what justifies the repetition of violence against Black bodies. Through an affective economy of guilt, no single Black body can be registered as a human in suffering, but instead

what registers is a collective brokenness that white saviors anticipate in order to save. These violences, which Charles and Virginia inflict, are enacted in the name of "protecting the nation" (47). While for the white supremacists that Ahmed analyzes, "protecting the nation" means to preserve the nation's identity of homogeneous whiteness, for white liberal saviors such "protecting the nation" means to protect the nation's identity as innocent.

Fanon: The Failure of White Liberal Recognition

Rankine's depiction of the consumption of Black death through art and social media demonstrates another form of pornotroping. But even Black life that is present in the play can only be considered another body. Charlotte, the sole Black character of the play, articulates Black life in her voice, presence, and action as an artist. Yet, even Charlotte's voice and presence in the play can only be rendered as object under the white gaze of Charles and Virginia. As an art patron, Charles maintains a position of support for Black voices through the endowment of his wealth to the arts. Charles denies how patronage still functions as a system of property and ownership akin to slavery. However, the interactions between Charles and Charlotte reveal such sentiment:

CHARLES:	All that white, smoky charcoal obscuring the faceless police? I—
VIRGINIA:	(*interrupting*) I like it. It's atmospheric and not so graphic.
CHARLOTTE:	That's my point.

ERIC: If I remember correctly the painting is based on an actual photograph.

CHARLES: You know it is.

VIRGINIA: Eric likes to pretend he doesn't know all he knows. Isn't that right, Eric?

CHARLOTTE: (*playful*) He's the epitome of humility.

CHARLES: He knows good work when he sees it. And so do I.

ERIC: Charlotte, I think that's meant for you.

VIRGINIA: Yes, Charlotte, all eyes are on you.

CHARLOTTE: My friends say such good things about working with you. Glenn Ligon was so pleased we were finally connecting.

CHARLES: Glenn, yes. We have a number of his pieces, but this one here is from the Million Man March. It's an early piece focusing on the social and economic stresses that black men face.

VIRGINIA: Come, let me show you this other piece. It's called *Defacement: The Death of Michael…Michael Stewart*, that's right. He was a Pratt student, graffiti artist, who was beaten into a coma by police. This is about as real as I can handle it.

CHARLOTTE: I've never seen this Basquiat. It takes my breath away/

VIRGINIA: We just acquired it. It's all Charles looks at.

CHARLOTTE: There's so much to see. I've read about your collection in *Artforum*. So many artists here who have inspired me. I'm really honored to be with you tonight.

VIRGINIA: We're delighted that you're here as well. Charles takes his stable of artists quite seriously. For him you're not just an investment, he believes you're leading a conversation with the culture.

Rankine, Claudia. *The White Card*. Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2019, pp. 22-3.

Charles collapses Charlotte's art with herself, which further collapses the distinction between owning her art and owning her, a distinction that actually does not exist in the U.S. nation-state. When attempting a compliment about Charlotte's work, Charles states, "[Eric, the art dealer] knows good work when he sees it and so do I" (22). Their art dealer, Eric, immediately replies, "Charlotte, I think that's meant for you" (22). Eric claims that Charles's remark refers directly to Charlotte rather than Charlotte's work, a significant subtlety. Charlotte's body merges with the body of her work into a plane of non-distinction. To further emphasize even more-so the inadvertent objectification of Charlotte, and not just her art, as property, Virginia attempts a compliment as well by stating, "Charles takes his stable of artists quite seriously. For him you're not just an investment, he believes you are leading the conversation with culture" (23). Even if using a term like "leading" to describe Charlotte's artistic candor, Charlotte is still rendered as property and non-human, as one artist within Charles's "stable." Charles and Virginia cannot recognize Charlotte as a subject in their engagement with an analytic of nonrecognition.

The act of rendering Black bodies as object and white bodies as subject harkens back to Fanon's subject-object relations from *Black Skins, White Masks*. In "The So-Called Dependency Complex of the Colonized," Fanon discards the hegemonic ontology of Blacks as inferior and dependent. Instead, Fanon maintains that the psychological complexes of inferiority and dependency of Blacks are due to the overarching colonial structure. Fanon argues, "Inferiorization is the native correlative to the European feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say: *It is the racist who creates the inferiorized*" (73). The overarching colonial structure

relies on the reduction of Blacks to an Othered object. Blacks are not ontologically inferior; however, the survival of a fragile white subjectivity depends upon this analytic of non-recognition of Blacks. In order to maintain this assumption, the legacy of white subjectivity constructs mechanisms, from psychological to systemic, to materially reduce Blacks to objects to reflect this assumption. This reduction provides whites the ability to derive their subject selfhood upon an encounter with the Othered Black object. This legacy of colonial subject-object relations continues to manifest into the present, even among those who wish to "help" Blacks such as Charles and Virginia.

Though subject-object relations may readily be assessed in the dichotomies of colonizer and colonized, slave-owner and slave, and police officer and Black body, white abolitionists also perpetuate objectification of Black bodies that is equally as harmful. These white abolitionists who work within the telos of "white innocence" still maintain a European colonial sense of superiority as shown in the roles of art patron and colorblind board member. Charles and Virginia's white savior wish to "help" Charlotte enacts as harmful an objectification of her Black body as outlined in Fanon's subject-object relations.

