

Ignoring the Negro: Commodity, Capitalism, and Cultural Appropriation

Tony Baugh
University of Edinburgh

“The white man slaves to reach a human level.” – Frantz Fanon

Abstract

The following paper moves on two fronts: the first movement is an examination of three important texts: *Black Reconstruction in America* by W.E.B. Du Bois, *Das Kapital, Volume I*, by Karl Marx, and *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* by Cedric Robinson. In this first section, I perform an exegesis of these three texts, bringing to bear a confluence of ideas to explore the ways in which the desiderata and destruction of the Black body, at the center of the practice of white supremacy/whiteness,¹ is also at the center of capitalism, a feature of the selfsame practice. After this foundational work is completed, the second movement of the paper is toward revealing a throughline from the commoditization of the Black body as site of desiderata and destruction under chattel slavery towards rampant modes of appropriation of Black American cultural products. I argue that this process is a cornerstone of late capitalistic consumption, socioeconomic domination, and biopolitical control.

Key Words: African American, Capitalism, Race, Political philosophy, Culture studies, Black male studies

1. Introduction

The great Du Bois (1935), in *Black Reconstruction in America*, his *magnum opus*, made the following observation of the South and the North during the American Civil War: “Both sections ignored the Negro” (56). This is the most important proposition that Du Bois makes in the famous “The General Strike” chapter of his master work. He goes on to describe in detail how the war between the United States of America and the Confederate States of America, between the Union and the Confederacy, between the North and the South, could have ended much sooner than

¹ As a Black man who has, in the immortal words of Bernie Mac, “been Black a long time,” I don’t know a single Black person that believes that white people are superior to them in any way. When I use the term “white supremacy,” I do so against my will because, conceptually, it operates with a certain notoriety and promotes the delusion that whiteness is a superior sociocultural category, when it never has been.

it had, sparing the lives of hundreds of thousands, if either side had remembered Black people. To this point, in his historical analysis, what Du Bois posits is a three-pronged assertion against the practice of whiteness/white supremacy: 1) That the practice of whiteness/white supremacy prevented white working class/poor folk from observing how freed slaves would not pose a threat to the economy or competition to their livelihood but improve them; 2) That the practice of whiteness/white supremacy deceived many into battling against their own interests by fighting a war for a planter class that exploited them; 3) That the practice of whiteness/white supremacy prevented the Confederacy from allowing their enslaved Africans to soldier for the South but too late, sealing their fate in losing the war.

This paper will explore this three-pronged assertion by Du Bois as exemplar of the destructive effects of white supremacy/whiteness and capitalism, what Du Bois called “the wages of whiteness,” a counter-intuitive and counter-productive practice, leading to the denuding of the human. This denuding of humanity at the heart of capitalism can be seen in modernity as the appropriating of cultural practices across the spectrum of monumental and nadiral artifacts of urban Black culture by white people while they with simultaneity attempt to adjudicate moral claims through economic seizure of these cultural norms. In this instance, I will cite the recent fines of athletes in the National Basketball Association (NBA) who have been fined large sums of money by their sports league for employing the discretionary philosophy of language of saying “Pause,” “No homo,” and “No Diddy.” I trouble the notion that these terms are homophobic and thus unliberal (cruel), positing that perhaps these fines are applied to Black male athletes because, whereas the nadir of Black inner-city culture is fetishized as the Black enslaved body once was, as a historical tendency, white people police Black forms of Black self-embodiment (phenomenology) as they covet these en fleshed norms of Black culture as their own, while neglecting the full autonomy of the Black body. Through this process I wonder if the Black male body ever ceased being the most valuable capitalist commodity, or if the commodification of the Black body has been transmuted into forms of cultural appropriation.

Part I

2. The Speaking Commodity

Marx begins *Das Kapital* with a discourse on the commodity because it is the commodity that is the central element of capitalism. When he describes a commodity as “...an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another,” that “...they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference” (Marx [1867] 1909, 27), “[n]either are we...concerned to know how the object satisfies these wants, whether directly as means of subsistence, or indirectly as means of production” (Marx [1867] 1909, 27), Marx designates a thingified notion of the commodity along a we/they dialectic. In other words, Marx posits an instrumentalist view of the commodity perspectival of consumer (proletariat/bourgeoisie) or producer (proletariat) or keeper of capital and the capitalistic means and modes of production (bourgeoisie), the degree to which the human [we] is a willing, unwilling, or unwitting participant in the economic system of industrial capitalism. At the outset of his critique of capitalism, Marx describes the commodity, without which there would be no capitalism, as some-thing that cannot be human, a thing that has no intrinsic value, only use-value, inasmuch as its function permits, and an exchange-value, for what it may be exchanged in the market, in circulation, for money or other

commodities, as the quintessence of capitalism, maximizing profits. Constant capital, the rudimentary value constitutive of the modes of production (private properties, machinery, tools, land, which, as Korsch explains, is itself a mode of production, those "... instruments of labour [that] [do] not, in the process of production, undergo any quantitative alteration of value" [146]) and variable capital, the activity that represents surplus in the capitalistic means of production – surplus value and surplus labor (including the monies spent on the maintenance of the body of the laborer [wages]) – evolve from the former to the latter to exploit the laborer of his time and energies (146). Variable capital is made possible through a combination of what Marx calls surplus-value and surplus-labor (146). On exchange-value and use-value, constant capital and variable capital, surplus-value and surplus-labor, Marx writes:

...that part of capital, represented by labour-power, does, in the process of production, undergo an alteration of value....This part of capital is continually being transformed from a constant into a variable magnitude. I therefore call it the variable part of capital, or, shortly, variable capital. The same elements of capital which, from the point of view of the labour-process, present themselves respectively as the objective and subjective factors, as means of production and labour-power, present themselves, from the point of view of the process of creating surplus-value, as constant and variable capital. (Marx [1867] 1909, 147)

According to Marx, "The minimum of variable capital is the cost price of a single labour-power employed the whole year through, day in, day out, for the production of surplus-value" (215). Surplus value, then, is that labor time ("...duration of...expenditure, or the quantity of labour" [47]) the wage worker expends on manufacturing the commodity that he sets his hand to for several hours per diem (106). Born out of the simultaneous change of "...the means of production...into means for the absorption of the labour of others..." (217), "...no longer the labourer [employing] the means of production, but the means of production [employing] the labourer...[i]nstead of being consumed by him as material elements of his productive activity" (217), these means of production at the heart of surplus-value "...consume him as the ferment necessary to their own life-process, and the life-process of capital consists only in its movement as value constantly expanding, constantly multiplying itself" (217). Since value, actual value, not surplus value, which is what is needed for the capitalist to make profits, since actual value does not change ("...20 yards of linen=1 coat or x commodity A=y commodity B..." [47]), only under the conditions that the raw materials are transmuted through labor into a new item, i.e. cotton into yarn, the value of the commodity stays the same and only is augmented as represented through and by the time the laborer puts into making the commodity. Thus, time is what creates value. There is no need, therefore, for the laborer to put more time into what he produces for the capitalist beyond how long it would take to create the commodity. This time is enough for that creation and enough to sustain the subsistence of the laborer. The capitalist, "[p]ersonified capital" (216), therefore needs to double that time, "[t]hat he may live only twice as well as an ordinary labourer, and besides turn half of the surplus-value produced into capital" (216), so he can see some money ("that oft...represents commodities long withdrawn from circulation..." [109], e.g., dead slaves, and that "...continues to be current" [109], thus is called currency), money being the embodied form of the commodity (in economic circulation) and through which, by circulation in the political economy, capitalism is generated.

The worker makes it possible not only, according to the capitalist, for the capitalist to be able to pay him for his time, but also makes it so that the capitalist can charge for the produced commodity what he desires in the marketplace to maximize his profits. Surplus-labor, thus, is that time that the capitalist adds on to the working day of the wage laborer beyond that time it would require him to complete his commodity manufacturing tasks (164). If the laborer is working eight hours a day, by Marx's rationale, this day, if it were a just working day unencumbered by the capitalist's avarice and caprice, would be four hours, which would align with the amount of labor time the commodity necessitated to be manufactured by the laborer. Surplus-labor intrudes when this necessary time for commodity producing labor is doubled by the capitalist so that he might "afford" to be able to pay the laborer wages, without it intruding upon his profits, thus generating capital, thus engendering capitalism. Of this procedure, Marx writes:

Suppose the working day consists of 6 hours of necessary labour, and 6 hours of surplus labour. Then the free labourer gives the capitalist every week 6 x 6 or 36 hours of surplus labour. It is the same as if he worked 3 days in the week for himself, and 3 days in the week gratis for the capitalist. But this is not evident on the surface. Surplus labour and necessary labour glide one into the other. I can, therefore, express the same relationship by saying, e.g., that the labourer in every minute works 30 seconds for himself, and 30 for the capitalist, etc. (Marx [1867] 1909, 164)

The labor time that the wage worker applies to producing the commodity is nominally doubled, thus increasing the surplus-value of the object of manufacture from the surplus-labor applied by the capitalist to the laborer's working day. This is the essence of capitalistic exploitation of the worker. Yet, what happens when the commodity itself, cornerstone of the exploitation of the wage worker, speaks, externalizing an interior desire, when the commodity wants to be free of being a commodity? Catastrophes, contradictions, antagonisms become imminent. Marx underestimated the possibility of the commodity to speak. True, he mused about a fictive occurrence of commodities speaking in a brief thought experiment, writing, "If commodities could speak they would say this: our use-value may interest men, but it does not belong to us as objects. What does belong to us as objects, however, is our value" (95). This value that Marx reckons the commodity possesses as an object is apart from its extrinsic worth, or use-value; therefore, it must be a reference to its intrinsic worth, a value that only a speaking commodity could have. However, Marx's thought experiment does not consider the speaking commodity, the enslaved Black worker central to mercantile and industrial capitalism, which could be seen as a dearth of ethical dimensions in Marxism itself, because, following Marx, the early orthodox and scientific Marxist philosophers did not reckon upon the sapience of the enslaved Black worker either.

