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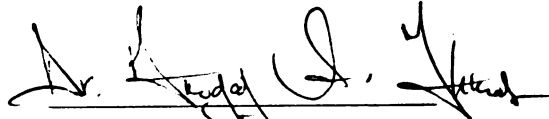
THIS IS MADNESS: A STUDY OF
THE PATHOLOGY OF RACE PREJUDICE

presented by

Quincy T. Norwood

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of the requirements for

M.A. degree in English


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THIS IS MADNESS: A Study of the Pathology of Race Prejudice

By

Quincy T. Norwood

A THESIS

**Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

THIS IS MADNESS: A STUDY OF THE PATHOLOGY OF RACE PREJUDICE

By

Quincy T. Norwood

This document is an exploration of the prominent psychosocial disorder commonly known as racism. In summation THIS IS MADNESS is a critical study of the pathology of white male hegemony as represented in a tradition of Black writers of the African Diaspora, past and present. Through an examination of the pathology of race prejudice, I wish to re-expose the depth of white supremacy's bourgeois tenets and constructs and how they continue to work to essentially create and sustain a genocidal reality that has historically targeted people of color. In addition, this thesis will serve as a space to display the inherent contradictions of Occidental concepts of "progress" and "civilization," as they are inseparable from racially motivated and "approved" violence and exploitation.

For the past, present, and future of the struggle. Known and unknown, famous and infamous.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis, *This Is Madness*, shares its name with an album recorded by The Last Poets in 1971. I picked this album up because it had one of my favorite poems on there, “The White Man’s Got a God Complex,” but I never gave the title that much thought until recently. After listening to the album in its entirety one night the significance of the album’s title dawned on me. I realized that Alafia Pudim and Omar Ben Hassen’s chants and poems that address a myriad of issues pertinent to Black folks in the United States and abroad such as the persistence of slavery and colonialism, corrupt politricks, Euro-Christian doctrines of pseudo-pacifism, a burgeoning fascist, hypercapitalist technocracy (that has now come to fruition) and a host of other relevant themes that seamlessly blend together and climax in one poignant proclamation:

This is Madness!

This is Madness!

All this madness is madness!

This madness is madness!¹

The Last Poets’ message that madness is a perfect way to describe the white supremacist “shitstem” of racial subjugation that manipulates reality through brutality and indoctrination to sustain its hegemony became clear to me. I chose *THIS IS MADNESS* for the title of this piece because I wish to continue along the same lines as Pudim and Hassen in identifying the pathology of white “jungle society,” while attempting to revise and go beyond what they began with their edifying album. While The Last Poets effectively and necessarily articulate the madness that Black folks confront daily, with the exception of “The White Mans’ Got A God Complex,” they spend the majority of the

album concentrating on the effects of downpression rather than the pathology of the actual downpressor. Far too little time and energy, especially in academia, has been devoted to looking critically at whiteness. Studies of race and racism are often limited to analyses of “minorities” which leave whiteness unquestioned, and as a result fail to reveal what is at the crux of the “sufferation” in so-called minority communities. Studies examining the effects of white supremacy are valid, but they run the risk of being counterproductive because they often neglect the cause of downpression, which in a sense exonerates the downpressor. “Approved” lines of inquiry pertaining to race rarely allow a space for identifying and attacking white supremacy since they are predicated on constructs manufactured by white supremacists to protect their selfish interests. Re-exposing white supremacy requires a departure from popular academic trends that tend to overlook the etiology of the *sufferation* that many reactionary “minority” scholars make a lucrative living explaining to white people. I want to go a different route with this thesis and deal with the psychopathological bent of the downpressor and the “jungle society” that passes for civilization because the sobering words of Omar Ben Hassen, “This is madness,” resonate in my mind when I look at the past and present practices of the engineers of genocide. Fire ‘pon Mr. Babylon.

¹ The Last Poets, “This Is Madness,” *This Is Madness*. (Douglass 1971).

Chapter 1.

Crazy Baldheads: Whiteness, Power, and Pathology

In academia the historical experiences and cultural practices of Black folks and other “minorities” are analyzed, Otherized, exoticized, problematized, and deconstructed from the perspective of whites or reactionary Blacks, while whiteness remains a taboo subject. The connotations of whiteness are rarely, if ever, looked at critically, especially in the present climate of exaggerated Americanism and hyper-patriotism where any remotely subversive word or action is immediately deemed treasonous. “Whiteness” here does not refer to a biological construct of race, but “a social, economic, and historical confluence of forces that determines the social being and consciousness of large segments of people and informs their relationships with each other.”² Studies of the meaning(s) of whiteness are necessary since historically, white skin privilege has been a matter of life and death for people of color. The despotic and exploitive undertakings of (neo) colonialist regimes in the United States and throughout the Black diaspora are grounded in the fallacious ethnocentric doctrine that binds whiteness to God, godliness, and most notably god-like authority in every area of life, but specifically when it comes to encounters with people of color. Centuries of murderation endured by the world’s nonwhite population can attest to the excessive licentiousness in the name of enterprise and imperialism that has been part and parcel of the nominally Christian Western white male identity.

