

**Soyica Diggs Colbert**

## **BLACK RAGE: ON CULTIVATING BLACK NATIONAL BELONGING**

In performances in Atlanta; Philadelphia; Washington, DC; Los Angeles; Rio de Janeiro; Chicago; and Denver in 2012, Ms. Lauryn Hill carved out space to voice black rage.<sup>1</sup> In videos uploaded to YouTube, Hill sings, raps, talks, and riffs varied renditions of the song “Black Rage (Sketch),” a remix of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II’s “My Favorite Things.” During her November performance at the Electric Factory in Philadelphia, drumbeats punctuated Hill’s rapping and singing. Her performance took the audience on a journey meant to leave no one behind; it moved from the highly choreographed rendition of the song with musical accompaniment and Hill acting as lead vocalist and band conductor to her slowly speaking the lyrics of the song and occasionally offering analysis of her words over the shouts and applause of audience members. She explains the line “when I’m feeling sad,” saying “that’s a depressive mood.”<sup>2</sup> As the title of her song suggests, in each reiteration Hill issues a different draft of the song, sketching her sound, mood, tempo, and emphasis with each new audience. Although renditions of the song shift, the lyrics consistently recount the physical, psychic, economic, and environmental vulnerability of black people in the United States. The lyrics transform the original song’s references to beloved objects—“blue satin sashes” and “snowflakes”—into ironic things such as “Black human packages tied up in strings,” which Hill described in her Philadelphia performance as a reference to bureaucracy but which also resonates with familiar images of lynching.<sup>3</sup> Shifting from the original song’s depiction

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of the curative capacity of things to offset feeling bad, Hill explains that her set of things prevents fear: “I simply remember all these kinds of things and then I don’t fear so bad!”<sup>4</sup>

Hill, a five-time Grammy Award winner, has performed versions of “Black Rage (Sketch)” since 2012. Yet *Rolling Stone*, *CNN*, *The Huffington Post*, and *Time* did not comment on the song until after she dedicated it on 21 August 2014 to the “the people fighting for racial equality in Ferguson, MO.”<sup>5</sup> Hill’s expression of rage for the suffering of black people did not warrant the attention of national media outlets until she connected it to the protests over the death of unarmed black male teenager Michael Brown on 9 August 2014. The circulation of Hill’s song, which moved from the attention of loyal fans in live performance venues, then online and then to the national media spotlight, establishes which social contexts make expressions of black rage legible and legitimate.

Hill’s expression of black rage draws on central aspects of what Raymond Williams calls a “structure of feeling” by animating a collectivity and operating in an emergent temporality.<sup>6</sup> According to Williams, “structures of feeling” refer to “a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period.”<sup>7</sup> Williams’s phrase describes the ability of emotions to shape burgeoning groups such as the Great Migration migrants, the men and women of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the evacuees of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, or the people involved in the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Every day and in the midst of crisis, black rage acknowledges the limits of black citizenship and enables the cultivation of black political collectivity by uniting individuals through a shared feeling. Hill’s expression of black rage complicates the temporality of Williams’s structure of feeling because it is both emergent *and* recurring.

It was only, however, in the face of death that black rage emerged in the social context of the mainstream press as an acceptable expression of collective political dissent. The media silence about the circulation of Hill’s song before the dedication exemplifies the outlaw status of black rage. Hill’s song is part of a genealogy that builds on expressions of black rage and anger in Amiri Baraka’s (then LeRoi Jones) play *Dutchman* (1964) and Audre Lorde’s speech-turned-essay “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism” (1981), both of which call attention to the persistent and recurrent limitations of black citizenship. Distinctive in degree, black rage and anger express a collective feeling that organizes a social group invested in resisting quotidian forms of racial violence.

In the late twentieth century, as the social context shifted from essentialist formulations of race to constructivist ones, expressions of racism become increasingly implicit. The consolidation of repeated actions (performance) over time is what constitutes identity (racial and otherwise) more than historical, geographical, or physiological factors do.<sup>8</sup> Within the constructivist milieu, individual striving, particularly that of President Barack Obama, seemed to counterbalance histories of antiblack racism. Once the biological and historical bases of racial affiliations became less self-evident, race scholars were left to ponder what connects seemingly disparate individuals who do not conform to normative formulations of subjectivity.