In *Kapital*, Marx wrote, "...that the Georgian slave-owner was lately delivered, by the abolition of slavery, from the painful dilemma, whether to squander the surplus-product, lashed out of his niggers, entirely in champagne, or whether to reconvert a part of it into more niggers and more land" (418). In his major work, *Anti-Dühring: Herr Dühring's Revolution in Science*, Engels, Marx's writing partner and chief interlocutor, writing in 1877, at the end of Reconstruction, explains how, slavery as an historical institution, was an inevitable function of the evolution of political economy in the world, inscribing: "It is very easy to inveigh against slavery and similar things in general terms, and to give vent to high moral indignation at such infamies" (211) but that

“[i]t was slavery that first made possible the division of labour between agriculture and industry on a larger scale...” (212). This aloof materialist conception of history of both Marx and Engels can be called evolutionary socialism. While Marx himself “...had insisted ‘that slavery cannot be abolished without the steam-engine and the mule and spinning-jenny’” (Robinson 2001, 119), and “...‘serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture,’... nothing of the sort was taking place” (Robinson 2001, 119). “Robert Fogel informs us that from 1810 to 1860, the demand for slaves in the South increased twentyfold, and tobacco and cotton production increased and expanded into the western slave states through the intervention of the steam engine in transportation (the steamboat and railroads)” (Robinson 2001, 119). His major work, *Ethics and the Materialist Conception of History*, sees Engel’s student Kautsky, whose mechanical version of Marxism became dominant in Europe from the late 19th century to the outbreak of World War I, only broaching the socioeconomic exploitation of Black people to exemplify class antagonism, writing, “So long as class rule has existed, the ruling morality has guarded wherever a sharp class antagonism has been formed, slavery, inequality, exploitation” (147). Lukács, who along with Karl Korsch brought Marxism to the West, in his major work, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, writes only of the plight of Black people to further prove his concept of reification as a form of species alienation experienced by the human subject under the capitalist economic system.

Lukács, who, according to Cornel West, arrives closest to Marx’s ethical dimensions but falls short due to his emphasis on historical necessity, wrote that the body of a man is his commodity “...inseparable from his physical existence” ([1923] 1971, 166). He also posited that the seeming immediacy and predestination of the capitalistic society that entraps the wage worker is tantamount to “...a slavery without limits” (Lukács [1923] 1971, 166), though without naming chattel slavery as the peculiar institution that it was, Lukács represents an ignorance of the humanity of Black people, leading one scholar to remark: “Western Marxism, in either of its two-variants – critical-humanist or scientific – has proven insufficiently radical to expose and root out the racist order that contaminates its analytic and philosophic applications or to come to effective terms with the implications of its own class origins” (Robinson 1983, 317). This ignorance of the humanity of Black people as commodities, as beings much more than objectified pistons sparking the economic engine of Western normative domination and imperialism is a reminder of Du Bois’ description of how the North and the South ignored the Negro during the Civil War.

This ignorance, is at the core of Cedric Robinson’s thesis in his book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, and why he maintains that the Black radical traditions that emerged in Europe and its colonies did so apart from continental or British radical labor movements because socialism, as derived from mechanical Marxism, obviated Black involvement, opting instead for ethnocentricity and nationalism over solidarity. The mechanical view of Marxism, the overemphasis of the materialist conception of history, is one of strict historical necessity, and it is what distanced the early orthodox and scientific Marxists from a radical historicist viewpoint, that is, a historicist perspective ethologically construed (West 1980) that could have sensitized them to the plight of Black enslaved people. As Eduard Bernstein writes in *Evolutionary Socialism*, “The materialist is thus a Calvinist without God” (7), capitalism’s (and chattel slavery with it) predestination “...in a materialism of natural science” (18) excused malice and sanctioned murder. However, Bernstein writes that technically, while “[p]hilosophic materialism...is in a mechanical sense deterministic,” “[t]he Marxist conception of history is

not..." because "[i]t allots to the economic foundation of the life of nations no unconditioned determining influence on the forms this life takes" (18). The conditions for each mode of historical and economic development, according to a Marxist conception of history, has been sustained from one iteration to the next. As Marx writes, in his section of *Kapital* on "The Greed for Surplus-Labour. Manufacturer and Boyard":

Capital has not invented surplus labour. Wherever a part of society possesses the monopoly of the means of production, the labourer, free or not free, must add to the working-time necessary for his own maintenance an extra working-time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owners of the means of production, whether this proprietor be the Athenian καλὸς κἀγαθός [well-to-do man], Etruscan theocrat, civis Romanus [Roman citizen], Norman baron, American slave-owner, Wallachian Boyard, modern landlord or capitalist. (Marx [1867] 1909, 164)

This philosophy of history that relativizes time is what led Engels to write of the inevitability of slavery being due to the inevitability of that stage in capitalism, which must flourish to its full extent to lead to the eventuation of socialism to bring about *Aufhebung* to capitalism. In this section of *Kapital*, Marx comes close to naming the especial plight of the Black slave as the speaking commodity who produces commodities, an opportunity for him to evince his ethical dimensions, but he falls short, again flattening time in such a way as to relativize the experience of the forced unpaid wage worker (*corvée*) with the dehumanized (commoditized) enslaved African. He writes:

Hence the negro labour in the Southern States of the American Union preserved something of a patriarchal character, so long as production was chiefly directed to immediate local consumption. But in proportion, as the export of cotton became of vital interest to these states, the over-working of the negro and sometimes the using up of his life in 7 years of labour became a factor in a calculated and calculating system. It was no longer a question of obtaining from him a certain quantity of useful products. It was now a question of production of surplus labour itself: So was it also with the *corvée*, e.g., in the Danubian Principalities (now Roumania). (Marx [1867] 1909, 164)

Marx ([1867] 1909), who at least understands that there is some difference between slave laborer and wage laborer, writes of their contrast: "Only, in the slave system, the advantage of a labour-power above the average, and the disadvantage of a labour-power below the average, affects the slave-owner; in the wage-labour system, it affects the labourer himself, because his labour-power is, in the one case, sold by himself, in the other, by a third person..."(380). Here, he observes that the life (use-value) of the slave was expended in seven years' time, this comparison of the experiences of *corvée* and the *Corvus*, the free worker forced to labor for a set time, and the Black crow, the animalized and dehumanized perpetual laborer, the objectified commodity that speaks, a concrescence of both ends and more, underscores the trenchant historical perception of the incapacity of the enslaved African worker, as *commodity*, to be capable of its own liberation.

Du Bois maintained that right "[u]p to the time that the war actually broke out, American labor simply refused, in the main, to envisage [B]lack labor as a part of its problem. Right up to the edge of the war, it was talking about the emancipation of white labor and the organization of

stronger unions without saying a word, or apparently giving a thought, to four million [B]lack slaves” (29). Marx’s “peculiar commodity,” what he called *labor-power*, was predicated by labor time, which the laborer pours into the manufacture of the commodity, giving it its surplus-value, and “...exists only as a capacity, or power of the living individual” (120). To be a living individual as much as one is an object of exchange is to be the more peculiar commodity, because to be a living soul and be commoditized is antithetical. The “...definite quantity of human muscle, nerve, brain, etc., [that] is wasted, and [required] to be restored,” (120) is dire straits for the white laborer but truer of the hungry Black slave whose whole existence is rotted by the menial, manual alienating labor of his enslavers’ design, as he subsists of the scraps from his table and the tears from his half-starved children. On the “peculiar commodity” of labor-power, Marx writes:

We now know how the value paid by the purchaser to the possessor of this peculiar commodity, labour-power, is determined. The use-value which the former gets in exchange, manifests itself only in the actual utilisation, in the consumption of the labour-power. The money-owner buys everything necessary for this purpose, such as raw material, in the market, and pays for it at its full value. The consumption of labour-power is completed, as in the case of every other commodity, outside the limits of the market or of the sphere of circulation. (Marx [1867] 1909, 120)

The distinction of Black labor power as commodity and currency in circulation can be found in the definitional disparity between cattle and *chattel*. Though possessing the same Old French word root, *chatel*, cattle and chattel are defined with differing designations. Cattle (n.) are large ruminant mammals with cloven hooves; chattel (n.) is an article of movable personal property. Chattel, then, by definition, holds the distinction of economic motility, of being in circulation. Marx’s formula of money being representative of commodity, $x \text{ commodity} = y \text{ money commodity}$ (67), is true for the Black enslaved person unlike any other enslaved human or indentured servant in modernity. Under this formulation, the Black slave was both commodity and currency, liquidity, a *drachma* that could be exchanged for goods and services, an eternal coin. This paper seeks to trouble the notion that Black people ever ceased being currency. When Kwame Anthony Appiah (2018) suggests that “we should resist using the term ‘cultural appropriation’ as an indictment” (85) because all “cultural practices and objects are mobile,” (85) he is close to naming the liquidity of Black flesh as currency but disallows such a trajectory of thought, landing on distilling accusations of cultural appropriation to mere “forms of disrespect” (85). What Appiah gets wrong about cultural appropriation is that the Black male body is still a commodity under capitalism, thus possessing a dearth of parity not in substance but in practice. Therefore, it becomes necessary to reconfigure our outlook of whiteness not as race but as economy, ecology, and cosmology, inhuman and incompatible with irenic cultural exchange and compatible only with a commodity-money-commodity exchange of a capitalistic marketplace.