A viable explanation for the lack of studies regarding whiteness could be the fact that whiteness has been normalized to the extent to where it is no longer even considered

a race. For example, at any given university there are African, African-American, Asian-American, Native American, and other “minority” literature courses. Conversely, courses that concern European or American literatures are simply general “literature” courses. These courses may have a specific historical period or locale in the title, but they are never dubbed “White Studies” or “White Literature,” which is in fact what they are. Richard Dryer addresses this phenomenon of un-raced or “invisible” whiteness in *White* (1997), a text outlining historical representations of whiteness. Dryer contends that while whites place nonwhite people in easily identifiable racial categories according to phenotype, they don’t view themselves as white people, but as “people.”

The assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off from saying that whites are people whereas other colours [sic] are something else, is endemic to white culture...In Western representation whites are overwhelmingly and disproportionately predominant...and above all are placed as the norm, the ordinary standard. Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as the norm they seem not to be represented to themselves as whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualized and abled. At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they’re just the human race.³

In the passage above, Dryer makes the point that whiteness is situated as the invisible, yet omnipresent, embodiment of humanity. The seemingly innocent notion of being “just

² Wahad, Dhoruba Bin. Interview with Chris Bratton and Annie Goldson. *Still Black Still Strong: Survivors of the War Against Black Revolutionaries*. Eds. Jim Fletcher, Tanaquil Jones, & Sylvere Lotringer. New York: Semiotext (e), 1993. 28.

³ Dryer, Richard. *White*. London: Routledge, 1997. 2-3.

human” ignores the power and privilege that is allied with whiteness. Taking the idea of white people as “just people” into consideration reveals the actual meaning of phrases such as “the American people,” “We the people,” and the fashionable post-9/11 mantra “United we stand.” The aforementioned phrases attempt to homogenize Americans into a single people, but the reality is that “We” and “the people” refer to the physical and ideological descendants of this country’s Native American genocide perpetuating and slaveholding forefathers. While Black America is used to describe the sum total of specifically Black communities in the United States, “White America” and America are interchangeable, which implies that the former is the true America. In addition, the interchangeability of “White America” and America verifies whiteness’s place as a given, or the norm. It is unnecessary to actually utter the words “White America” because it is understood that that is what is generally meant when whites say “America.” Whites purporting not to be of a particular race, but instead representatives of the “human race,” validate the universalization of their culturally specific theories and practices by reinforcing the assumption that when whites speak they do so with the authentic voice of the “human race.” Furthermore, in the assumption that whites are imbued with the capacity to speak for the entire “human race,” lies the power to create and sustain a linguistically constructed reality that corroborates white supremacy by obscuring its existence through egalitarian and “melting pot” rhetoric.

What is taken for granted in the declaration that whites are “just human,” is who defines what it means to be human. As Dryer begins to suggest above, the assertion that whites are the un-raced “human” norm automatically stigmatizes nonwhites and consigns us to the status of the abnormal Other. “White” becomes a signifier for human, while

other “races” represent a deficiency of the human, which serves as the premise for master/slave and colonizer/ “native” relationships that accelerated Western imperialist expansion. The idea of a nonwhite, not quite human, counterpart to the white human Self sustained the plantation’s culture of domination. Sylvia Wynter elaborates on the cultivation of a totemic system of humanity that equates whiteness with “human” rationality and blackness with subhuman irrationality in her essay “Sambos and Minstrels.” Wynter argues that the creation of the minstrel stereotype was essential to the forming of the white bourgeois identity:

The social construct of Sambo, like the opposing social construct of the rebellious Nat, was necessary to the self-conception not only of the master, but to that of all whites in the South who patterned their own self-conception on the master-model. The slaves’ testimony points to the way in which their claim to equality with the rich whites came to be based on the strategies by which the bourgeoisie projects its own bourgeois model as Norm, so that it can be internalized by the proletariat who then vindicate their claim to equality within the context of the bourgeois universe of signification.⁴

The image of the docile and simpleminded Sambo unified wealthy and poor whites under the flag of their bourgeois construct of whiteness by giving poor whites a symbol that epitomized the adverse of the bourgeoisie human Norm. Although poor whites may not have been slaveholders, they could still adopt the master’s bourgeois sensibilities by pointing to the stereotype of the Sambo. The Sambo’s childlike and “irresponsible” nature afforded poor whites the opportunity to act out their patriarchal fantasies and

emulate the hegemonic posture of the father/master. Although poor whites may not have been slaveholders, they could still adopt the master's bourgeois sensibilities by pointing to the stereotype of the Sambo. Wynter's "bourgeois universe of signification" is an organization of signs that designate standing in the plantation order, and society in general. She continues:

First of all the system produces the imaginary social signification of the Place of the Norm. The Place of the Norm is constituted by and through the definition of certain desired attributes. The most desired attribute was the "intellectual faculty." The sign that pointed to one's possession of this attribute was whiteness of skin. The sign that pointed to its nonpossession was blackness of skin, which revealed non-human being. The black exists as the Symbolic Object constituting the Lack, the Void of these qualities that have been postulated as the absolute sign of the certainty of being human... The plantation order which made it illegal for a slave to learn to read and become educated, which exhausted the black with relentless work, then produced empirical evidence of the Negro's "lack of intellectual faculties." The Negro then becomes the SYMBOLIC OBJECT OF THIS LACK WHICH IS DESIGNATED AS THE LACK OF THE HUMAN.⁵

The ideological underpinning of the plantation system is an arrangement of symbols created in the white imagination that sublimate whiteness, while denigrating blackness. The master's sense of being is contingent upon a construction of blackness that associates

⁴ Wynter, Sylvia. "Sambos and Minstrels." *Social Text*, 1979.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

it with the polar opposite of what whiteness allegedly represents. Supposed absence of rational aptitude, signifying non-humanness, is projected onto black skin from the master's imagination in order to stabilize his self-image as master, and the unlimited autonomy that is packaged with his ontological perception of the world. Wynter mentions that safeguarding an imagined white identity was the impetus behind the plantation order's systematic denial of the possibility for the enslaved to become literate. In Western thought literacy is tantamount to "intellectual faculty," and being lawfully and violently refused opportunities to learn to read and write reinforced the myth of the enslaved African's "natural inferiority" while solidifying the white master's position as the "human Norm."

Wynter's assessment of the hierarchical order of the plantation that positions whiteness as the human Norm is invaluable, seeing that the plantation's ideological support system is the foundation of contemporary race relations. Conventional accounts of the psychological remnants of slavery seem to be limited to its Black victims, but the psychic carryover of the pathological imperialist worldview that persists in privileging whiteness is given close to no attention. "American domination—the only domination from which one never recovers. I mean from which one never escapes unscarred,"⁶ remarks Aime Césaire. Césaire's statement holds true for both the victims and the victimizers. The white people as "just people" discourse presupposes that whites that adopt this label have somehow detached themselves from the system of white hegemony. However, as Cheryl Harris notes in "Whiteness as Property," identifying as "white" precludes such a disconnection:

⁶ Césaire, Aime. *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972, 2000. 77.

At the individual level, recognizing oneself as “white” necessarily assumes premises based on white supremacy: It assumes that Black ancestry in any degree, extending to generations far removed, automatically disqualifies claims to white identity, thereby privileging “white” as unadulterated, exclusive, and rare. Inherent in the concept of “being white” was the right to own or hold whiteness to the exclusion and subordination of Blacks. Because “[i]dentity is...continuously being constituted through social interactions,” the assigned political, economic, and social inferiority of Blacks necessarily shaped white identity.⁷

The “just people” claim does nothing to reject a “white identity” that is reliant on Black subordination, or the power and privilege that it encompasses. Harris observes that “the white identity” invokes the legacy of domination that that one inherits and perpetually benefits from, simply by being “white.” In Harris’ line of reasoning, whiteness possesses certain cultish characteristics, and membership in this cult is synonymous with exclusivity and entitlement. Malcolm X extends Harris’ point in his speech “Educate Our People In Politics” with his analysis of the implicit relation between whiteness and power:

But when you get the white man over here in America and he says he’s white, he means something else...when he says he’s white, he means he’s boss. That’s right. That’s what white means in this language. You know

⁷ Harris, Cheryl. “Whiteness as Property.” *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to be White*. Ed. David R. Roediger. New York: Schocken Books, 1998. 112.

the expression, “free, white, and twenty-one.” He made that up. He’s letting you know all of them mean the same. “White means free, boss.”⁸

As Malcolm X explains, the pathological master-complex of the Euro-American white male has remained virtually unchanged since being fostered on the plantation. A definitive aspect of the master-complex is the myopic view that sees the world as land to conquer and its nonwhite population primarily as an expendable source of cheap labor. “Sanctioned” violence, corporate sponsored socio-political institutions, and a monopoly over the world’s mass media outlets are utilized to help the capitalist Euro-American male assert his will over the planet. The fascination with globalization boils down to the Americanization of the rest of the world, which translates to the subjugation of nonwhites, by any means necessary.