This analytic of nonrecognition functions as yet another harm against Black bodies in the affective economy of white innocence. On how the affect of hate may solidify the identity of others, Ahmed argues:

> That is, hate crime works as a form of violence against groups through violence against the bodies of individuals. Violence against others may be one way in which the other's identity is fixed or sealed; the other is forced to embody a particular identity by and for the perpetrator of the crime, and that force involves harm or injury (55).

Guilt functions similarly in performing crimes against a Black body perceived as broken. The crimes, though not explicitly violent in nature, perform a kind of use of the Black body as means to achieve white validation. In an affective economy of white innocence, if one "saves" a Black body, or is seen as "saving" a Black body, it seals one's collective identity as part of white innocence; even if quietly or implicitly, this "saving" maintains white social power over against Black bodies while also protecting whiteness against guilt. The violence thus inflicted upon Black bodies is to continually fix them as an object of redemption for white innocence, as evidenced in Virginia and Charles's continued endeavors at a "critical agency" to save Black people. This salvation would thus be considered its own kind of guilt crime that remains situated in an analytic of nonrecognition.

Ahmed: The Failure of the "Colorblind" White Liberal

Charles objectifies Black bodies not only through collapsing the ownership of their artwork with the ownership of their bodies, but also through his attempt at fulfilling diversity quotas on boards. In addition to collecting art, Charles serves on the board for his foundation. He notes that Charlotte would be a good fit for his board, stating, "I'm thinking she'd be good for the board. We have that hole there" (44).

ERIC:	So how do you feel the evening is going?
CHARLES:	I like her. I like how measured she is. The new work could be really groundbreaking.
ERIC:	I agree.

CHARLES: I want to do more than buy her work. I want to support her endeavors.

ERIC: She did say something about wanting a new studio.

CHARLES: What do they run nowadays?

ERIC: Depends. Brooklyn. Around a million.

CHARLES: That's not bad. I know someone I can call. I'm thinking she'd be good for the board. We have that hole there.

ERIC: It will definitely solve the diversity issue.

CHARLES: It will be appropriate to explain the workings of the foundation and the impact it's having.

ERIC: I'll leave that to you. What do you have there?

Rankine, Claudia. *The White Card*. Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2019, pp. 44-5.

In *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed engages in diversity work as a way of warping institutional norms. She warps these norms precisely in inhabiting spaces of atmospheric whiteness with a raced body (135). Yet she is critical of diversity work when it veers into a cop-out for larger systemic organizations to avoid the real labor of wrestling with walls that uphold the atmospheric norms of whiteness. She argues:

> One time after I gave a talk on whiteness, a white man in the audience said, 'But you're a professor?' You can hear the implication of this but: but look at you, Professor Ahmed, look how far you have gone! How easily we can become poster children for diversity, how easily we can be held up as proof that women of color are not held up. Being a diversity poster child: it can make the world you come up against recede as if you bring it to an end; as if our arrival and progression makes whiteness disappear (146-147).

For Ahmed, "diversity poster child" performs the repeated role of tokenism within institutional frameworks where the resolution of the legacy of systemic racism is

resolved through the filling of a quota. Ironically, the "hole" of board, which Charles considers "colorblind" is the presence of a diverse set of bodies in the room that together engage in proprietary endeavors that are historically rooted in whiteness. Eric affirms that the inclusion of Charlotte on the board "will definitely solve the diversity issue" (45). Ahmed warns of the problems that prevent an exposure of whiteness, namely when "your own body becomes used as evidence that the walls of which you speak are not there or are no longer there; as if you have eliminated the walls through your own progression" (147). When Charlotte asks if racism is really just a byproduct of capitalism or if whites inherently believe themselves to be superior, Charles argues, "In the boardroom decisions are always colorblind. We don't get distracted. If this administration's base is solidly white men spewing racist rhetoric, it's not us" (49). Yet, the very vantage point of colorblindness is in essence the crux of whiteness: to be in a position transcendent of any positionality. Charles's argument that anything in contrast to blatant white supremacy cannot enact another form of racism prevents him from dismantling the wall around whiteness's colorblindness. Charles's defensiveness may be summed up in the following claim he declares after his son Alex points out the direness of addressing racism in the U.S.: "I don't support this idea that all white people are a part of what's wrong with this country. Some of us are working very hard to make all our lives better" (46).