As Suresh Naidu (2020, 3) writes in his paper “American Slavery and Labour Market Power” (2020), “Slaveowners, like all employers, face problems of motivation and retention. But while employers of free labour have but one instrument at their disposal, the wage, with which to manage the many dimensions of the labour contract, a slaveowner has legal, state-sanctioned racial coercion as a flexible instrument with which to compel performance and capture absconding enslaved workers.” Thus, the industry of chattel slavery had no market limits; the institution of

slavery itself was its only limit.² This economic phenomenon could be seen in America after the ending of the international slave trade with the passing of the “Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves” in 1808. That this act passed as cotton became king, after the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793, caused commoditized Black bodies as slave labor to become its wedded queen. Due to this morbid concrescence of the international slave trade being outlawed in 1808 and cotton becoming so lucrative, the Black body was worked to death in the fields, dying on average at the age of twenty-two. However, this presented no problem to the aristocratic planter class enslavers, who devised ways to procure further flesh to be commodified. As in the European metropolises, themselves outlawing the tradition of international slave trade, American agrarian and industrial capitalists fell at the mercy of price gouging by the mercy of the mercantile capitalism of merchants and traders who continued to smuggle in Africans to be enslaved by the highest bidders (Robinson 1983, 117).

Du Bois maintained that it was this mercantile price gouging for Black flesh that “made the slave owners in early days [kill] the slave by overwork and renew their working stock; it led to the widely organized interstate slave trade between the Border States and the Cotton Kingdom of the Southern South; it led to neglect and the breaking up of families, and it could not protect the slave against the cruelty, lust and neglect of certain owners” (11). This period marked the beginning of what Du Bois referred to as “...the deliberate commercial breeding and sale of human labor for profit...” (11) It is in “...this vital respect” that Du Bois posits slave labor was unlike wage labor. The commercialization of the Black body is the representation of the constancy of circulation of the Black laborer commodity. This is what led Cedric Robinson to write the following: “For 400 years, from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, while the capitalist mode of production in Europe engulfed agrarian and artisanal workers, transforming them over the generations into expropriated, dependent fodder for concentration in factories, disciplined to the rhythms and turbulences of the manufacturing process, the organizers of the capitalist world system appropriated Black labor power as constant capital” (308). Recall our earlier explication of the difference between constant capital and variable capital according to Marx, how constant capital is constitutive of the instruments of labor, the raw material and machinery themselves, and it is clear the enslaved Black labor differs from white labor in that the Black slave was the worker and the machinery of his work all in one. Unlike Marx, who believed that “[t]he consumption of labour-power is completed, as in the case of every other commodity, outside the limits of the market or of the sphere of circulation,” Du Bois shows that during slavery the consumption of the Black body as commodity was an unceasing practice at the heart of capitalism, as he “would insist on the world-historical significance of American slavery in the emergence of modern capitalism and imperialism” (Robinson 1983, 228). On December 31, 1863, Marx writes the following letter to Abraham Lincoln, congratulating him on the Emancipation Proclamation:

We prize as our dearest inheritance, bought for us by the blood of our fathers, the liberty we enjoy—the liberty of free labor on a free soil. We have, therefore, been accustomed to regard with veneration and gratitude the founders of the great republic in which the liberties of the Anglo-Saxon race have been widened beyond all the precedents of the old world, and in which there was nothing to condemn or

² Walter Rodney (1972, 8), in a materialist conception of history communicated in his *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), maintained that slavery became economically untenable in the ancient world, which led to the development of feudalism as an economic system to replace it.

to lament but the slavery and degradation of men guilty only of a colored skin or an African parentage... We regarded with abhorrence the conspiracy and rebellion by which it was sought at once to overthrow the supremacy of a government based upon the most popular suffrage in the world, and to perpetuate the hateful inequalities of race. (Du Bois 1935, 90)

That Marx could write this epistolary to Lincoln praising his efforts in exacting the Proclamation as "...the splendid proof that the principles of universal freedom and equality" are ascendant and approbating the Northern States for being "...brave, generous and untiring" in pursuit of the freedom of Black people, while failing to acknowledge the intrepidity of the fugitive struggle of Black people towards their own liberation and comparing their working conditions with those of white wage laborers causes the sentiments of his otherwise thoughtful missive to fall flat. Marx missed the vital manner that "...the slave laborer differed from all others of his day." This is why Marx's great pronouncement in *Kapital*, "Man himself, viewed as the impersonation of labour-power, is a natural object, a thing, although a living conscious thing, and labour is the manifestation of this power residing in him," (144) falls flat as the "natural object" of the laboring man is made unnatural through slavery, as unnatural as money-lenders' capital, "... money exchanged for more money, a form that is incompatible with the nature of money, and therefore remains inexplicable from the standpoint of the circulation of commodities" (115).

The slave as commodity is as unnatural as the concept of commodity for commodity's sake, or commodity fetishization, or money as a stand-in for commodity, alienating sociality from exchange, behaving as a commodity abstracted from the commodity through interest, "... [making] money out of money, more money," (115) in the words of Aristotle, "...money of money, so that of all modes of making a living, this is the most contrary to Nature" (115). Thus, the liquidity of the commodity expressed as money has in it the note of sacrifice. As natural/unnatural object, a living sacrifice, human sacrifice, the Black enslaved body as commodity, "...abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (Marx [1867] 1909, 47), is beyond pure descriptions or conceptual frameworks for laboring classes of individuals. The Black slave was a sacrificial offering for the God of the American economy on the altar of the practice of white supremacy. As in the Old Testament, without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sins, in capitalism/imperialism as political economy, without the shedding of the blood of the Black body, there could not be foundationalized the economy that created America's exceptionalism. It is out of these prevenient socioeconomic auspices that the speaking commodity, the Black slave, wanted to break free from capitalism, as a concomitant of the practice of white supremacy/whiteness, but first he had to contend with those who faithfully practiced its ritual.

3. The White Question

Those "small masters," who in *Kapital* did not exist because the capitalist was too lazy to work a spade, and share in the wage-worker's labor time, thus divesting his capitalist pursuit, were extant in the selfhood of the poor white person in the South at the outset of the Civil War (1861-1865). Purblind to the practice of whiteness/white supremacy, these poor white wage workers took up arms against the Union for a planter class of wealthy whites, imagining themselves to be on equal footing with this Southern aristocracy, only to be destroyed in the process by their whiteness. The poor white man did not want the Black slave to be freed, responding to the planter class and

its propagandistic mythmaking project, “[m]ixing reality with fantasy,” “[fearing] that John Bull, Billy Yank, Johnny Poor White, and Nat Turner were all lurking in the shadows” (Robinson 1983, 355). As Du Bois writes, “The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and [B]lack” (16). At the close of his “The White Worker” chapter of *Black Reconstruction*, in his poetical general sweep of the historical events of chattel slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, black codes, and the Lost Cause, on the topic of the inhumanity to man as the depletion of humanity from which mankind must be emancipated, Du Bois posits that the abrupt and coerced presence of the Black body in America was as if “... some unjust God leaned, laughing, over the ramparts of heaven and dropped a [B]lack man in the midst: ‘It transformed the world [and]...turned democracy back to Roman Imperialism and Fascism; it restored caste and oligarchy; it replaced freedom with slavery and withdrew the name of humanity from the vast majority of human beings.’” (30). It becomes clear that the withdrawal of the name of humanity from most human beings that Du Bois here contends was not just a reference to the deracination of the humanity of the Black slave, through the procedures of slavery (forced breeding, selling enslaved married couples “up the river,” working the slave to death like mules, etc.) but of the humanity of white people, participants all in the practice of white supremacy.

In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois writes not of the freedom of Black slaves through the historical necessity of chattel slavery towards the acme of capitalism to bring about evolutionary socialism that would bring freedom to all people through the creation of a classless society, as Engels suggests in *Anti-Duhring*. Rather, this is the perception through the oculus of whiteness/white supremacy practice that sees Black people as free when they slave for white people, that the most proximal they can be to humanity is bound in their servitude to white people, while white people “...betray [themselves] into wars for profit...” Thus, the destruction and death of the Black body presaged a destruction and death of the participant in whiteness. Whiteness as a practice, therefore, becomes, for the participant in whiteness, a self-destructive modality of nonexistence that deceives its adherents as an economy of valueless value. Of white men engaged in the Civil War, “...a war to determine how far industry in the United States should be carried on under a system where the capitalist owns not only the nation’s raw material, not only the land, but also the laborer himself; or whether the laborer was going to maintain his personal freedom, and enforce it by growing political and economic independence based on widespread ownership of land,” (29) Du Bois posited “...that it was a “rich man’s war and the poor man’s fight:” (81) “Slavery was a greater blessing to the non-slaveholding poor than to the owners of slaves, and since it gave the poor a start in society that it would take them generations to work out, they should thank God for it and fight and die for it as they would for their “own liberty and dearest birthright of freemen” (81).

Here, Du Bois discloses how fear motivates the practice of whiteness/white supremacy. The fear of being relegated to the condition of slavery instead of working to abrogate its institution is an animating force of whiteness. Illogical this fear is, too, that with simultaneity suggests the ontological inferiority of Black personhood but dreads the possibility of Black freedmen being capable of competition in the workplace. This is the illogicality of practice as ritual and as ritual at work. Du Bois, for example, gives the account of a Charles Nordhoff, who averred “...he was told by a wealthy Alabaman in 1860, that the planters in his region were determined to discontinue altogether the employment of free mechanics” (28).