The master-complex, distinguished by the all-consuming desire for control and an unending inclination toward avarice, is symptomatic of the pathology of whiteness. Violent behavioral patterns and racist attitudes that whites exhibit toward “minorities,” specifically Blacks, are reflective of a psychological defect that prevents them from meshing their actions with their lofty doctrines of democracy and social equity. Dr. Bobby Wright expounds on the concept of the psychopathological white profile:

This presentation is based upon the following very simple premise: in their relationship with the Black race, Europeans (Whites) are psychopaths and their behavior reflects an underlying biologically transmitted proclivity with roots deep in their evolutionary history. The psychopath is an individual who is constantly in conflict with other persons and groups. He

⁸ X, Malcolm. “Educate Our People in Politics.” *February 1965: The Final Speeches*. Ed. Steven Clark. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1992. 85.

is unable to experience guilt, is completely selfish and callous, and has a total disregard for the rights of others.⁹

Dr. Wright's description of the psychopathic racial profile is based on whites' historical record of hostility, exploitation, and downpression imposed on Blacks and other "minorities," and the lack of recognition of any wrongdoing on their behalf whatsoever. Reconciling unconscionable murderation with a sense of Christianity based morality does not present a problem for the white racist because, as Wright says, "psychopaths simply ignore the concept of right and wrong." The potential for capital gain and the insatiable lust to maintain a position of global dominance has eroded any modicum of ethics in the collective mind of the white ruling elite.

The racist white power structure often employs Western rationalism, a system of pseudo-sciences that were biased from their inception, to justify violent crimes perpetrated against Black folks and other "minorities." E. Franklin Frazier argues that the "mechanism of rationalism" excuses them from blame by fabricating evidence to support their delusions of racial superiority:

Race prejudice involves mental conflict, which is held to be the cause of the dissociation of ideas so prominent in insanity. The Negro-complex in often out of harmony with the personality as a whole and therefore results in a conflict that involves unpleasant emotional tension. In everyday life such conflicts are often solved by what—in those following contradictory moral codes—is generally known as hypocrisy. When however, the two systems of incompatible ideas cannot be kept from conflict, the insane

⁹ Wright, Bobby. *The Psychopathic Racial Personality and Other Essays*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1984. 2.

man reconciles them through the process of rationalization. Through the same process of rationalization, the Southern white man creates defenses for his immoral acts, lynching becomes a holy defense of womanhood.¹⁰

Frazier's "Negro-complex" describes a fear of blackness that prompts whites to project their own anxieties onto Blacks. For example, the white desire to rape becomes the stereotype of the hypersexual Black male that preys on white women, and as a result this stereotypical image rationalizes the lynching of a Black person as a "holy defense of womanhood." In similar fashion, the white inclination toward violence becomes the image of the young Black inner-city dwelling super-predator that rationalizes a slave trade-like prison system and the pervasiveness of police brutality. Clay, the male protagonist of Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, speculates on what in would happen in an instance of racial role-reversal to best explain the innate hypocrisy of Western rationalism. Ironically, Clay makes the following statement moments before the play's white female antagonist, Lula, murders him:

Don't make the mistake, through some irresponsible surge of Christian charity, of talking too much about the advantages of Western rationalism, or the great intellectual legacy of the white man, or maybe they'll [Blacks on the train] begin to listen. And then maybe one day, you'll find they actually do understand exactly what you're talking about, all these fantasy people... And on that day sure as shit, when you really believe you can "accept" them into your fold, as half-white trusties late of the subject peoples. With no more blues, except the very old ones, and not a

¹⁰ Frazier, Franklin E. "The Pathology of Race Prejudice." *The Negro Caravan*. Eds. Arthur P. Davis, Sterling Brown, & Ulysses Lee. New York: Arno Press Inc., 1969. 906.

watermelon in sight, the great missionary heart will have triumphed, and all those ex-coons will be stand-up Western men, with eyes for clean hard useful lives, sober, pious and sane, and they'll murder you. They'll murder you and have very rational explanations. Very much like your own.¹¹

Clay's appraisal of Western rationalism exposes its pathological temperament, as he posits that becoming "stand-up Western men" entails a license to commit "justifiable" homicide. Shortly after Clay utters the words above, Lula plunges her knife into his chest twice, and his lifeless body falls on top of her. Lula screams to the other passengers, "Get this man off me! Hurry, now! Open the door and throw his body out." The passengers follow Lula's orders and after dusting herself off, she proceeds toward another Black male on the train who will undoubtedly have the same fate as Clay. Frazier's "Negro-complex" explains why Lula escapes persecution for murdering Clay. The "Negro-complex" prevents the other passenger from believing that Lula, a "white" woman, could have been the aggressor in the situation, even though they witness her stab Clay. The "mechanism of rationalism" vindicates Lula by positioning her as the white damsel in distress defending herself from a Black sexual predator.