In the context of new-millennial postblackness, Hill's song animates a black political collectivity that remains invisible in normative formulations of citizenship.<sup>9</sup> In order to decipher how "Black Rage (Sketch)" produces a racial collectivity, we must understand the circulation of the song from 2012 to 2014 as part of a racial dynamic particular to the United States that necessitates that black rage return again and again. Hill's song taps into contemporary and inter-generational feeling and recalls the work of Baraka and Lorde. It also connects to the depiction of black rage in Suzan-Lori Parks's play *The Bridge* (2005). Each expression of black rage combats invisible and routine forms of racism. It is my contention that although quotidian and "minor" forms of racism cultivate extreme and explicit manifestations of racial violence, the connection goes unnoticed in a context of color blindness that does not acknowledge racial difference.<sup>10</sup> Although the YouTube videos of "Black Rage" serve as a point of reference for Hill's performances, they do not capture the emotions of the live event; they can only document it.<sup>11</sup> Performance exerts a material effect through repetition, circulation, and accumulation; the effect is the appearance of stable collective identities. Collectivity also results from the feeling that coincides with the performance of blackness: the irony Hill performs in her song and, as I will show, the act of signifying in Parks's play. Routine performances offer a quotidian mode of resistance that matters as much as responses to extreme cases of racial violence. Understanding how blackness operates in relationship to feeling provides an opportunity to respond to racism because it accounts for the sociality of race.

#### MS. LAURYN HILL'S "BLACK RAGE (SKETCH)"

Establishing "how emotions operate to 'make' and 'shape' bodies" and our "orientations towards others," Rodgers and Hammerstein's "My Favorite Things" offers a list of objects that shift a negative feeling (sadness) into a more positive one.<sup>12</sup> Julie Andrews sings the most well-known version of "My Favorite Things" in the film adaptation (1965) of the Broadway musical production of *The Sound of Music*. John Coltrane also recorded several versions of the song in the years 1960–6 that included extended improvisational breaks that fundamentally change the structure of the song. The singer's emotional attachment to favored objects (beautiful dresses and the changing landscape of the seasons) offsets the negative response to regular unfortunate happenings of life. In response, Andrews sings

When the dog bites, when the bee stings,  
When I'm feeling sad,  
I simply remember my favorite things  
And then I don't feel so bad.<sup>13</sup>

In the song, emotions create a context for identities, actions, objects, others, and the world. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Sara Ahmed argues that "emotions are intentional in the sense that they are 'about' something: they involve a

direction or orientation towards an object. . . . The ‘aboutness’ of emotions means they involve a stance on the world, or a way of apprehending the world. . . . Emotions are both about objects, which they hence shape, and are also shaped by contact with objects.”<sup>14</sup> Building on Ahmed’s analysis, I argue that emotions circulate through and awaken shared feelings in subjects and objects, thus changing distinct individuals into collectives.

Williams’s term “structure of feeling” differs from Ahmed’s theory of emotion because it calls attention to the collectivity that results from the circulation of emotions rather than to the work of the emotions themselves.<sup>15</sup> According to Williams, “structure” denotes “a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension.”<sup>16</sup> Williams is not the only theorist to consider how feeling gives shape to a group. As black cultural theorists including Angela Davis and Clyde Woods have argued persuasively, shared feelings (in the work of Davis and Woods, the blues) express a political sensibility that works in relationship to minoritarian difference but does not depend on materialist formations of identity.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Frank B. Wilderson III argues that “a shared sense that violence and captivity are the grammar and ghosts of our every gesture” connected the attendees of a 2008 Conference on African and Afro-Caribbean Performance.<sup>18</sup> Wilderson’s rendering of a “palpable structure of feeling”<sup>19</sup> gives primacy to the violent histories that distinguish black life but does not focus, as does the work of Davis and Woods, on the lifesaving practices that exorcise the ghosts. My analysis also follows the groundbreaking work in affect and ethnic studies in José Esteban Muñoz’s “Feeling Brown” and the more particular explorations of anger and rage in the work of Baraka and Lorde.<sup>20</sup>