The appertaining rage of poor white wage workers at the wealthy planter class whites was predicated by their clear observation that they were being exploited; yet whiteness ideology at the core of ritual practice concealed Necessity and contingency and dispossessed them of being able to locate the truth: Black slave emancipation would hasten economic security for them all. Du Bois relays the following excerpt of the letter of a young Confederate conscript on the battlefield fighting against the Northern armies directly addressed to Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America: “It is with intense and multifariously proud satisfaction that he [the conscript] gazes for the last time upon our holy flag – that symbol and sign of an adored trinity, cotton, niggers and chivalry” (81). Through his historical analysis, Du Bois shows that poor white folk (and the elite planter class of slaveholding whites) by the ideological practice of white supremacy convinced themselves (the planters mostly convincing the poor whites) that 1), if slavery ended it would adversely affect the US economy (untrue) and 2), if they (poor whites) did not fight the Union they would take the place of the millions of enslaved Africans still in bondage, similar to the poor whites languishing in factories across Europe. It can be asserted, then, that whiteness has always caused white folk to stumble and destroy themselves, while the ideology of white supremacy has prevented them from seeing it.

Meanwhile, Black people, in whose hearts the fundamentals of democracy never died, engaged in methodologies to procure their freedom. One of these methods was fugitivity – the act, both psychical and physical, of escaping sociopolitical bondage. Du Bois called the Fugitive Slave “...the piece of intelligent humanity who could say: I have been owned like an ox. I stole my own body and now I am hunted by law and lash to be made an ox again” (20). To this, his own impersonation, Du Bois would oblige, “By no conception of justice could such logic be answered” (20). Thus, as unjust as chattel slavery was, fugitivity, that needing to abscond from slavery by risking life and limb, stealing commodities as oneself, being the most effective pathway to freedom, was equally unjust but necessary for the “intelligent humanity” to express its humanness *qua* humanity. The practitioners of whiteness were threatened by this evasion of the institution of slavery, the evasion of its practice, which is the evasion of practice itself and the emergence of humanity. In response to this evasion of practice, Du Bois notes “...at the same time white labor, while it attempted no denial but even expressed faint sympathy, saw in this fugitive slave and in the millions of slaves behind him, willing and eager to work for less than current wage, competition for their own jobs. What they failed to comprehend was that the [B]lack man enslaved was an even more formidable and fatal competitor than the [B]lack man free” (20). What Du Bois considered a failure on the white laborer to comprehend that the Black man enchained was a greater socioeconomic deficit to him than the Black man freed was, as Bourdieu reckons ritual practice as not having its own interior logics, not a matter of the dearth of comprehension skills but demonstrative of the illogicality at the center of practice, of the practice of whiteness/white supremacy, which is a matter of self-deception.

On the matter of the war effort, Du Bois recalls the North and the South had two normative responses: the North, where the *de jure* institution of slavery was ended in 1833, *poco a poco* allowed Black men to fight in the Union Army; the South was dead set against enlisting Black soldiers. A rich planter living in DeSoto County, Mississippi wrote: “As to recognizing the rights of freedmen to their children, I will say there is not one man or woman in all the South who believes they are free, but we consider them as stolen property – stolen by the bayonets of the damnable

United States Government” (142). The North, though allowing Black men to soldier, did not share in the scathing critique of Southern belligerents’ way of life. At several points such as this in *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois wants us to know that the white Northern Armies were not fighting the War to end slavery; they fought to preserve the United States of America. These high-ranking officers fighting for the Union, both Sherman and Pryor, and many others like them, failed to see that the real war was for their own humanity, and preserving the Nation would do little to make them human. On both sides, whether the states out of which their soldiers emerged practiced slavery or benefited from it, there came a moment, close to clarity, but so very far from it, where their practice of whiteness/white supremacy came to the brink of collapsing. This collapsing is the “social character” (Marx 1935, 47) of the commodity attempting to escape. In the case of the Black body commodity, this mysterious social character, reified through intense labor, is observable in the increasing impossibility of the further denial of humanity by those who practice whiteness, in the North and in the South. For the North, this potential collapse was in how the Union began to allow Black formerly enslaved men to fight in their ranks. These were soldiers who slowly began to people the rank and file of the Union Army in 1863, the most famous of all, “...the celebrated 54th and 55th Negro regiments – the first regularly authorized Negro regiments of the war” (Du Bois 1935, 97). “The recruiting of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment of colored men was completed by the 13th of May” (Du Bois 1935, 97), and, after their rousing defeat at the sands of Fort Wagner on July 18, 1863, Black Northern soldiers were becoming known for their valor in battle.

In December of 1863, General James D. Morgan of the Army of the Ohio “...led Negro troops in the battle of Nashville” (Du Bois 1935, 109), proclaiming that “...a new chapter in the history of liberty had been written” (Du Bois 1935, 109). Morgan believed that “...marching under a flag of freedom, animated by a love of liberty, even the slave becomes a man and a hero” (Du Bois 1935, 109-10). About this sensation, this phenomenon of the horrid and humanizing quality of war, Du Bois would muse: “How extraordinary, and what a tribute to ignorance and religious hypocrisy, is the fact that in the minds of most people, even those of liberals, only murder makes men. The slave pleaded; he was humble; he protected the women of the South, and the world ignored him. The slave killed white men; and behold, he was a man!” In the battles around Nashville, “[b]etween eight and ten thousand Negro troops took part...[,] all of them from slave states” (Du Bois 1935, 110). In a “significant dispatch” in the *New York Tribune* on July 26, 1863, there was written the following statement: “In speaking of the soldierly qualities of our colored troops, I do not refer especially to their noble action in the perilous edge of the battle; that is settled, but to their docility and their patience of labor and suffering in the camp and on the march” (Du Bois 1935, 110). When Grant was “...made Lieutenant-General in 1864, and began to reorganize the armies,” (Du Bois 1935, 110) “...he found that a few Negro troops had been used in Virginia” (Du Bois 1935, 110), and “...transferred nearly twenty thousand Negroes from the Southern and Western armies to the army of Virginia” (Du Bois 1935, 110). For the North, the problem of winning the war had been deciphered. Though it had taken the convening years (1861-1863) leading up to the Emancipation Proclamation, and tens of thousands of deaths of its soldiers, for the North to include Black troops in their fighting ranks, when the Union did ingraft them, the tide of the long-fought conflict turned in its favor. Yet, even after being included into the warring number of enlistees, were not paid the same as their white counterparts, a historical fact that would lead Du Bois to respond, “It would not have been American, however, not to have maintained some color discrimination, however petty” (99).

The pay of soldiers at the beginning of the war was \$13 a month. Negro soldiers enlisted under the same law. In the instructions to General Saxton, August 25, 1862, it was stated that the pay should be the same as that of the other troops. Soon, however, this was changed, and Negro soldiers were allowed but \$10 a month, and \$3 of this was deducted for clothing. Many of the regiments refused to receive the reduced pay...

But the Negroes did not waver. (Du Bois 1935, 99)

This inequality of pay for Black soldiers fighting in the Union army displays a potentiality in the collapse of whiteness as practice found in the various modes of resistance by the Black body. The commoditized though unwavering Black man, through a modality of radicalism, the pronouncement of humanity in the presence of inhumanity, engenders the possibility of an anarchistic evasion of practice altogether, what must be if whiteness/white supremacy as a practice is ever to be overturned.

Nevertheless, the South, blinded even to a greater degree by the practice of white supremacy, did not see the light until it was too late. When Jefferson Davis "...discussed the matter with the Governor of Virginia and said that he had been in conference with the Secretary of War and the Adjutant-General," by March 17, 1865 "...it was said: "We shall have a Negro army. Letters are pouring into the departments from men of military skill and character asking authority to raise companies, battalions, and regiments of Negro troops" (Du Bois 1935, 119). The Confederacy had finally done the math, what Lincoln, "...under a fire of criticism" for defending the enlistment of Black troops, described as "[t]he slightest knowledge of arithmetic [to] prove to any man that the rebel armies cannot be destroyed with Democratic strategy" (Du Bois 1935, 100) but with the "...near two hundred thousand able-bodied colored men, most of them under arms, defending and acquiring Union territory..." (Du Bois 1935, 100). The simple math required to win the war on the part of the Confederacy was complicated by their commitment to the practice of whiteness/white supremacy. To wit, people practicing whiteness as ritual, in that ritual practice has no interior logics, would rather die than to acknowledge the humanity of Black men, refusing to arm them to fight to secure their freedom, and relegating them to the posture of mere objects. When Du Bois writes, "The slave pleaded; he was humble; he protected the women of the South, and the world ignored him. The slave killed white men; and behold, he was a man," perhaps the only pathway to humanity, for all people, is to kill whiteness. Whiteness must die. Whiteness loses wars; whiteness costs lives. Whiteness loses humanity. The American Civil War lasted for four years of constant theatre and is the bloodiest conflict in American history, and the greatest tragedy of it is that it could have been avoided if whiteness had been rejected. No slavery – no war. No disallowing of Black soldiering – no bloody war. An estimated 620,000 men from thirty-seven states were killed in battles fought across nineteen states from Vermont to Florida.

Part II

4. Cultural Appropriation: What Is It Really?

Capitalism and white supremacy/whiteness are the same practice. Both have always shared

the fetishization of a particular commodity – the Black body. On commodity fetishization, which is essential to capitalism, which emerges from the “mystical character” of the laborer and his relation to the product he produces, Marx writes:

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. (Marx [1867] 1909, 47)

The products of labor becoming commodities, “...social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible” (Marx [1867] 1909, 47), has hardly applied to Black people as commodities. If you are the product that you cultivate through dragooned daily labor, socially, politically, and economically, there is no possible disentanglement for that speaking commodity, while whiteness/white supremacy/capitalism is still in practice. Indeed, the enslaved African in America was the most vital commodity of the Industrial Revolution (1790-1850), who by 1860, was more valuable than three times the railroads and factories of the North combined (Johnson 2013); yet conspicuous has been the perceptibility of the Black body as desired artifact and forgotten lore. Responding to the racist minimization of the Dunning School, where he stood at the end of his writing aghast at what American historians had done to the field of history (Du Bois 1935, 725), which diminished the efforts of Black people to work towards their own liberation and the perfecting of American democracy during the Reconstruction era, Du Bois, in *Black Reconstruction in America*, “drew on Hegelian dialectics and Marx’s notions of class struggle to correct the interpretations of the American Civil War and its subsequent Reconstruction period grown dominant in American historiography” (Robinson 1983, xxxii).