Charles's claim of colorblindness links to an undeclared history that Ahmed articulates as a significant facet in the operation of affective economies. By undeclared histories, Ahmed means allusions to other events in temporal proximity. When addressing undeclared histories in "The Organisation of Hate," Ahmed details

how soon after a man named Tony Martin was sentenced to life imprisonment after he killed a teenage boy who attempted a burglary of his home, a Conservative Party leader named William Hague stated that the law is "more interested in the rights of criminals than the rights of people who are burgled" (47). While not being explicit in comparison, a sentence like this "evokes a history that is not declared" (47). As an example of how meanings accumulate in affective economies, this undeclared history "sticks" because "it positions Martin as the victim rather than the criminal, as a person who was burgled, rather than a person who killed" (47). In contrast, when Charles says that the white men spewing racist hate is "not us" and that "some of us" are ensuring that "our lives are better" his rhetoric establishes an undeclared history of white innocence in contrast to the historical moment of the Trump era. Though Charles can acknowledge the Trump administration as the source of racist hatred, his allusion to such hatred establishes a distinction for himself. This undeclared history of white innocence sticks because white saviors can be seen as innocent in contrast to Trump supporters. Because he is not a Trump supporter, any action Charles commits such as collecting art voids him of any inquiry, and, should even be celebrated for its critical agency in improving all lives.

Hartman: The Failure with White Liberal "Empathy"

I return to Charles's grand reveal of his latest art purchase. During Charles's unveiling of the piece, a portrayal of Michael Brown's body, he states, "That body is a portal to the inhumanity" (57).

ALEX: It's Brown's autopsy.

CHARLOTTE: But according to you, Charles, the only way to get to Officer Wilson is through Michael Brown's body?

CHARLES: That body is a portal to the inhumanity.

CHARLOTTE: (under her breath) We're not going to get anywhere with this kind of…this kind of American sentimentality.

CHARLES: How is this sentimentality? This piece will remind everyone who comes into this house what's happening out there.

CHARLOTTE: Feeling bad by looking at black lines enclosing a white space doesn't come close to experiencing the dread of knowing you could be killed for simply being black.

ERIC: Not to state the obvious, but we're not black. And I think that is what is important about your work. It gives the viewer a point of entry.

CHARLOTTE: But we're not looking at my work. This generic public record is just that, generic, impersonal. Don't you understand people were shot in the Bible study? Nine bodies bleeding to death on a tile floor is the same as this?

ERIC: Hold on, Charlotte. You are acting as if this is a personal assault on you. It's not as if you run the risk of being shot by police…

CHARLOTTE: If you think I am protected from ending up like the Sandra Blands of the world—the black woman who purportedly hanged herself…

VIRGINIA: We know who Sandra Bland is…

ERIC: I would have thought this piece is exactly the intent of your work, to make people feel with their eyes the violence done to African Americans.

CHARLES: I agree with Eric, this representation is no different from your work.

CHARLOTTE: Any police report of my death would erase me as much as this autopsy report erases Michael Brown.

CHARLES: I can't see this (*gestures toward the sculpture*) without thinking of Michael Brown. It's a memorial to him in our home.

ALEX: It's art in our house.

CHARLES: I know you're always saying the other pieces I collect aestheticize black experience, but you can't say that about this.

CHARLOTTE: If you think what I'm doing is no different than this then I fail.

Rankine, Claudia. *The White Card*. Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2019, pp. 57-9.

For Charles, Mike Brown, in all his spliced and remolded creation, can never be human, but merely the object through which whites may use to represent inhumanity. Charlotte labels Charles "sentimental" in his decision to purchase a piece of artwork that displays the autopsy report of Michael Brown.

In Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman outlines the precarious effects of empathy, which Charles and Virginia emulate during their dinner. Hartman addresses specifically how empathy deployed on the part of white abolitionists further illuminates and structures the Black body as object. In a sentimental gesture, white abolitionist John Rankin writes to his brother in brutalizing detail about how slaves have been treated in order to convey the evils of the slavery system:

> 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 suffers, 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 (18).

Rankin attempts to evoke empathy in his brother by imagining how he would feel if he had been subject to such brutality. Though the intention may ultimately be for

abolitionist ends, Hartman demonstrates how such attempts at empathy only further reify the Black body as an object outside of humanity's recognition. The exercise of empathy can only allow for a white subject to again feel for himself, as Hartman argues, "Yet empathy in important respects confounds Rankin's efforts to identify with the enslaved because in making the slave's suffering his own, Rankin begins to feel for himself rather than for those whom this exercise in imagination presumably is designed to reach" (19). In Rankine's play, Hartman's argument of empathy fails to contribute to the subjectification of Black bodies and only further solidifies Black bodies as a fungible object.

Charles's sentimental gesture to portray Black death mirrors Rankin's sentimental gestures to portray Black death. In both cases, the fungibility of the Black body is revealed through such empathic gestures as Hartman writes:

> Moreover, by exploiting the vulnerability of the captive body as a vessel for the uses, thoughts, and feelings of others, the humanity extended to the slave inadvertently confirms the expectations and desires definitive of the relations of chattel slavery. In other words, the ease of Rankin's empathic identification is as much due to his good intentions and heartfelt opposition to slavery as to the fungibility of the captive body (19).

However, whereas Rankin attempts to portray this pain as a way to achieve identification whereas Charles collapses lived Black fleshly pain with objectified Black bodies in an attempt to disrupt the social discourses written on Black bodies. In response to Charles's claim of the art depicting Black death as a portal to inhumanity, Charlotte states, "Feeling bad by looking at Black lines enclosing a white space doesn't come close to experiencing the dread of knowing you could be killed for simply being Black" (58). Charlotte points out that a gap still remains between Black suffering and Charles's feeble attempts at understanding or sympathizing or

even identifying with Black suffering through art or empathy. Instead of disrupting any of the discourses already branded on the Black body, Charles's art piece only reproduces these discourses once more through his violence of identification.