I wish to end this chapter with a simple statement made by poet Langston Hughes that condenses what I have attempted to express here. "Some white folks have gone crazy from being white" laments Hughes. White supremacy is innately pathological, but the lack of attention that its depth receives allows it to thrive. As long as whiteness is avoided as subject of critical inquiry, it will continue to be privileged as the human

¹¹ Baraka, Amiri. *Dutchman*. *The Amiri Baraka/ Leroi Jones Reader*. Ed. William J. Harris. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991. 98.

Norm. Re-exposing and dismantling white supremacy must begin with a look at the unchecked psychosis of the “white bourgeois identity” that replicates itself from generation to generation.

Chapter 2.

It's Like a Jungle Sometimes: White Terror and Genocide

Runs falls rises stumbles on from darkness into darkness
and the darkness thicketed with shapes of terror
and the hunters pursuing and the hounds pursuing
and the night cold and the night long and the river
to cross and the jack-muh-lanterns beckoning beckoning
and blackness ahead and when shall I reach that somewhere
morning and keep on going never turn back and keep on going
Runagate Runagate Runagate¹²

Robert Hayden's "Runagate Runagate" opens with an articulation of the thoughts of an anonymous slave frantically running toward freedom, and running away from the dogs and patterollers¹³ that are relentlessly pursuing her/him. Upon reading this passage, one cannot help but take notice of the escapee's overwhelming sense of urgency as the threat of an ensuing terror draws nearer with each step taken "from darkness into darkness." "No more auction block for me/ no more driver's lash for me,"¹⁴ exclaims the renegade slave as s/he frenziedly runs for her/his life through the woods. S/he continues, "And before I'll be a slave/ I'll be buried in my grave." Two options present themselves to the runaway, freedom or death. Being apprehended and returned to the plantation is not a viable alternative because it would mean being subjected to the unspeakable horrors of slave life all over again.

¹² Hayden, Robert. "Runagate Runagate." *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997. 1506

¹³ Runaway slave hunters

¹⁴ *Ibid.* , 1507.

Hayden does well in capturing the sentiments of the slave fleeing the ubiquitous racially motivated violence that characterized the lives of slaves. In order to secure obedience, white masters often employed the most brutally extreme measures of terrorism. Frank Bell, an 86 year-old former slave from New Orleans, provides an account of his encounter with white terrorism from his early life:

When I'm about seventeen I marries a gal while Master on drunk spell. Master he run her off, and I slips off at night to see her, but he finds it out. He takes a big, long knife and cuts her head plumb off, and ties a great, heavy weight to her and makes me throw her in the river. Then he puts me in chains and every night he come give me a whippin' for a long time.¹⁵

After witnessing his wife being decapitated by the hands of his master, Bell is forced to throw her in the river. As if the viciousness of this ordeal is not enough to satisfy his master, Bell receives lashes from the whip to “punish” him for the “crime” of wanting to marry, or taking it upon himself to make a decision that would affect his life. Although Bell’s master is clearly the guilty party in the aforementioned passage, Bell’s wife is savagely murdered and Bell, himself, is brutally beaten. The slaughtering of slaves often got justified in the public domain due to the white supremacist “mechanism of rationalism” that not only criminalized Blacks, but also claimed that they are subhuman; therefore they were not afforded the same human rights as whites. Though Bell’s master was eventually killed in a shootout which gave Bell somewhat of a quasi-freedom, the psychological remnants of the horrors Bell experienced as a slave continued to haunt him,

¹⁵ Yetman, Norman R. *Voices From Slavery: 100 Authentic Slave Narratives*. New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2000. 22.

“Finally I gets up nerve to leave town and stays the first night in white man’s barn. I never slept. Every time I hears something I jumps up and Master be standin’ there, lookin’ at me...Next night I slept out in a hay field, and Marster he get right top of a tree and start hollerin’ at me.” The atrocities that Bell experiences physically, visually, and aurally on the plantation leave a lasting impression on his subconscious, making the memory of the terror slavery a part of his everyday existence.