The commonality between white supremacy and capitalism construed as practice is that the dead and forgotten Black body is at the center. The commoditized flesh of the Black slave, a living object in the political economy of America, through acts of fugitivity and resistance, shows forth itself more human than its enslaver. The ideological core of white supremacy shrouds through its ritual of practice how it is deracinating to the human (consider the Confederacy enlisting Black men to serve in its army only too late and ultimately losing the war [Du Bois 1935, 119]). Whiteness/white supremacy is a concomitant of capitalism and capitalism is a concomitant of whiteness/white supremacy; whiteness/white supremacy works to uphold the tenets and features of capitalism and capitalism works to uphold the tenets and features of whiteness/white supremacy. This is a cyclic process because capitalism is a cyclic phenomenon, whose “...very immanent limit, [an] ‘internal contradiction’, ...drives [it] into permanent development.” Resultants of the paradoxical relationship between surplus-value (Marx) and surplus-enjoyment (Lacan), whiteness/white supremacy knows no limitations because capitalism knows no limitations, because the two practices are concomitants condign of each other. Therefore, for example, when Michael Brown was murdered in Missouri, a state admitted to the Confederacy on November 28, 1861, eleven months after the war began, Brown, a victim of the police apparatus, of Darren Wilson acting on behalf of the State, the practice of whiteness/white supremacy and capitalism was fully functional. At the center of this practice, as it could be observed in that moment in 2014, as it could be perceived in the murder of Sonya Massey in 2024, as it could be witnessed in 1866, was the desiderata and destruction of the Black body. In this way, capitalism functions most optimally

when the Black body is fetishized, commoditized, and left for dead. This is the true index of the functionality of the capitalistic economic system. The currency of capitalism is the currency of the deadened Black body – overworked, underpaid, and hunted and killed by State apparatuses. Therein is the fetishization of the Black body commodity brought together with the supremacy of whiteness as a singular cornerstone of practice. This practice is often mindless, counterintuitive, and counter-productive, in a system of systems that reckons upon productivity and profits. As Black humanity is ignored, white humanity reveals itself as vacuity, as something that is practiced yet never achieved. White humanity instead is a consumer of the Black body, as a marketized consciousness that consumes commodities, what could aptly be called commodity fetishization.

Though whiteness as a racial category is an epistemology that bestows power to its adherents, whiteness possesses an inability to imbue humanity. Therefore, while the Black body is autonomous and dynamic, it continues to be commodified by participants in the practice of whiteness through the desiderata of “cool,” a term first popularized in its second sense by a Black man, tenor saxophonist Lester Young, in the 1930s (Vitale 2009). Cool has become for white people a currency of racial capitalism. Instead of producing their own cultural artifacts, emergent and redemptive of their name, image, and likeness, participants in the practice of whiteness steal radical forms of self-expression, even though they are in a position of power and prestige to generate their own cultural products. Similar to how their European ancestors stole the Black body from the shores of Africa, white people without the aid of guns have stolen phenomenologies of inhabiting space from Black people, especially Black people from the urban centers of the United States. It would be different if Black people held the capital, both real and symbolic, that white people do in the world. Then, the parity would obviate the possibility of appropriation. On this procedure of stealing without guns, Marx (and Engels) in *The German Ideology* writes of a similar practice among German philosophers colonizing core tenets of French rationalism as their own.

For Marx, German idealism is but an ideology that conceals the dialectical structure of the historical process in daily life only to be confronted by unmediated catastrophes when the pattern is reversed (Lukács [1923] 1971, 165). This historical idealism underestimates the trenchant fungible effects of a materialist conception of history, how man’s faculty of labor drives the development of sociality to more rapid stages of progress across chronology. Marx attributes the historical idealism of German ideologues like Feuerbach and Bauer to their appropriation of French transcendental dogma, writing “They [the Germans] do not recognize the deeds of other nations as historical: they live in Germany, to Germany, and for Germany; they turn the Rhine-song into a religious hymn and conquer Alsace-Lorraine by robbing French philosophy instead of the French state, by Germanizing French ideas instead of French provinces” (30). Without armament or munition, white people have conquered Black people’s cultural norms, colonized their very essence. The relevant question becomes, then, are white people any longer able to develop meaningful cultural artifacts of their own. For example, the *New York Times*, on January 29, 2024, published an article entitled “They’ll Take the Travis Kelce – Hairdo, That Is,” (Krueger 2024) in which Superbowl champion and Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce is accredited with originating the “fade” haircut that Black men have been wearing and popularizing for generations. Kelce would go on to “...[denounce] the notion that he was responsible for the fade’s popularity and noted that it was especially heinous that the *NYT* did not give credit where it was due during Black History Month” (Hebert 2024). However, that the *New York Times*, the most prestigious of all newspapers of record, one of the oldest newspapers in the United States, would

publish such an article is revealing. Since, because of the religion of white supremacy, the Black body is the site of desiderata and destruction, the commoditization of Black flesh, a form of species alienation tethered to the Black body from chattel slavery, engenders a four-fold appropriation of its being – denial, falsification/negation, co-option, and universalization/trivialization³ – so that, though he has never been more *en vogue* as he now is (desiderata), the atomization of his cultural artifacts the world over, while his person continues to be psychically and physically deleted under the weight of erasure (destruction), reveals a commodity fetishization that seeks the very marrow of the commodity’s cultural and economic body. In his poem, “I, Too,” Langston Hughes muses over the sociological trajectory of the Black person in the American Empire, writing:

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I’ll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody’ll dare
Say to me,
“Eat in the kitchen,”
Then.

Besides,
They’ll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed –

I, too, am America. (Hughes [1933] 1995, 46)

This poem sees the contrastable writer, Hughes, and speaker, a Black house slave, metaphorized through the similarity of their existential plight, these two men tethered as one, one in 1926 apartheid America, and the other, during the period of American chattel enslavement (1662-1865). Through metaphor, which both Aristotle and Ricœur suggest “...implies an eye for resemblances,” (87). Hughes posits that nothing has changed for the Black person in the United States, conjoining the experience of his humiliation and alienation during slavery to that of a selfsame reality sixty-one years after the invidious institution was ended. The owners of the table, the bourgeois capitalist planter class of the American slavocracy, send the “darker brother,” (suggestive of rape – read dishonor and control) to eat in the kitchen (read isolation and humiliation) when company comes, when, in the presence of those with equity, namely white

³This formulation of cultural appropriation comes from John W. Kinney, Distinguished Professor of Theology at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University, from a lecture he gave in his systematic theology course.

people, enter, and he, darker and other, commodity and proletarian, must exit, because what communion hath light with darkness?⁴ Eating well and growing strong in the dark recesses of society's house, with a lighter complexion than the field slave, the house slave, both brother and other, communes in a diatribe with himself, as Lucille Clifton says of self-affirmation, "...one hand holding tight the other" (427), saying that he will be seated at the table *tomorrow*. Note that for the oppressed, repressed, and suppressed, the day of redemption must always be tomorrow. For the bourgeoisie, the capitalist exploiters and participants in the practice of whiteness, today, the immediacy of the present hour is all that is, and is all that is needed to function. In the moment of this dialectic, the eschatology of the downtrodden, this religious belief that somehow tomorrow will be better than today is an antagonism with a material belief at the center of the practice of whiteness, ossified with ownership, rigidified by property. The table, the place of power and prestige, will never belong to the Black person, though the Black person may, in error, think he could one day take a seat. The closing argument of the poem prophesizes that one day the white American, those representative of disproportionate socioeconomic and political power in the United States, would see "...how beautiful [the Black human is] and be ashamed." My contention is that we are indeed in that *one day* that Hughes spoke about and what this *one day* has wrought is not appreciation but appropriation, and that at an accelerated rate.

Hughes predicted that they, the white American, would see how beautiful the Black Americans are; however, he did not foretell that they would one day find the Black human to be so beautiful that they would seek to be them while they disposed of their bodies. We are in Hughes' *one day*, and this has caused a commodification so severe that it would seem all the unique cultural morphological expressions (music, dance, style of dress, speech) of the Black American are fair game, a modern commodity fetishization. This fetishization takes the form of a lie. It tells the Black person that he is not beautiful (Denial) while attempting to emulate his especial modes of morphological expression and misrepresenting their origins (Falsification) thus minimizing his contribution to society (Negation). Intensifying the ardor of this confoundment is the white person's sociopolitical alignment with the Black person, forming allyship without advocacy, intruding Black culture and attempting to reproduce it (Co-Option), thus suggesting that Black culture is a social ecology into and out of which the white person may irrupt and depart at any moment with great ease (Trivialization), the Black body simply being "up for grabs" (Universalization), while the Black person can never inhabit whiteness as a ritual practice, can never sit at the table. Yet, this is the slaving process that Fanon conceptualizes in *Black Skin, White Masks*, where he writes, "The white man slaves to reach a human level" (11). Cultural appropriation, a parasocial relation at the core of commodity fetishization, to wit, as in our earlier example with Du Bois, the simultaneous desiderata and destruction of the Black body, which is at the center of capitalism, is the white search for humanity. This search may be the result of the constitutive lack within whiteness, though positional of power, at a humanistic deficit, thus using acculturation as a means of effective opposition to the cultural norms of the subjugated yet more culturally relevant group, what Devereux and Loeb might call "antagonistic acculturation" (Tanner 1997, 108, 184).

5. Of Black Men, Pause Culture, and Paul Grice

⁴ This language is derived from 2 Corinthians 6:14.