Both sympathy and empathy for Black suffering operate within the affective economy of white innocence. To position bodies as objects to be sympathized with or empathized with still reifies the suffering of said bodies. Hartman writes,

> There is a relation between destructive attachments and conservation: for the destructive relation to the object to be maintained the object itself must be conserved in some form. So hate transforms this or that other into an object whose expulsion or incorporation is needed, an expulsion or incorporation that requires the conservation of the object itself in order to be sustained (51).

An affective economy of either hate or innocence requires the conservation of the object so that it may be expelled repeatedly. In the case of the affective economy of white innocence, subsequent attempts of "relating" to Blackness or Black bodies through either sympathy or empathy depends upon the conservation of the object, the suffering Black body, in order to maintain feelings of sympathy or empathy. When Charlotte deems Charles's gesture "sentimental," Charles questions the accusation and defends himself by stating, "This piece will remind everyone who comes into this house what is going on out there" (58). Nevertheless, Charles's piece is in fact far removed from any lived pain of Black flesh. The distance rendered through art packages "reality" as sentimental, and the aroused feelings of sympathy or empathy remain tethered in association to a status of white innocence. In reality, however, sympathy and empathy do not vanquish the harmful discourses written on Spillers's Black body but merely accumulates even more discourses through the affective economy of white innocence. Charles's art piece actually accumulates more

harmful discourses about Black flesh through another production of the Black body as broken and in need of saving through white critical agency.

The Failure of White Liberal "Wokeness"

While Charles and Virginia engage in the affective economy of white innocence through white saviordom, their son, Alex, also engages in the affective economy of white innocence through his own positionality as "woke." Whereas Charles and Virginia deny their own shame through a critical agency of "helping" Blacks, Alex denies his own shame through his merciless judgment of his own parents as white saviors. Alex's supposed "wokeness" functions as yet another defense mechanism, another form of white innocence, because he implies he has transcended into the ideal white anti-racist subjectivity through his own enlightenment about race and vocal judgments of his mother, in particular, as ignorant.

Alex, alluding to the dialogue around white saviordom, tries to "correct" his mother after she says Alex is a "superhero" (34). He responds, "Mom, I try to engage with you, nonjudgmentally, but you're making it impossible. This isn't about me. We've talked about this before" (34). "This" refers to Alex's antiracism involvement in racial justice movements like Black Lives Matter. Alex's lack of forgiveness and judgment of his mother prevents him from owning his own self-loathing for his own whiteness. By focusing his anger on his parents, he can also remain "innocent" as a white person by considering his parents, the white liberal saviors, as the real problem. In the case of Alex's relationship with his mother in particular, he exhibits

some aspects later readings of the Oedipal complex consider as an individuation process where in that his antagonism toward his mother persists in a conflict over psychological separation from her.[22] In Alex's case, he further elaborates on his disdain for his parents by stating, "Innocent people of color are every place, even if you're trying not to look" (36). Alex is aware of the conversations about black invisibility to a white gaze, but maintains a critical agency through accusing his mother as the root of the problem. There is no humility in how Alex handles the recognition of making a mistake as unremitting in the project of racial justice.

Alex considers his sense of wokeness to derive not only from separating himself from his parents, but also from establishing his fluency on antiracism work. He reads Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility* and claims that he should give a copy to his mother (51). Alex's wokeness lacks any recognition of the inevitable tragedy in racial justice work. Instead, Alex operates in an affective economy of white innocence where his judgment of his parents and knowledgeability on race solidifies for him his identity as woke. Alex's position as "woke" really just does what a student leader from a Black Lives Matter leader suggests: "make [him] feel better and help [him] sleep at night" (39). Charlotte notes how Alex is being hard on his mother after he accuses his mother of having "white tears" (51). In a way, Alex uses the black movement to not deal with his own personal affects toward his family.

[22] Freud's Oedipal complex maintains that adult neurosis derives from the core childhood neurosis. That childhood neurosis, for men, manifests as a fear of the father and (sexual) desire for the mother, which typically resolves in childhood in order to prevent adult neurosis. Mahler reads Freud's Oedipal complex as less about how to reject the mother as a sexual object, but how to establish individuality through separation.
Joel Paris, "The Oedipus Complex: A Critical Re-Examination," (*Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1976) 173-179.

Alex uses and co-opts the black cause to avoid accepting his own parents' inabilities to hear or see him; as long as he does this, he will not actually be able to hear Charlotte and respect what she does or what she needs.