Unlike theories of the blues, theories of rage and anger run the risk of reinforcing pernicious stereotypes of black people as uniformly angry. Fear of such stereotypes facilitates black suffering by requiring silence lest the sufferers face accusations that they are inciting violence (i.e., Sandra Bland questioning Officer Brian Encinia).<sup>21</sup> In this essay, I explore how anger and rage function as both innovative *and* destructive responses to antiblack racism. The failure to examine articulations of rage as a clarifying force bolsters the operation of implicit forms of racism by restricting legitimate fury to a response to black suffering to death.

The sonic irony at the heart of Hill’s song communicates how the organizing force of black rage produces responses to implicit and explicit forms of racialized violence. In the film, the sound of music offers comfort to the von Trapp children as Maria (Julie Andrews) recounts her favorite things. In contrast, Hill’s rendition functions much like an “occupation,” seizing the soothing space “My Favorite Things” fosters to show how fear facilitates black dehumanization and suffering.<sup>22</sup> Hill’s version signifies on the original to establish the singer’s authority and defamiliarize the feeling that accompanies hearing the melody of “My Favorite Things.”<sup>23</sup> Instead of commenting on how a relief from sadness may emerge through interactions with desired objects, Hill offers a historical and socioeconomic lesson that produces black rage as a response to antiblack racism and shows how that rage mitigates fear. She sings:

BLACK RAGE is founded on two-thirds a person  
Rapings and beatings and suffering that worsens  
Black human packages tied up in strings,  
BLACK RAGE can come from all these kinds of things.

...

When the dogs bite  
When the beatings  
When I'm feeling sad,  
I simply remember all these kinds of things and then I don't fear so bad!<sup>24</sup>

Hill's use of the melody of "My Favorite Things" troubles the utility of things that Rodgers and Hammerstein's version establishes by remembering humans (lynching victims) that were things.<sup>25</sup> Upsetting the hierarchical order of subjects over objects, Hill's song calls attention to the operation of human objectification. Instead of using objects to mitigate emotional responses to everyday experiences of violence, Hill's song calls into question the ideas and practices that regulate and regularize violence. Hill's use of the familiar melody focuses on vocal modes of expression—speech and song—that may circulate beyond the racialized body. Listening is a repeated practice that has been cultivated in historical contexts that often misread black people. Thus, Hill communicates black rage through musical traditions that offer and then upend familiar "relational stances," as does Bessie Smith (as Baraka asserts in *Dutchman*), a point to which I return below.<sup>26</sup> Put another way, Hill and Smith purposefully tap into different registers of hearing in order to form divergent collectives of listeners. When Hill dedicated her song to the black protestors of Ferguson, Missouri, she reoriented the ear of the mainstream media.<sup>27</sup>

Hill's song designates the violent practices that produce black suffering as "things" rather than acts, a seeming misnomer. By calling acts "things," the song focuses attention on the processes that produce materiality. The word "things" emphasizes means of production, reading a particular violent history, an accumulated suffering, back onto blackness as a habitus resulting from a performed dynamic that is enlivened and specified through relationships with others and objects that produce feelings.<sup>28</sup> In "Dances with Things," Robin Bernstein, following Martin Heidegger and other thing theorists, makes the important theoretical contribution that "things, but not objects, script actions."<sup>29</sup> Heidegger explains that things have a reciprocal relationship with humans in that things are acted upon and impact their surroundings, unlike objects, which only receive human action but do not participate in interaction. Bernstein adds to Heidegger's theory, arguing that certain things communicate racial histories and therefore script racialized interactions, and that subjects do more than act—they act out specific racial dynamics. Hill's song aligns with Bernstein's theory that although things call forth racial scripts, they are not practices. Rather, they bear the mark of and call forth practices. The multitemporality of remembering *and* summoning disrupts what Wilderson depicts as the primary feeling "that violence and captivity" produce the "grammar" "of our every gesture." This multitemporality situates blackness as not just a result of prior actions but also a possibility, a

designation oriented toward the future while accounting for the past.<sup>30</sup> The exchange between humans and objects that animates objects as things produces collective and individual feelings. And the feelings that emerge by way of performances that constitute blackness follow a script that too often includes violence and degradation.