The sentiments of terror expressed in Hayden’s “Runagate Runagate” and Frank Bell’s post-slavery interview disclose the mythology of the concept of Western “civilization.” “Progress” of the imperialist Western regime, now represented best by the United States, has long been reliant upon Black sufferation resulting from the many forms of white terrorism that continue to perpetuate a system of racial domination. The very presence of Black folks on American soil is a living testament to the legacy of white terrorism. The Maafa¹⁶ experience set the tone for what would grow to be a seemingly never-ending series of atrocities inflicted upon Black folks in the name of white hegemony. Occupying the peculiar position of being both the catalysts and victims of Western “civilization” has provided Black folks with an intimate knowledge of the underlying physical, psychological, and socio-economic violence that is discounted in the popularized white bourgeois discourse of “civilization.” The reality is that for Black folks, and other “minorities” the West’s civilization has been all but civil. In *Discourse on Colonialism* Aime Cesaire, the forefather of the Negritude movement, writes:

At this idea: that no one colonizes innocently, that no one colonizes with impunity either; that a nation which colonizes, that a civilization which justifies colonization—and therefore force—is already a sick civilization, a

civilization which is morally diseased... Colonization: bridgehead in a campaign to civilize barbarism, from which there may emerge at any moment the negation of civilization, pure and simple.¹⁷

According to Cesaire, in the colonial situation the Western *idea* of civilization thwarts the materialization of an *actual* civilization. To those on the underbelly of Western “progress,” “civilization” has proven to be a misnomer used to masquerade decadence and terrorism. This is why Fanon informs us “when the native hears a speech about Western culture he pulls out his knife—or at least he makes sure it is within reach.”¹⁸

From chattel slavery, to sharecropping, to peonage, to neo-slavery, coping with the ever-present threat of white terror has been an integral part of the Black experience. Cultural critic bell hooks asserts that, “All black people in the United States, irrespective of their class status or politics, live with the possibility that they will be terrorized by whiteness.”¹⁹ As hooks rightly observes, white terrorism transgresses the boundaries of class and political preference. However, though white terrorism does not discriminate, it does appear as if the white supremacist establishment disproportionately targets poor Black folks. One can even posit that their very status as “poor” points to the economic terrorism of capitalism that systematically denies Black folks the opportunity to partake of the fruits of their own labor. Comrade George Jackson describes this condition of economic terror as neo-slavery:

Slavery is an economic condition. The classic chattel slavery and today’s slavery must be defined in terms of economics... Neo-slavery is an

¹⁶ Swahili term meaning “disaster,” used to describe the Middle Passage.

¹⁷ Cesaire, Aime. *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972, 2000. 40.

¹⁸ Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1963. 43.

¹⁹ Hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1992. 175.

economic condition, a small knot of men exercising the property rights of their established economic order, organizing and controlling the life style of the slave as if he were in fact property. Succinctly: an economic condition which manifests itself in the total loss or absence of self-determination.²⁰

Loss or absence of self-determination equates to the downpressed being dependent on the downpressor. Violence and Ideological State Apparatuses, such as the media, religion, education, etc., all serve to secure the hegemony of the ruling class (i.e. wealthy white males) in the neo-slaveocracy. Jackson notes that the purpose of militaristic police, a repressive state apparatus, in “the new Black colonies” is not to protect the citizens, but to reinforce the conditions of neo-slavery by serving as agents of the dominant class: “The pigs [police officer] are not protecting you, your home, and its contents. Recall they never found that T.V. set you lost in that burglary. The pig is protecting the right of a few private individuals to own public property!!”²¹ The laws of a neo-slaveocracy, created for the people by politicians, are designed to maintain a social order that severely restricts the progress and freedoms of Black folks and other “minorities.”

The economic underdevelopment (bloodsucking) of many “minority” communities has numerous by-products that play a significant role in sustaining the neo-slaveocracy. One of the foremost of these by-products is “crime,” which leads to a disproportionate incarceration rate for Blacks. For example, the disparity between the

²⁰ Jackson, George. *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*. New York: Bantam Books, 1970. 189-191.

²¹ *Ibid.* , 191.

laws concerning sentencing for possession of powder cocaine and crack cocaine²², which is cheaper and made more readily available in Black communities contributes to the ever expanding “minority” prison population. The United States prison system is rapidly becoming a private stock overflowing with Black people from the *lumpenproletariat* class who are depicted as “criminals” in the media. Capitalism’s socio-economic guillotine pushes poor Black youths into survival mode, and often they resort to less than legal means of employment in order to sustain themselves rather than accepting minimum wage jobs that barely pay enough to support one person, let alone a family of people. The stereotypical image of the young Black super-predator assuages the public consciousness, while ignoring the poverty and social reasons that create “crime.” This is the logic behind political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal’s assertion that all prisoners in the United States are political prisoners due to the economic terrorism that cultivates “criminal behavior.” When asked if he considers himself a political prisoner, Abu-Jamal responds:

Most people, if not all people are imprisoned for a political reason. For a political effect. Prisons in America are political organs of the state... Yes I am a political prisoner. As a matter of fact I believe every prisoner in America is a political prisoner. That may be too radical, that might not be accepted by the United Nations, but that’s my position... Every prosecution is a public and a symbolic act, a political act by the state to