Actions such as viewing and collecting art that depict Black death, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and identifying with Black suffering are an effect of the affective economy of white innocence. All the behaviors as exhibited by Charles and Virginia highlight how guilt circulates affectively to separate particular bodies into solidified identity groups and inflicts further harms onto certain bodies (i.e., Black bodies) for the sake of validating other bodies (i.e., white bodies). Part of the problem with Charles and Virginia is their inability to access any feelings of discomfort, discomfort around their complicity in racism. In order to assuage its guilt, the affective economy of white innocence expels discomfort in exchange for a critical agency to assuage its guilt. In reality, any one's remote discomfort or shame can only be perceived as a threat to one's own form of white innocence. Much of the Chapter 3 will delve in the generativity of shame and vulnerability as a disruption to the affective economy of white innocence.

CHAPTER 3: SHAME

I return to the affects listed in Chapter 1: disavowal, innocence, triumphant agency, and guilt. These affects form the affective economy of white innocence. The problem with this affective economy lies in its inability to access emotions that challenge white innocence or white liberal subjectivity. Instead, as indicated in Chapter 2's engagement with *The White Card*, it is precisely this circulating affective economy of white innocence that produces the white saviordom or "wokeness" of Charles, Virginia, and Alex. Moreover, this circulation of affects simultaneously accumulates more violent discourse and violent actions onto Black bodies. As Ahmed argues, a stuckness exists in such a circulation and pervasiveness of whiteness that must be named and critiqued. After critiquing whiteness in Chapter 1 and 2, what can emerge? Both George Yancy's "Dear White America" and James Cones's *God of the Oppressed* consider how shame may offer access to an otherwise, an otherwise that extends beyond the stuckness of the affective economy of white innocence. For Yancy this otherwise requires "tarrying" while Cone explores "a death to whiteness." Both Yancy and Cone provide an analytic of shame for considering the opportunities that reside within hopelessness in the concluding scene of *The White Card*.

In "Dear White America," Yancy articulates how "tarrying" can be a way of accessing shame.[23] Yancy defines "tarrying" in its distinction from "wallowing":

> I can see your anger. I can see that this letter is being misunderstood. This letter is not asking you to feel bad about yourself, to wallow in guilt. That is

[23] George Yancy. "Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority." *New York Times*, 24 December 2015.

> too easy. I'm asking for you to tarry, to linger, with the ways in which you perpetuate a racist society, the ways in which you are racist.

While guilt collapses the white gaze repeatedly onto itself in the form of "wallowing," "tarrying" may serve as the extended stay in places of residual shame. In many ways, "wallowing" serves as a strategy to avoid acknowledging racist culpability, of doubling down on white innocence. Shame, on the other hand, may access this acknowledgment. This residual shame accrues from the unacknowledged perpetuation of systemic racism. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, an affective economy of white innocence feeds off of a lack of acknowledgment. Shame—as Yancy demonstrates through "tarrying"—provides an access to a phenomenological position of otherwise, an otherwise to the pervasive affective economy of white innocence. Such a "tarrying" provides a space, as Yancy considers, to "trace the binds that tie you to forms of domination that you would rather not see." Guilt or "wallowing" on the other hand, simply centers whiteness by placing white liberal subjects as the sole enactor of racism. Shame, on the other hand, reveals the systemic mechanisms and interweaved affects that move and orient white liberal subjects to enact harms on Black bodies. So long as guilt circulates, there cannot be acknowledgement or perception to even begin the process of tracing back to such violent discourses branded onto Black bodies in the U.S.

For Virginia, her guilt manifests as a "wallowing" that Yancy cautions against in the excerpt above ("This letter is not asking you to feel bad about yourself, to wallow in guilt"). When Charlotte claims that the goal of her art is to unveil what has not been seen, she says, "I do want people to feel what Black people are feeling"

(28). Even beyond seeing, Charlotte wants a momentary affect: an experience of being a Black body in the U.S. Because Virginia is incapable of tolerating the shame of Black suffering, she wallows in her own self-pity produced from guilt. She asks in a voice that Rankine notes to be "genuinely feeling," "What kinds of feelings am I not feeling?" (28). Rather than sit with shame, Virginia slips into the guilt of "feeling bad for oneself," which can only further center whiteness and possibly demand more emotional labor from Charlotte to assuage her guilt. If Virginia sat with her shame, she would engage in more affective work of "tracing" her own binds to the forms of domination. In this case, "tarrying" asks for a temporal lingering with discomfort in order to resist placing additional responsibility for dismantling racism and emotional labor onto Charlotte.

In a similar vein as Yancy, James Cone also advocates that white liberal subjects accept their participation in such violent discourses. While Yancy claims that such acceptance necessitates the affect of shame through "tarrying," Cone argues for a theological white death. I turn to theology, and specifically Cone's theology, as an analytical lens for considering how a white death is not synonymous with a subjective collapse, but rather a precursive event to entering an otherwise. Cone crafts a theology in *God of the Oppressed* that attends to black life, suffering, and liberation.[24] His theology emphasizes the workings of the divine as grounded in historical, social, and material contexts. This theology differs from much Greek-influenced Christian thought where questions and conclusions about God stemmed

[24] Cones, James H. *God of the Oppressed*. Maryknoll, Orbis Press, 1997.

from assumptions about God's contextlessness and timelessness. Cone applies this contextualization of theology when considering the theological concept of reconciliation. When addressing reconciliation, Cone contextualizes the theological concept of reconciliation through examining the historical and social desire for reconciliation between blacks and whites in the U.S. On such a reconciliation, Cone notes:

> White people must realize that reconciliation is a costly experience. It is not holding hands and singing 'Black and white together' and 'We shall overcome.' Reconciliation means *death*, and only those who are prepared to die in the struggle for freedom will experience new life with God (219).