The problem of cultural appropriation intensifies when white raciality reveals itself as vacuous personhood inextricably tied to power. When this occurs, white people begin to police the very culture they imitate. Thus whiteness functions as monkey (*mimesis*) and trainer (*Polizeiwissenschaft*).⁵ This phenomenon is no truer than in how Black male professional basketball players are fined for using their cultural artefacts in a sophisticated philosophy of language known as “pause culture.” Popularized in recent history by rappers Cam’ron and Ma\$e on their sports and popular culture podcast “It Is What It Is,” pause culture likely emerged out of Harlem, New York, in the 1990s as a nonviolent shibboleth, a rhetorical mechanism to establish differentiation and identification of friend or foe. One of the earliest accounts of the use of shibboleth is found in the Book of Judges where the Gileadites were able to tell between themselves and the Ephraimites because the Ephraimites were unable to pronounce the *sh*, the voiceless postalveolar fricative ⟨ʃ⟩, at the front of a word, as the sound was foreign to their language.⁶ When Black men say “pause” in conversation, rather than issuing an adjudication between themselves and their interlocutor, often leading to the death of their conversation partner judged to be their enemy (as in the Ancient Hebraic Gilead tribes), in a more sophisticated way they are attempting to establish the cooperative principle of locution, illocution, and interlocution.⁷

In his paper “Logic and Conversation,” Paul Grice posits four maxims along his Cooperative Principle (CP) of conversation, that is, the organizing coordinates of what is available to be interpreted during the speech act, or implicature, between two interlocutors (45). These four maxims of conversational logic are as follows: 1) Quantity: The speaker should only be as informative as needed, avoiding prolixity (47, 52). 2) Quality: The speaker should avoid mendacity (47, 53). 3) Relation: The speaker should only provide statements relevant to the conversation (47, 54). 4) Manner: The speaker should avoid vague and confusing language (47, 51). For reasons of irony, metaphor, meiosis (understatement), hyperbole, or deliberate ambiguity, if the implicature of the conversation is understood between interlocutors to be for humor or rhetorical effect, the maxims can be flouted accordingly (53). However, if it is not understood between interlocutors that either irony, metaphor, or meiosis is in use, the implicature, the interpretation theory of the interlocutionary event along what is implied in it, is at risk of being lost for those members of the conversation. This phenomenon is what pause culture seeks to prevent, with particular focus given to Grice’s fourth maxim, Manner. What manner of conversation are we having? Are we having a conversation as two heterosexual men, or are we having a conversation as a heterosexual man and a homosexual man? On the concept of Manner, Grice posits relevance (Relation) as being a key factor, providing the following example of what form flouting the maxim of Manner might take:

Manner: I expect a partner to make it clear what contribution he is making, and to execute his performance with reasonable dispatch. (Grice 1975, 47)

With regard to pause culture, according to the Gricean maxim of Manner, when it is understood between interlocutors that they are conversing as two heterosexual men, and one of the heterosexual men elocutes a phraseology that is homosexual in character, the term “pause” is

⁵ Cf. Michel Foucault, “Security, Territory, and Population” and “The Birth of Biopolitics” In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, Volume I* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 67-80.

⁶ Cf. Judges 12:6

⁷ Cf. Paul Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), pp. 14-15.

issued with immediacy by the adhering interlocutor according to the broken implicature faulting as a resultant of the flouted maxim. In substance, this procedure is hardly indicative of homophobia. The illocutionary (inner-logic) act of speech of the “pause” issuer is merely to reorganize the conversation towards rectifying the flouted maxim with a view towards restoring paramountcy of relevance. A prominent recent example of pause culture in use was in a conversation among three heterosexual Black men on “It Is What It Is,” featuring former National Football League (NFL) running back Le’Veon Bell, excerpted below, who speaks on his experience being recruited to play for the Kansas City Chiefs:

Bell: He’s (coach Andy Reid) showing me all the things they’re about to do with me and the ways they’re about to use me. So, I’m, like, foaming at the mouth. So I’m, like, ... “Shit...”

Cam’ron [interrupting]: Aye, Yo. We gonna calm that. “The way they gonna use you?” ... I was gonna let “The way they gonna use you” slide, but when you start foaming at the mouth...Pause, Bro. (Yeer Network 2023)

A clarifying motion, a nonviolent shibboleth, this phrasing is a sophisticated methodology of language philosophy that affirms the sacral quality of communalism expressed through conversation. Bell accepted the “pause” in good humor, and the trio, along with moderator Treasure Wilson, a Black woman, moved on to continue their amicable conversation. Yet, because pause culture, has its emergence from the nadir of Black culture, what Thomas Sowell would call Black redneck culture,⁸ proceeding out of the mouths of uncivilized Black men from the ghettos of America, maturing in the speech acts of Black men in exurban areas, it is viewed askance.

In the spellbinding introduction to his book *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood*, Tommy Curry suggests that because of how “[r]acism against Black men often results in their emasculation, criminalization, and death,” . . . “Black men have not only survived but developed rich analyses of this oppression under the capitalist ethno-patriarchal regime we call white supremacy” (4). For Curry, Black men are subjected to a view of their personhood that criminalizes them as “...sexual threats like the rapist, while simultaneously constituting them as the carnal excesses and fetishes of the white libido” (4). Yet, though the object of the gaze of white normativity, Black maleness becomes a matter of contrariety because “...maleness has come to be understood as synonymous with power and patriarchy, and racially codified as white,” (6) thus having in it “...no content for the Black male, who in an anti-Black world is denied maleness and is ascribed as feminine in relation to white masculinity” (6). Curry articulates his logic this way:

If whiteness is masculine in relation to Blackness, then Blackness becomes relationally defined as not masculine and feminine, because it lacks the power of white masculinity. Thus, Black maleness is, in fact, a de-gendered negation of white maleness that is feminine because of its subordinate position to white masculinity, but not female, because Black maleness lacks a specific gender coordinate that corresponds to either white maleness or femaleness.... (Curry 2017, 6)

⁸ Cf. Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (New York: Encounter Books, 2005), pp.1-64.

The Black man, then, becomes the generic object of white subjectivation and subjection, too feeble to be fully a person, yet as nothing, able to receive desire *ad majoram* and *ad infinitum* from white people in their reactionary pursuit of world mastery. Black men, thus, have become a mass of nonbeing able to be culled and killed, a social outgroup of malleable proportions, no face, no mind, no future, no past. As site of destruction he is site of desiderata, and often his culture, indeed Black culture writ large, is embraced by its assailants on a situational basis.

Therefore, as a Black man, on November 18, 2024, when All-Star point guard for the Charlotte Hornets LaMelo Ball is fined \$100,000 for adopting and adapting the phraseology of “Pause,” in the guise of saying “No homo,” during a postgame television interview (ESPN 2024) because it was deemed by the NBA front office as being “offensive and derogatory,” he fell victim to his culture being embraced by white elites on a situational basis. I claim that the nuance of Ball uttering “No homo,” after saying he and his teammates “loaded up” on defense (which could have been perceived as homoerotic innuendo), while speaking to a woman and not another heterosexual man, represented an intricate technology of conversational logic misconstrued as violence. This instance is thus representative of the problematic of cultural appropriation. From an exterior plane of pseudoscientific observation and examination, the appropriating (white) culture selects which artifacts of the appropriated (Black) culture it deems digestible, while supporting, even bolstering some of the most pernicious elements of those cultural products it assimilates into its own cultural mores. Language being an element of culture and custom is not immune to this process.

If Gramsci is right, language indicates the stability of a culture. In his essay “The Study of Philosophy and of Historical Materialism,” he explains that “all men are ‘philosophers’” (51) because all people spontaneously philosophize in the three main areas, “...language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not simply and solely of words void of content” (51), “...common sense and good sense” (51), “...popular religion and therefore also in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of perceiving and acting which make up what is generally called ‘folklore’” (51). Gramsci questions if it is “...preferable to work out one’s own conception of the world consciously and critically, and so out of this work of one’s own brain to choose one’s own sphere of activity, to participate actively in making the history of the world, and not simply to accept passively and without care the imprint of one’s own personality from outside” (51). Gramsci posits the following formulation: “If it is true that any language contains the elements of a conception of the world and of a culture, it will also be true that the greater or lesser complexity of a person’s conception of the world can be judged from his language” (51).

The language of a culture is a barometer, then, of that culture’s moral sense. A culture, for our purposes here, ghetto Black culture, that sweetens terminologies of destitution and denigration, obnubilation and desecration, is not often one that is readily emulated by the dominant rungs of society. This small segment of Black culture, that is, ghetto Black culture, makes use of terms like “dope,” which at one point was the *nom de guerre* of heroin, one of the most addicting and destructive illegal narcotics in history. Today, “dope” for many Black people, does not refer to a powerful and bewildering illicit drug; it means “good,” “pleasing,” or “beneficent” in a similar way that the word “bad” has been transmuted by Black people to mean “great” or “beautiful.” “Dope’s” second sense, then, has overshadowed its originary sense, but many white people have no qualms about repeating it time and again, its former negative usage being lost in the miasma that is appropriation. Yet, bourgeois culture, capitalist culture, indeed white culture, draws the line

at “Pause” and “No homo,” terms also emergent out of Black ghetto culture. For the ruling class of elite whites and their masses of poor white lackies, a Black man saying “No homo” is a bridge too far, the very physical presentation of the term “No homo” being distinct from the homophobic epithet “homo,” notwithstanding. In America, Black men, the major contributors to Black ghetto culture, are the poorest (Winship, *et al.*, 2018), Black men are imprisoned the most (Prison Policy Initiative 2025), exonerated the most (Gross 2022), survive cancers the least (American Cancer Society 2025),⁹ are killed by gun violence more often than white men (Violence Policy Center), and graduate high school in the fewest numbers (Reeves 2023). Why are these experiencing various deaths the movers of the world cultural needle?