²² The 100:1 quantity ratio calls for a more severe punishment for those convicted for possession of crack cocaine than the punishment administered for those in possession of powder cocaine. Possession of 500 grams of cocaine warrants a mandatory five-year jail sentence, while possession of five grams of crack cocaine carries the same sentence. If one is arrested for possession of five grams of powder cocaine, that person will most likely receive probation without actually serving any jail time. Most people convicted under the 100:1 law are young Black males.

give the populace an illusion of control, to show that “we’re taking care of this problem.”²³

In white supremacist society nonconformity leads to incarceration or one of many other punishments established to maintain the social order. Conforming in this context means becoming a pawn in the capitalist order of things. Fanon’s *fellahs*, or those who choose to operate outside of what the ruling class deems “legal” are viewed as potential threats that must be eliminated. “So called criminal action is governed by cause and effect, as is everything material. All criminals are victims of the attempt to maintain hierarchy,” explains George Jackson.²⁴ Mass incarceration contributes to White America’s false sense of security because they feel that they are protected from society’s “criminal element.”

As more people get incarcerated, more prisons are constructed which creates a source of cheap labor to perform menial tasks. William Upski Wimsatt notes, “Prisons are a \$100 billion dollar industry. A lot of money is being made. The beds must be filled.”²⁵ Like the Jim Crow Laws of the South, and other statutes designed to control slaves and “free” populations of Black folks in the early twentieth century, the crack cocaine mandatory sentencing law acts as one of the many laws that are specifically engendered to extract bodies from economically underdeveloped communities to become “wage” slaves in prison. In an exploration of the United States’ prison industry Howard Zinn explains:

²³ Abu-Jamal, Mumia. Interview conducted in 1989 at Huntingdon Prison in Pennsylvania. *Still Black Still Strong*. Eds. Jim Fletcher, Tanaquil Jones, & Sylvere Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e), 1993. 126.

²⁴ Szulc, Tad. “George Jackson Radicalizes the Brothers in Soledad and San Quentin.” *New York Times* 1 Aug. 1971. 10.

²⁵ Wimsatt, William Upski. *No More Prisons*. New York: Soft Skull Press, 1999. 8.

The prisons in the United States had long been an extreme reflection of the American system itself: the stark life differences between the rich and the poor, the racism, the use of the victims against one another, the lack of resources of the underclass to speak out, the endless “reforms” that changed little...the poorer you were the more likely you were to end up in jail. This was not just because the poor committed more crimes. In fact, they did. The rich did not have to commit crimes to get what they wanted; the laws were on their side. But when the rich did commit crimes, they were not prosecuted, and if they were they could get out on bail, hire clever lawyers, get better treatment from judges. Somehow the jails ended up full of poor black people.²⁶

Along with the justice system, the police have a historical record of terrorizing Black folks. More often than not, the police officers responsible for incidents of brutality and outright murder never receive any formal punishment outside of minor slaps on their wrists. I believe that at the root of the prevalence of police brutality lays the nonhuman/human binary that I discussed in the previous chapter. Sylvia Wynter speaks to this notion in an open letter in which she cites the Los Angeles Police Department’s usage of the acronym N.H.I. in their report concerning the infamous Rodney King beating. As Wynter indicates, N.H.I., meaning, “no humans involved,” is used to refer to “the category of the non-owning, jobless young of the inner cities; primarily black, Latino, and increasingly also white, assimilated to its underclass category.”²⁷ In the neo-slaveocracy, the unemployed and inner city dwelling Black and Latino youth are

²⁶ Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States 1492-Present*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1995. 504-5.

identified in terms of the nonhuman Other to the white bourgeois human Norm. The acronym N.H.I. points to a shift in the way that humanity is gauged; from literacy or the adoption of Euro-Christian ideals to ownership and the ability to contribute to the consumption/production cycle that supports the economy. If one is unemployed, they don't have "purchasing power," which makes them *persona non grata* in the capitalist neo-slaveocracy, and their "human rights" become null and void in the eyes of the white ruling elite. As said by Robert F. Williams, the way that the rights of Black folks are perceived by the white ruling class parallels the major premise of the Dred Scott decision, "as far as the Black man is concerned, he has no legal or human rights that white terror is bound to respect."²⁸

The veracity of Williams' assertion is evidenced by the fact that in the minds of many officers of the law, who are foot soldiers for, and reflect the collective sentiment of the larger white supremacist enterprise, the value of Black life has really not increased since the days of chattel slavery. Former political prisoner and Black Panther Party member Dhoruba Bin Wahad contends that the police in Black and other "minority" communities are essentially given free reign to commit wholesale murders and other crimes in the name of protecting and serving:

The majority of policemen see the poor communities as a jungle in which they have to be the number one predator, the feared animal in the jungle, and they carry out this absurd analysis to its logical conclusion and that's

²⁷ Wynter, Sylvia. An open letter to her colleagues.