I argue that Cones's notions of reconciliation such as "holding hands and singing" sentiments like "Black and white together" or "We shall overcome" remain tethered to the affective economy of white innocence. These "sentiments" demand an erasure of the past without dismantling current systems of white power legacies. Such "sentiments" remain out of touch with the type of shame Yancy outlines because it lacks "tarrying" in the discomfort of the binds that still tie white people to legacies of racial oppression. Instead, Cone turns to death as a prerequisite of white-black reconciliation.

But how exactly is death connected to reconciliation between blacks and whites? For Cone, when a white person "dies," it means that a person "sells and redefines his or her life in commitment to the Kingdom of God" in the name of repentance for engaging in or profiting by Black oppression (221). Cone's theological reading of the Kingdom of God is the realm for those who have been designated as destitute in the world. He maintains, "God's kingdom is for the bad

characters, the outcasts, and the weak, but not for the self-designated righteous people" (73). For white liberal subjects who have designated themselves as righteous, like Charles or Virginia, the Kingdom of God remains a realm outside their own access. Furthermore, to "commit" to the Kingdom of God requires a dedication to redefining one's life for those who have been deemed "bad characters" or "outcasts" such as Black people. But one cannot begin this process of commitment without recognizing how a position of self-righteousness as a white liberal subject contributed to racial oppression. It is only when white liberal subjects repent for such contributions that whites and blacks may reconcile in the pursuit of social justice. Cone argues:

> When whites undergo the true experience of conversion wherein they die to whiteness and are reborn anew in order to struggle *against* white oppression and *for* the liberation of the oppressed, there is a place for them in the black struggle for freedom (222).

I apply Cone's concept of "death to whiteness" to the affective death of the white liberal subject. White liberal subjectivity operates within an affective economy of white innocence, in part, through claiming that white liberal subjects are in fact fighting against white oppression of the oppressed. However, they have not committed the white death that may bring them truly into the Black struggle for freedom. This is in part due to their allegiance to the "sentimental" like Cone outlines as well as Charlotte in *The White Card*. Cone notes that fighting for the oppressed, or white conversion to the black cause, "ought not be identified with white sympathy for blacks or with a pious feeling in white folks' hearts" (221). Without white death, one remains a white liberal subject, tethered to sentimental

affects like "sympathy" and "piety." Similarly, as explored in the previous chapter, Charlotte calls out Charles's art collecting as an exhibit of "American sentimentality" (57). When Charles claims that the display of Michael Brown's autopsy is "a portal to the inhumanity," Charlotte maintains, "Feeling bad by looking at Black lines enclosing a white space doesn't come close to experiencing the dread of knowing you could be killed for simply being Black" (58). In both examples, Cone and Charlotte illuminate how white liberal subjects remain stuck in their attachment to sentimental affects such as sympathy. Sympathy, in addition to affects like guilt and triumphant agency, comprise the affective economy of white innocence.

As a white liberal subject, one partakes in the affective economy of white innocence that perpetuates and accumulates racist harms. As Cone notes, whites who "convert" to the movement of racial justice "must be made to realize that they are like babies who have barely learned how to walk and talk" (222). A "white convert" is child-like not in innocence, but in ignorance. Therefore, a "white convert" requires molding and guidance as it continues its unremitting failures in the process of learning just a little more of how to "walk and talk" against white oppression and for the liberation of the oppressed. This "white convert" differs from the white liberal subjectivity precisely in the white convert's submission to being incapable and unknowledgeable about how to single-handedly resolve racism while also acknowledging how, even in their best efforts at racial justice, they may in fact be regularly perpetuating racism.

Cone's definition of a "white convert" to Black liberation connects back to unremitting failure. As outlined back in Chapter 1, by focusing on and

acknowledging Ahmed's claim of "stuckness" in white backdrops, white people may better attend to the oppressions they contribute to or perpetuate in the present. This present is saturated in tragedy due to overarching white hegemonies as outlined by Glaude. Through the acknowledgement that failure is an inevitability in any gesture toward racial justice amidst the tragic backdrop of white hegemonies, white people may be more apt to learn from their ignorance rather than maintain a stance of eternal innocence.

In the case of Charles at the start of the play, his own identity with white liberal subjectivity inhibits Cones's "death to whiteness." His white innocence upholds a wall of defensiveness when it is challenged, as he states, "I don't support this idea that all white people are a part of what's wrong in this country" (46). In his white innocence, Charles maintains that his opposition to Trump protects him from committing harm, therefore he does not need to labor over the power of his language. This lack of labor on Charles's part leads to lackadaisical usage of "rally for" and "protest of" Trump when referring to his son's political activism (24; 31). Ultimately, Charles positions himself as an ideal antiracist subjectivity of white innocence, which allows him to claim he is a beacon of safety. He states, "My dear, don't worry, you are safe here" (24). Charles's white innocence convinces him that harm is not something he is capable of due to his opposition to Trump, and therefore he does not have to consider the harmful impact of his own micro-aggressions of language or practice. These actions are twofold: solidifying the identities of white innocence and broken Black bodies as well as accumulate more harmful discourses onto Black flesh in the form of Black bodies. These earlier

encounters with Charles in the play demonstrate how he has yet to "die to whiteness" because his own white liberal subjectivity remains alive, agential, and, ultimately, innocent.