6. A Word on the Invention of Black American Language and Its World Historical Siphoning

On June 25, 2024, the *New York Times* ran an opinion piece the title of which was “Today’s Teenagers Have Invented a Language That Captures the World Perfectly,” written by Steven Marche, a white Canadian. The language in question mainly consists of ideolects taken from African American Vernacular English, or AAVE. AAVE (also erroneously referred to as “nonstandard Black English”) is the culturally cultivated idiom spoken by many Black people living in the United States “...that has incontrovertible African influences” (Baugh 2000, 95), that was primarily cultivated as a way of linguistic insulation when “Black slaves coming to this new world were systematically isolated from other speakers of their native language...to restrict possible uprisings during the Atlantic crossing” (Baugh 1983, 24), and was a resultant of the African enslaved not being allowed by their enslavers to learn how to read or write during the period of American chattel enslavement (1619-1865). As linguist John Baugh writes in his book *Ebonics: Linguistic Pride and Racial Prejudice*:

It was due, in part, to these African influences and to public confusion over the differences between dialects and languages that in 1997 the LSA [Language Services Association] balked at this very point: The distinction between “languages” and “dialects” is usually made more on social and political grounds than on purely linguistic ones. For example, different varieties of Chinese are popularly regarded as “dialects,” though their speakers cannot understand each other, but speakers of Swedish and Norwegian, which are regarded as separate “languages,” generally understand each other. (Baugh 2000, 95)

Since language is first learned in the ear, aurally, through the auditory meatus, the language that was spoken in the slave quarters by “...slave [descendants] of African origin [including] the grammar, various idioms, patois, argots, idiolects, and social dialects of Black people (Williams 1975:vi)” (Baugh 2000, 15) (much of which went through a process of relexification, the concomitance of tendencies from the mother tongue, in the case of the African enslaved, the Niger-Congo and Hamitic Bantu languages) being transferred into the new tongue, namely English, “...albeit reflecting the lingering linguistic consequences of American slavery” (Baugh 2000, 96),

...there is persuasive empirical evidence that, owing to their history as United States slave descendants of West and Niger-Congo African origin, to the extent that

⁹ This is consummate of lung cancer, the deadliest cancer in the U.S.

African-Americans have been born into, reared in, and continue to live in linguistic environments that are different from the Euro-American English speaking population, African-American people, and their children, are from home environments in which a language other than English language is dominant within the meaning of “environment where a language other than English is dominant” as defined in Public Law 1-13-382. (Baugh 2000, 49)

This relexification accompanied by new cultural idiomatic expressions of pronunciation (phonics), grammar, and vocabulary has systematized a sophisticated yet academically unrecognized version of American standard English widely in use today, passed down by Black people from generation to generation, from previous lived experiences of those “born many times” in the words of Cicero to the lived experience of those currently alive. Whereas American standard English, or ASE, “...as apart from ‘the King’s English [British standard English, or BSE],’ began to emerge with print technology [with] standard spoken [American] English [was] enunciated by Edward R. Murrow and his peers, and heard on radio in ordinary homes throughout the nation...[revolutionizing] the spoken American standard,” (Baugh 2000, 33) AAVE (and other comparable Black linguistic forms) has been historically and consistently regarded as an inferior form of English, a point that Baugh underscores in *Linguistic Pride and Racial Prejudice*: “Many who criticized Ebonics did not do so merely because they objected to the term; they scoffed at Ebonics as an attempt to legitimize “bad English” in the name of politically correct linguistic enlightenment” (2).

Of the terms associable with what Baugh might call “Black street speech,” terms developed over time by Black Americans like “dope” (adjective expressing admiration and bemusement), “cool” (adjective acknowledging multifarious degrees of pleasing aesthetics), “poppin” (adjective meaning fashionable and trendy), “bad” (adjective meaning “good”), “chat” (noun denotative of the gradual dissolution of the virtual realities, suggestive of an emerging cinematic sociality of humans as media forms), “(no) cap” (interjection – or noun) expressing that one is not lying (“cappin”), “based” (adjective of certification or validation of cultural relevance), “woke” (adjectival expression denoting the awareness of the various threat potencies of white people), and “mid” (adjectival term meaning “middle of the road” or “underwhelming”) have emerged as ideolects of AAVE, copied and appropriated by white petit-bourgeois youths and their parents. (Consider that the meaning of “woke” has been recomposed by white conservatives as a political weapon [Mattinson and Ainsley 2024], becoming rather than in its instructive autochthonous intent a pejorative thus devoid of all originary content of Black radicality. This cultural theft reveals that white people, though the progenitors of the English language, have become incapable of developing their own English terms of reactionary procedure[s].)

Marche, writing in the *New York Times*, representing the predominant middle-American view, however, would have his readers believe that his white son’s generation, using nothing but recycled AAVE terminologies, which Marche refers to as slang, have “...devised a language that responds to the new and distinct reality they face” (Marche 2024). According to sociolinguists like Baugh, a dialect of English was created to respond to turbulent exigencies, but it was not popularized by wee suburban white boys; it was invented by ghetto Black men (and women), living under some of the worst conditions in U.S. history, from chattel slavery to coerced inner-city squalor. Marche contends that the “...primary value of slang has been to create linguistic shibboleths, a way to differentiate yourself quickly from other people” through a process that is

sometimes “...generational, sometimes...racial, and sometimes...ideological” (Marche 2024). He continues to praise the sociolinguistic ingenuity of his privileged white son’s generation like this:

The kids themselves are the only bright spot, which is why I’m so grateful my son offered me a glimpse into the language of his generation. Another purpose of slang is to demonstrate generational distinction, yet slang has brought my son and me closer. It’s taught me that the current crop of teenagers created a language to describe the flawed reality we’ve abandoned them to, and in doing so they’ve proved themselves less deluded and more innovative than we were. (Marche 2024)

The reality of Black people in America has always been one that is flawed, and it is out of the fires of the Black cultural cauldron that Black people have generated cultural artifacts that are radically redemptive to them, such as a language that reflects the wont and woes, the triumphs and failures of their multivariate experience. After all, who has been more abandoned in the world than Black people, than Black youths, than young Black men?

Frantz Fanon limns a haunting portrait of the colonized mind of the Black man living within a regime of Western powers, particularly of France. For 1952 Fanon (because the fatalistic and cynical Fanon of 1952 is not the sanguine and prophetic Fanon of 1961 at the end of his life who wrote *The Wretched of the Earth*), the Black man is insecure, longing dubiously for the day that he can not only be valued as his white colonial counterparts but also to actually be white (“If he is overcome to such a degree by a desire to be white, it is because he lives in a society that makes inferiority complex possible” [88]; “...his desire to be white – i.e., to be a man – I would demonstrate to him that his neurosis, his psychic instability, and the crack in his ego stem from a governing fiction...” [184]). He discloses a Black male psyche riddled with insecurity and a lack of self-esteem, these men being repeatedly discriminated against, dehumanized in their social sphere, repressed systematically in their homelands (Martinique, Guadeloupe, Algeria, France), made to feel less than, constantly in a state of exclusion. In this wise, Fanon cites the great social psychologist Germaine Guex, putting her thoughts in conversation with the writings of another coetaneous colonized Black philosopher, Jean Veneuse. Through Guex, Fanon uncovers how Veneuse, though brilliant, suffers from abandonment syndrome, that he would like to feel “the mantle of affection” but that in his writings, being Black, he is alienated and alone, and how “...this lack of self-esteem as an object worthy of love has serious consequences..., it keeps the individual in a state of profound inner insecurity, as a result of which it inhibits and distorts every relation with others” (75):

This lack of affective self-esteem always leads the abandonment neurotic to an extremely painful and obsessional feeling of exclusion, to never fitting in, and to feeling out of place, affectively speaking...Being “the Other” is a term I have encountered on several occasions in the language of the abandonment neurotic. To be “the Other” is to always feel in an uncomfortable position, to be on one’s guard, to be prepared to be rejected and...unconsciously do everything that is needed to bring about the anticipated catastrophe. (Fanon 1952, 68)

Therefore, when the Black man is abandoned, he is sociogenetic (the abandonment neurosis is quite like the neurosis of being made other, i.e., being made Black, being Blackened, being made

to feel inferior), he is “otherized” by Lacan’s culturally hegemonic “big Other.” He has become catastrophe itself, actualizing a devaluation of self that he perceives in his neurosis to be imminently awaiting him. He becomes the catastrophe that he dreads and that he is more than sure will happen because he fears that he is not worthy of love to begin with. This is the genesis of the antisocial behavior that stems from abandonment syndrome.

Yet our focus is still on Ball, whose fine was issued by the same sports league that is from the top down hip-hop coded. Be reminded that hip-hop as a musical medium of artistic expression was created by Black and brown men in the South Bronx, New York in the mid-70s, in the ghetto. It has become the predominant money-making musical genre in the world, this music created, cultivated, and innovated by Black people, especially by Black men. Although seventy percent of NBA players are Black, only around eight percent of majority owners are Black, with ninety-two percent of owners being white (Statista 2024).¹⁰ Yet, white owners (read enslavers) have had no qualms about hip-hop culture (read Black culture) being present as music during gameplay, in the style of jerseys and court insignia. In his article “Is Slavery’s Legacy in the Power Dynamics of Sports?”, Kurt Streeter remembers Curt Flood’s thoughts on being a Black athlete: “A well-paid slave is nonetheless a slave,” (2019) as he explains that “...a line can be traced to the modern NBA from antebellum slavery.” He quotes David J. Leonard, saying, “One way to think about slavery is as a history of confinement and the struggle of movement – being moved against your will or seeking to break free of those chains. A connection can be made to what we’re seeing in the league today, the drive among [B]lack players to freely move and control one’s future, control one’s life and likeness, story and voice. All of this is part of a larger history in [B]lack America” (2019). This larger history has often trammelled by the interference of white people who deign to think that they have the range to critique Black culture or that Black people themselves are not apt to critique their own culture(s).