²⁸ Williams, Robert F. Interview. *The Black Scholar*. May 1970. 2.

treating people of color as if their lives were insignificant... The police have murdered people from all these communities with impunity.²⁹

Wahad appropriately uses the analogy of the jungle to describe the terrain of Black communities in which the police execute the will of the establishment. The life experiences of Amadou Diallo, Abner Louima, Timothy Thomas, Malice Green, Donovan Jackson and countless others demonstrate that in “hostile white jungle society”³⁰ the aggressive and overtly racist actions of the police are part of the daily cruelty of a society distinguished by its penchant toward white rule by terrorism and intimidation. The distressing consequence of the high incarceration rate and normalized *murderation* of Black folks by the police is the “elimination of young Black males by ostensibly normal and everyday means.”³¹

The psychological aspects of white terrorism manifest in a process that Dr. Bobby Wright characterizes as “mentacide,” or “the deliberate and systematic destruction of a group’s minds with the ultimate objective being the extirpation of the group.”³² Mentacide encourages Black self-hatred by through an insidious conditioning process that is endemic to the system of white domination. George Jackson contends that schools, churches, and other appendages of the State socialize Black folks to internalize negative images of blackness and adopt white bourgeois ideals:

Right behind the expeditionary forces (the pigs) come the missionaries and the colonial effect is complete. The missionaries, with the benefits

²⁹ Wahad, Dhoruba Bin. Interview. *Still Black Still Strong*. Eds. Jim Fletcher, Tanaquil Jones, & Sylvere Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e), 1993. 113.

³⁰ Ibid. , Williams. 3.

³¹ Ibid. , Wynter. 14.

³² Wright, Bobby. *The Psychopathic Racial Personality and Other Essays*. Chicago: Third World Press, 1984. 17.

Christendom, school us on the value of symbolism, dead presidents, and the rediscount rate. The black colony lost consciousness to these missionaries. Their schools, their churches, their newspapers and other periodicals destroyed the black conscience and made it impossible to for us to determine our own best interest.³³

The ideological restraints of white supremacy have served to colonize the minds of Black folks. White terrorism coerces Black folks to view themselves through a whitewashed lens. The pathological nature of white supremacist society only allows for the conception of difference to occur in terms of a hierarchy. Anything outside of prescribed white cultural norms is deemed inferior and subsequently marginalized. Whiteness remains the privileged signifier in textbooks, mass media, and other outlets of widely disseminated information, while blackness continues to be underrepresented, or more often than not, misrepresented as the embodiment of abnormality. In my paper “Plantation Rhymes: Hip Hop as Writing Against the Empire of Neo-Slavery,” I cited the following lyrics from Carson, California rapper Ras Kass that illustrate the destructive results of mentacide, “In ’81 I remember the night/ I covered myself with baby powder so my Black ass could be light/ Cuz God is white, and Bo Derek is a ten/ I hate my Black skin/ It’s just a sin to be a nigga.”³⁴ Ras narrates an experience born from the psychological terrorism of white supremacist society. The idea that “it’s just a sin to be nigga” originates from the Western discourse of Man, which purports that the idyllic (hu)man is the white bourgeois Christian male. Furthermore, as Sylvia Wynter indicates in “History in the Age of Man,”

³³ Ibid. , Jackson, 192.

³⁴ Ras Kass. “The Evil That Men Do,” *Soul On Ice*. Priority Records, 1996.

blackness, or any differentiation from the bourgeois white ideal signifies the “name of what is evil.”³⁵

With the one-year anniversary of September 11th hastily approaching, and the popular “war against terrorism” and “axis of evil” terminology that has become so popular, I can’t help but take note of the chauvinism of American (white) violence. The current American discourse on terrorism positions the United States as the guiltless victim of a random attack by “a network of terrorists,” and in doing so completely disregard the continuum of Western imperialist aggression that has facilitated the underdevelopment of the Third World proper, and the Third World in the first (Usgs).³⁶ At the crux of the pathology of whiteness is the “normative gaze” with which whites look at the rest of the world. This causes them to look outward for terrorism, evil, and barbarism while turning a blind eye to their own historical and present behavior. I am not attempting to detract from the significance of what occurred on September 11th, but the terror and fear that White America experienced as a result of 9/11 is the terror and fear that has been a normality in the daily lives of Black folks for close to six centuries now.

³⁵ Wynter, Sylvia. “History in the Age of Man.” *Small Axe: a journal of criticism*. 3 (2000): 180.

³⁶ United States Ghettos

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