The relay from constitutive action to blackness operates in and through feelings and as a function of the times. Prior to the dedication, “Black Rage” circulated widely on YouTube and in live performances. The circulation of Hill’s song should be read alongside the disappearance and reappearance of blackness as a legible and coherent racial category in the age of Obama (2008–16): circulation not only functions to create visible and invisible collectives, it also operates as a temporal configuration.

The inauguration of President Barack Obama helped affirm theories that blackness had lost its salience as an indicator of a common history and experience. Charles Johnson’s 2008 essay “The End of the Black American Narrative” evidences the relationship between Obama’s presidency and the inauguration of a new racial epoch.

No matter which angle we use to view black people in America today, we find them to be a complex and multifaceted people who defy easy categorization. We challenge, culturally and politically, an old group narrative that fails at the beginning of this new century to capture even a fraction of our rich diversity and heterogeneity. . . . It simply is no longer the case that the essence of black American life is racial victimization and disenfranchisement, a curse and a condemnation, a destiny based on color in which the meaning of one’s life is thinghood, created even before one is born. This is not something we can assume.<sup>31</sup>

Although calls to rethink identity politics emerged during the twentieth century, Obama’s inauguration functioned as a tipping point, shifting murmurs into exclamations. For many, his election served as irrefutable evidence of the end of systemic and blatant racism. But the evidence of racial equality that Obama’s election purported to show demonstrated its weakness in 2012 with the death of unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin and continues to erode with each death of an unarmed black person at the hands of a police officer or vigilante. Although prosecutors and pundits have attempted to rationalize the deaths of Martin and Brown, the explicit ways blackness functioned in their deaths cannot be denied.<sup>32</sup>

Hill’s song has not changed significantly since its early performances, just as the primary indicators of black financial life and well-being (employment rates and wealth) have not shifted in any substantial way.<sup>33</sup> The visibility of the social relationships the song describes and the attendant feelings (internally and externally) that structure black political subjectivity have shifted. Hill’s song evidences an emergent social sphere that must, unfortunately, loop around again and again like the chorus of a song in response to implicit and explicit manifestations of racism. In Williams’s Marxist formulation, his “structure of feeling,” time functions linearly. In Hill’s rendering, time has a circular shape. The political present of Hill’s song recurs, unlike Williams’s emergent social sphere, which situates the

awakening of social positions as a part of a larger teleology. Hill's description of the song as an "old sketch" underscores how the song anticipates events such as the killing of unarmed teenager Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson by suggesting the recurrence of both the song and the dimension it communicates. In 2012, Hill's song tapped into a recurrent structure of feeling and marked recurrence by recovering a well-known tune and depicting a well-known scenario of black death at the hands of violent vigilantes. In the age of Obama, racism masquerades as individual or class-based modes of oppression that work to subjugate, slowly and deliberately, what Baraka would call blues people. In the context of a purportedly color-blind society, it is dangerous to see the 2014 dedication of the song as a singular iteration.

Hill's song offers a strategy for making use of the rage that emerges from antiblack racism. The song participates in constructing blackness as rage and intervenes in its circulation through that structure of recurring feeling. "Black Rage" produces an orientation to black life that calls attention to the constitution of black "things" in the crucible of capitalism. In addition, it departs from a long-standing tradition among black reformers of predicating value on perfection or respectability. The singer releases recordings of the song via her website and does not make it available for download and sale, refusing the commodification of the song. Just as the song enters an alternative economy of cultural production, its lyrics explain how the singer moves from fear to the empowering and clarifying position of what she calls rage. The song explicates how black people have been thingified. To resist the process of finding black things comforting, Hill's song calls for a deep critique of capitalism. It offers modes of interrelation and registers of feeling as a mechanism for combating the transformation of black lives into fungible matter.<sup>34</sup> The circulation and distribution of the song models a form of black political subjectivity based on daily and routine responses to the implicit forms of racism that underpin the most egregious forms of antiblack violence.