In a 1991 interview with NPQ that he entitles “Charlie Parker Didn’t Give a Damn,” in his text on social, religious, and cultural criticism *Prophetic Reflections: Notes on Race and Power in America*, Cornel West suggests that Black people are the best critics of their cultural products. For West, when Charlie “Bird” Parker, the preeminent musician of his generation, developed bebop in the early 1940s as an evolution from swing in the 1930s, he did not consult white people for their thoughts on his innovation. Jazz, the first great American artform, invented in New Orleans by Black men at the turn of the twentieth century, like all Black cultural artifacts, never emerged out of a historical necessity of subordination to the white normative gaze. West writes:

Jazz is the middle road between invisibility and anger. It is where self-confident creativity resides. Black music is paradigmatic of how black persons have best dealt with their humanity, their complexity – their good and bad, negative and positive aspects, without being excessively preoccupied with whites. Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and Coltrane were just being themselves. And for whites interested in the humanity of the “other,” jazz provides them with examples of sheer and rare genius – a purely American form of artistic grace and elegance emanating from its subjugated people, exiled people, degraded people. (West 1993, 16)

¹⁰ Head of Basketball Operations Joe Dumars, who is Black, is Executive Vice President under Adam Silver, the white president of the National Basketball Association.

These jazz artists, Black men who invented the idea of “cool,” did not “...look at themselves in relation to whites or engage in self-pity or white put-down” (15), but they looked to themselves to develop cultural mores of self-expression that beatified the corpus of their being. There was no enchaining themselves to whiteness as a *modus operandi* of constructing selfhood. Rather, this insular quality of self-creation through culture was a method of demonstrating the ways in which Black people have always been their greatest and most apt critics. White people do not have the range to police Black cultural norms, if for no other reason than they have relinquished their own specificity to attain the humanity found in what might broadly be construed as Blackness. Thus, they vacate their humanity in pursuit of humanity while policing the humanity of others as they imitate the humanity they deign to control. This is a triple negation that leads white culture back to where it has always been, at the center of domination and plunder, distanced *in toto* from being human.

7. Conclusion

Though politicized in its employment, whiteness as a racial category is apolitical because it has nothing to resist. The only phenomenon it is resistant to is change. As this paper has attempted to demonstrate, capitalism works the same way. As a single, unifying entity, whiteness/capitalism/white supremacy is reactionary by nature, i.e., at its founding. Because of this, throughout this paper, I elected to capitalize the term *Black*,¹¹ as it is used to describe the ethnic and cultural moorings of an un-monolithic and non-monumental demography of peoples, and lowercase the term *white*, as it is not constitutive of culture but of property, domination, and exploitation.¹² When Hannah Arendt (1970) writes “[d]eath, whether faced in actual dying or in the inner awareness of one’s own mortality, is perhaps the most antipolitical experience there is [...] [signifying] that we shall disappear from the world of appearances and shall leave the company of our fellow-men, which are the conditions of all politics,” (67) I want to invert that and suggest that death is the beginning of politics, not the ending, because only those who are killed all day long have a reason to be political. Whiteness, the harbinger of death, formulates an anti-political existence for those who practice being white by bringing into alterity those who relate to one another based on culture. To be sure, those practicing whiteness have reason to be political – to maintain the status quo. The term *status quo* derives from an old Latin phrase, *status quo res erant*

¹¹ Du Bois was the first to call on the capitalization of a term that refers to the shared history of Black people, writing to the *New York Times* that “The use of a small letter for the name of twelve million Americans and two hundred million human beings [is] a personal insult.” “The Times turned him down in 1926 before coming around in 1930 when the paper wrote that the new entry in its stylebook...[was] an act in recognition of racial self-respect” (Coleman 2020).

¹² Whiteness, conjoined to the project of white supremacy, is a delusion that motivated and substantiated a racialized stratification of peoples to plunder and extract resources at the expense of cultures of the Global South. This whitening process is seen today as a sinthome of a people who are slaving themselves to be human by appropriating the cultural norms of what they paradoxically hate, and whom they use as a datum of their phobogenesis – the Black man. Man as the center of the universe as transcendental signified is a notion that emerged out of the Age of Enlightenment in Europe (1688-1789). The thought process of this Anthropocentricity is something like this: “With my mind, I create objects; I am not the object. I am noumena, not phenomena. If the Black man is a projection of my mind as an object swirling about me, I’ve given him life; therefore, I and I alone have the capacity to eliminate him, and vanquish him as the theodicean problem of evil. So I desire the Black man for what he can give me, but I have no real need for him.” This is why I suggest in the essay that the Black male is the site of desiderata *and* destruction for white people, or the people who think themselves white, or the people who practice whiteness, in their pursuit of becoming human.

antebellum, which means “in the state in which things were before the war.” It is said to have only been used so that each side in the war could maintain their property as they had before the outbreak of a great conflict. The war most consequent of race and whiteness in the modern age is the American Civil War, the goriest military conflict in United States history. Could it be possible that the cry of the votership of the Republican Party of the candidate for whom nearly 60% of white people voted in the 2024 U.S. presidential election (Sanders 2024), the twice-impeached, four-felony-arraigned 45th U.S. president, to “Make America Great Again,” is a plaintive plea for whiteness to freeze time, indeed, to travel back in time, to an epoch when those who practiced whiteness were replete with power?

Not a full year after the Civil War ended, the state congress of Mississippi declaimed “[t]hat all freedmen, free Negroes, and mulattoes in this state over the age of eighteen years, found on the second Monday in January, 1866, or thereafter, with no lawful employment or business, or found unlawfully assembling themselves together, either in the day or night time, and all white persons so assembling with freedmen, free Negroes or mulattoes, or usually associating with freedmen, free Negroes or mulattoes on terms of equality, or living in adultery or fornication with a freedwoman, free Negro or mulatto, shall be deemed vagrants, and on conviction thereof shall be fined in the sum of not exceeding, in the case of a freedman, free Negro or mulatto, fifty dollars, and a white man two hundred dollars and imprisoned, at the discretion of the court, the free Negro not exceeding ten days, and the white men not exceeding six months” (Du Bois 1935, 168). This is but one iteration of what came to be known in the South as the black codes. These black codes were based on the slave codes that were implemented during chattel slavery to delimit the range of motion of the Black body. In short, following the abolition of the institution of slavery, the Black body was to be kept in a posture of subservience and sub-humanness. Again, whiteness working against humanity predicated by the deception of its practice.

Though ostensibly legislated by Southern states to limit the movement of Black bodies, nominally directed at vagrants, who were thought to be lazy and shiftless, unemployed Black men, who did not show up to work as a sharecropper on the plantation where they were once enslaved, the black codes were an economic measure by those who practice whiteness/white supremacy to maintain an oligarchy in the South following the defeat of the Confederacy, and to hold on to the profit margins they once earned from their crop production in that they no longer had legal slaves. Just ten percent of white Southern men enslaved Black people at the height of the institution, with Du Bois noting that, while “[n]o scientific study of the submergence of the remainder of the planter class into the ranks of the poor whites, and the corresponding rise of a portion of poor whites into the dominant portion of landholder and capitalist, has been made” ... “[o]f the names of prominent Southern families in Congress in 1860, only two appear in 1870, five in 1880. Of 90 prominent names in 1870, only four survived in 1880” (54). To this phenomenon, Booker T. Washington, born into slavery in 1859, would rejoin that following Reconstruction he knew of “...Negroes tenderly caring for their former masters and mistresses who for some reason [had] become poor and dependent since the war,” (14) that there were “... former masters of slaves [who] for years [had] been supplied with money by their former slaves to keep them from suffering,” and that there were “...former slaves that [had] assisted in the education of the descendants of their former owners” (14).

The black codes, then, were ways of proscribing how the Black human could exist in his own body as a methodology of extracting capital from him. If deemed to be a vagrant because he did not have a job or did not show up to work at his contracted plantation job, that day was the Black man forced to work a chain gang. This, however, is all a ruse. Only the veneer of civilization is present. This is observable in how through the greed of capitalism and the otherization of the Black body, under the black codes, the participant in the practice of whiteness "...assembling with freedmen, free Negroes or mulattoes,...on the terms of equality, or living in adultery or fornication with a freedwoman, free Negro or mulatto shall be deemed vagrants, and on conviction thereof shall be fined in the sum of...two hundred dollars and imprisoned..." In Mississippi, for example, as with all the black codes, broadly, vagrancy, while a referent of homelessness, could be made what the white state legislature deemed it to be – fornication, adultery, assembling as equals. Exemplary of literal oligarchy at a tethering of white supremacy and capitalism in practice, this example shows, as several examples have in this paper, that whiteness/white supremacy/capitalism as a practice is a deficit to white people themselves *because* it is a dehumanizing ecologic/economic system for Black people. In this paper, I attempted to demonstrate how white people are not able to develop their own embodied phenomenologies of artifactitious culture. I claim that this inability is an enflashed example of their slaving to become human. This process comes at a price, with the Black body being so desired that it is killed with immediacy via summary execution by the State (Michael Brown) and its economics are extracted (LaMelo Ball) when the usurpers of Black culture deem themselves capable of policing it.

Author

Tony Baugh is a graduating fourth-year PhD candidate in philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, who has recently been appointed Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Coppin State University. His research examines socialism and conservatism as political philosophies to locate regimes of harm articulated as Black suffering, centering the thought of C.L.R. James, Cornel West, and Huey P. Newton. By these means, he works to develop an understanding of theodicy as an activist epistemology that conceives radicalism as integrationist unless divorced from the multidirectional assimilationist logics of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. He has a forthcoming chapter contribution in the book *Race, Preaching, and Ricœur* through Bloomsbury Academic.

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