At the closing of *The White Card*, I consider how Rankine demonstrates an example of white death as accessed through shame. A year after the dinner party ordeal, Charles visits Charlotte's studio to inquire about her latest art exhibit. Charles asks Charlotte why her art now consists of images of white people observing Black suffering rather than simply images of Black suffering. In response, Charlotte claims that the art she used to create contributed to the collective reification of Black death rather than the critique of such reification. An example of this collective reification occurs with the aesthetic depictions of Michael Brown's death, which further memorialized Black flesh into broken Black bodies and further erased the white police officer involved in the facilitation of such death. Charles grows defensive when Charlotte hints that Charles and the white police officer work within the same white imaginary. She states:

> Look, I don't want you to think of the officer as a monster or Hulk Hogan or a demon or whatever and I don't think you're a monster, but his obsession with black people as criminals and yours with black people as victims are cut from the same cloth. Neither is human (77).

In this way, Charlotte highlights how the white liberal subjectivity, as it operates within an affective economy of white innocence, harms Blacks equally as much as white supremacists. Framing a Black body as victim continues to distinguish it from the category of man. Charlotte's comment about being cut from the "same cloth" primes him for the possibility to experience his shame. However, it is not until the

final section where Charlotte challenges Charles to confront his whiteness not only in conversation but also through becoming an art piece that he experiences a white death:

CHARLOTTE: What do you see when you look at me?

CHARLES: The daylight.

CHARLOTTE: What does that even mean?

CHARLES: You of all people should understand that. You and I are out in the world and it's as if there's a fault line that runs the entirety of our lives between us. On your terms there's no way for me to get to you on the other side.

CHARLOTTE: If that were only true. Despite all the segregation, the tragedy is we are on the same side. We've always been here together, shipwrecked here together.

CHARLES: You're right; we're here together.

CHARLOTTE: Wrecked together, solitary, here together…

CHARLES: But the feeling is the feeling of a gap.

CHARLOTTE: The gap, Charles, is caused because you refuse the role you actually play.

CHARLES: I don't need you to show me me.

CHARLOTTE: Me, me, me. You don't need me to show you anything. That's probably the first honest thing you've said.

CHARLES: Fuck you, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: I'm already fucked. You know, I have to admit, I thought you were different from all the others, but in the end…for you I'm just this annoyance that won't confirm to your good works.

CHARLES: You're acting as if I think of you as some kind of project.

CHARLOTTE: Well, don't you?

CHARLES: I do believe I can help.

CHARLOTTE: If you actually want to help, why don't you make *you* your project?

CHARLES: What about me? My money? My power? My mobility, as you say?

CHARLOTTE: I mean the mass murder and devastation that comes with you being you.

CHARLES: Me being me? Mass murder, devastation. It's hard not to hear that as a completely irritational attack.

CHARLOTTE: Racism exists outside of reason. Black people have never been human.

CHARLES: This is so hopeless.

CHARLOTTE: Go further into that hopelessness, and then we can begin to really see each other.

CHARLES: You're right to keep me a part of it. My whiteness. It needs to be faced.

CHARLOTTE: (*she faces Charles*) At its' deepest level, yes.

CHARLES: It's just skin and yet I know it's power too.

CHARLOTTE: Dehumanizing power.

CHARLES: What is skin? I've heard dust is mostly skin (touching the table)—is this my skin? Yours?

CHARLOTTE: Charles—

CHARLES: We're shedding skin all the time—thousands of cells a minute. But it renews itself. I've never actually looked at my skin.

How many cells is it? How porous is it? How many layers are there? Where is it darkest? Where lightest? (*He began to unbutton his shirt*.) All my skin is holding me together. Good lord, all this skin shields me. It protects me from…from being you.

> It's like the badge of the police. (*He removes his shirt and turns his back to her.*) I'm ready. (*Beat.*)
>
> Charlotte, you can shoot me now. (*He stands there with his back to her and arms at his side. Silence.*)
>
> (*Leonard Cohen's "Different Sides" begins to play. Charlotte ties her smock around her waist and, taking off her shoes, steps onto a crate, binding her hands with his scarf. She stares at Charles's back. Charles turns around. His horror and confusion are apparent. There is the click and flash of a camera.*)

Rankine, Claudia. *The White Card*. Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2019, pp. 86-9.

Charlotte manages to capture what Ahmed calls the "waiting for the bogus"—which accumulates again and again in the affective economy of white innocence—while placing Charles as the real art project, the real object to depict. I return again to Ahmed's discourse of "waiting for the bogus" as an integral dimension of affective economies. On "waiting for the bogus," Ahmed writes:

> The impossibility of reducing hate to a particular body allows hate to circulate in an economic sense, working to differentiate some others from other others, a differentiation that is never 'over', as it awaits others who have not yet arrived. Such a discourse of 'waiting for the bogus' is what justifies the repetition of violence against the bodies of others in the name of protecting the nation (47).