As Daphne Brooks and Salamishah Tillet have noted, Hill's song adds to the tradition of black women's protest singing. As Tillet has observed, Hill's song recalls Nina Simone's well-known protest ballad "Mississippi Goddam," which Simone penned in response to the murder of Medgar Evers in Mississippi on 12 June 1963 and the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, on 15 September 1963. Hill's song juxtaposes upbeat music with lyrics that describe antiblack violence in order to evoke the feeling of rage. Brooks situates the 2012 performance of Hill's song in Houston, Texas, in the context of twenty-first-century protests against the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Oscar Grant.<sup>35</sup> The song and its circulation and reception call attention to a historical dynamic that generates both the concealment and the revelation of black suffering. The expression of black anger and rage that emerges as listeners hear the song sustains those who experience implicit forms of state-authorized antiblack violence.

The coupling of the affect (fear) and emotion (rage) that occurs when audiences hear Hill's song informs individuals' attachments to blackness and contextualizes the singer's relationship to the social sphere in which the violence takes place. Rage and fear seem like reasonable responses to the physical violence Hill depicts in "Black Rage." Instead of making visible violent systems of



oppression, black rage certifies “one’s status as an identity-in-difference,” which, to borrow language from Muñoz’s “Feeling Brown,” requires the individual

to know that one falls off majoritarian maps of the public sphere, that one is exiled from paradigms of communicative reason and a larger culture of consent. This exile is more like a displacement, the origin of which is a historically specific and culturally situated bias that blocks ... [the brown] citizen-subject’s trajectory to “official” citizenship-subject political ontology.<sup>36</sup>

As Muñoz makes clear, the path to citizen-subject requires the participant to approximate normative structures of feeling.

### FEELING BLACK COLLECTIVITY

In the play *Dutchman*, Baraka theorizes black rage as an expression of a recurring structure of feeling. His depiction of rage informs interpretations of aesthetic production and political formations that emerge in a color-blind context because it engages with implicit forms of racism and artists’ responses to them. I do not see aesthetic practice as distinctive from political practice; I understand artistic performance as participating in cultivating political subjectivity and as a part of political practice.

Baraka and Lorde make strange bedfellows. The black women writers’ renaissance of the late twentieth century that formed the context for Lorde’s work articulated a clear critique of the gender hierarchies and heteronormativity that characterize the 1960s nationalisms that frame *Dutchman*. However, pairing Baraka’s and Lorde’s theories of rage and anger makes possible more than it forecloses. In moving from Baraka to Lorde, I offer a textual history of the essentialist–constructionalist debate as it emerged in two central black studies texts and situate them as context for the widespread understanding in the late twentieth century of blackness as a performance and for the affective turn in ethnic studies. Baraka and Lorde present versions of black rage that serve as a prehistory for Hill’s song and Parks’s play.

It is dangerous to look at just one speech in Baraka’s well-known play *Dutchman*. As Nita N. Kumar notes, the structure of the play is dialogic. Taking into account Kumar’s analysis, which claims that the speech I have in mind must be read within the context of the entire play, I contend that the speech bears the marks of its context because, as the culmination of action in the play, it functions as a response. In addition, the speech may be understood to articulate a theory of social relation that offers an answer to a central question of Baraka’s work: How does he define blackness? The answer to the question changed throughout his long career, but even in the Black Arts movement period within which *Dutchman* falls, scholars have contested what Baraka meant by blackness.<sup>37</sup>