I applied Ahmed's "waiting for the bogus" in affective economies of white hate to affective economies of white innocence. I applied this by considering how white liberal subjects repeatedly wait for the broken Black body that threatens their identity as innocent white subjects of an innocent white nation. Such repeated anticipations justify the violences of "helping" again and again in the name of white guilt. While guilt on the part of the white subject usurps black bodies into a white imagination, white shame as facilitated by Charlotte produces a potential exit out of

this white innocence. Through a death of his white innocence, Charles glimpses at, for possibly one of the first times, all the harms his white liberal subjectivity does to Black bodies in this tragic backdrop. Now Charles sees the hopelessness of being "shipwrecked" here together (86). Rankine's reference to being "shipwrecked" (and earlier Charlotte's imagining her own artwork as being "held in the hold of a ship" [76]) speaks to a larger analytical tradition in Black thought. This tradition considers the hold of the slave ship as a site of both existence as an oppressed Black body and non-existence as Black flesh as explored in Hortense Spillers and taken up by Christina Sharpe in "wake work."

Now Charles tarries in the discomfort that he too had been a part of: the violence inflicted upon Black bodies. The real portal into the inhumanity is his own body. Through Charles's own shame, he may access a "white death" from the white liberal subjectivity and consider an otherwise outside the affective economy of white innocence. As Charles states, he has never actually looked at his skin until now (88). Charlotte gives him a knowledge that reveals just how ignorant he had been all along. In this way, his child-like white innocence is broken in order to see that it was his own child-like white ignorance all along. This hopelessness, with Charles on display as the object of analysis, provides a moment that gets Charles closer to a recognition of Charlotte more so than could any pornotroping, art collecting that depicts Black death, boardroom colorblindness, or empathy ever could. For a moment, Charles glimpses into what it is like to be the object of the genre of white man's gaze, the gaze of whiteness.

Works Cited

Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2017.

Ahmed, Sara. "The Organisation of Hate." *Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh University Press, 2004. pp. 42-61.

Ahmed, Sara. "Phenomenology of Whiteness." *Feminist Theory,* vol. 8, no. 2, 2007, pp. 149-168.

Billings, Hammatt. Illustration for Uncle Tom's Cabin. Boston, John P. Jewett & Company, 1853. http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/interpret/exhibits/tom_leg.html.

Blum, Edward J. and Paul Harvey. *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America*. Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Cones, James H. *God of the Oppressed*. Maryknoll, Orbis Press, 1997.

Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York, Grove Press, 2008.

Ferreira da Silva, Denise. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Glaude Jr., Eddie S. *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America.* Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1997.

Jordan, Winthrop. *White over Black*: A*merican Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. Baltimore, Penguin Books Inc, 1968.

Lorde, Audre. "The Uses of Anger." *Women's Studies Quarterly,* vol. 25, no. ½, 1997, pp. 278-285.

Moten, Fred, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)" *Southern Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 112, no. 4, 2013, pp. 737–780.

Painter, Nell Irvin. *The History of White People*. New York and London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2010.

Paris, Joel. "The Oedipus Complex: A Critical Re-Examination," *Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1976, pp. 173-179.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric.* Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2014.

Rankine, Claudia. *The White Card.* Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2019.

Rich, Adrienne. "Notes Toward the Politics of Location." *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives Fourth Edition*, edited by Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, Routledge, 2017, 177.Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016.

Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016.

Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics,* vol. 17, no. 2, 1987, pp. 64-81.

Wekker, Gloria. *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*. Durham, Duke University Press, 2016.

Wiegman, Robyn. *Object Relations.* Durham, Duke University Press, 2012.

Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves In Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désêtre: Black Studies Toward the Human Project," in *Not Only the Master's Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice (Cultural Politics & the Promise of Democracy)*,

eds. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon. Boulder and London: Paradigm Publishers, 2005, pp. 107-169.

Yancy, George. “Dear White America: Letter to a New Minority.” *New York Times*, 24 December 2015.

Vita

NAME OF AUTHOR: Hannah Murray

PLACE OF BIRTH: Annapolis, Maryland

DATE OF BIRTH: October 15, 1993

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York

Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts in Religion, 2020, Syracuse University

Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies and English, 2016, Indiana University

AWARDS AND HONORS:

Theta Chi Beta, Syracuse University, 2020

Theta Alpha Kappa, Indiana University 2016

Phi Beta Kappa, Indiana University, 2015

Executive Dean's List, Indiana University, 2012-2016

Hutton Honors College Student, Indiana University, 2013-2016

Founders Scholar, Indiana University, 2012-2016

Bill Gallagher Essay Contest (2nd place), Indiana University, 2016

Mary Jo Weaver Scholarship Program, Indiana University, 2015-2016

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Legal Assistant, Robert Half Legal, 2017-2018

Secondary English Teacher, Teach for America, 2016-2017