Baraka’s play features two central characters: Clay, “a twenty-year-old Negro,” and Lula, “a thirty-year-old white woman.”<sup>38</sup> The play depicts the two characters meeting on a New York City subway car and entering a conversation laced with sexual innuendo. The interaction turns from flirtation to antagonism



when Lula begins to insult Clay. Although the speech functions as a part of theatrical dialogue, it also theorizes a structure of feeling that majoritarian groups often find imperceptible. Lula taunts, teases, and antagonizes Clay, calling him an “Uncle Tom. Thomas Woolly-head,” and “black son of a bitch.” She finally asserts, “You’re afraid of white people. And your father was. Uncle Tom Big Lip!” After a physical altercation, Clay charges, “I’m not telling you again, Tallulah Bankhead! Luxury. In your face and your fingers. You telling me what I ought to do. [*Sudden scream frightening the whole coach*] Well, don’t! Don’t you tell me anything! If I’m a middle-class fake white man . . . let me be. And let me be in the way I want. [*Through his teeth*].”<sup>39</sup> Marking the circumscription of his ability to act as a black man and his antagonist Lula’s relative freedom to assume various social positions, Clay uses the name of liberal actor and talk-show host Tallulah Bankhead Clay to refer to Lula. He explains that his willingness to participate in “An act. Lies. Device”<sup>40</sup> makes possible not only her protection, but also, more important, his safety. Clay explains that he is able to appear before her as a figure only through his act of deceit. He must approximate a certain kind of citizenship even to appear on normative mappings of subjectivity, but his performance always falls short. His act functions both as a volition and as subterfuge.

Clay’s final speech, which he makes in response to Lula’s attempts to define him as a stereotypically black middle-class man, draws attention to how normative affective dynamics conceal black rage. He explains that the insistence on seeing and hearing blackness in relationship to white normativity creates a glaring blind spot. Clay charges, “They say, ‘I love Bessie Smith.’ And don’t even understand that Bessie Smith is saying, ‘Kiss my ass, kiss my black unruly ass.’ Before love, suffering, desire, anything you can explain, she’s saying, and very plainly, ‘Kiss my black ass.’ And if you don’t know that, it’s you that’s doing the kissing.”<sup>41</sup> Clay’s interpretation demonstrates how affective dynamics of fear work to secure whiteness and obscure blackness. Fear produces silence and facilitates misunderstanding because, as Clay explains, it suppresses the genuine outrage over racial violence. Similar to the way Hill’s song occupies Rodgers and Hammerstein’s melody, Clay suggests that Smith’s music operates in two registers: the first communicates outrage about racism, the second expresses the vicissitudes of black life. The possibility of the second register communicating a wholly intraracial dynamic shields the singer from retaliation. But Clay makes a more important point, explaining that Smith does not have to conceal her rage because racism is illegible in a context that disallows black suffering and fails to theorize black affect. Both Hill’s song and the sonic tradition Clay references serve two purposes: (1) the music registers a minoritarian feeling that falls off of majoritarian maps but animates and sustains collectives; and (2) it models an aesthetic practice that responds to black suffering as suffering, creating a cultural history that does not disappear because it is ignored. The music of Smith and Hill remains, waiting for those with ears to listen.

Reviews in the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, and the *New York Review of Books* of the 1964 production of *Dutchman* at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York communicate the inability of white observers to understand black

rage. In Howard Taubman's review for the *New York Times*, he marvels at how shocking the play is and concludes, "If this is the way the Negroes really feel about the white world around them, there's more rancor buried in the breasts of colored conformists than anyone can imagine."<sup>42</sup> Striking a similar note of incredulity, Edith Oliver's review for the *New Yorker* praises most of the play but finds the final "outburst of fury" "hollow."<sup>43</sup> Oliver's critique seems based on the premise that a character such as Clay could not harbor the feelings of rage he expresses in the final speech. Philip Roth articulated a similar concern with more explicit language in a lengthy review essay that pairs *Dutchman* with James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964). Roth strings together a set of causal relationships that reinforce racial essentialism. He asserts that Clay "is really not Negro enough for us to be told that it is for his being a Negro that he is murdered" and that if Clay is deficient in authentic Negrohood, his death is meaningless. Moreover, Roth asserts, "he does not behave with Lula like a man who is a poet or a murderer," and thus his fury is unbelievable. Roth's review reinforces the central point of Clay's speech: black rage cannot appear as a legible structure of feeling for a "shy, somewhat embarrassed"<sup>44</sup> figure or a "Negro who wears a three-button suit and is reserved and well-spoken"<sup>45</sup> even though, as Roth concedes, "the predicament of the Negro in this country . . . is awful."<sup>46</sup> In Roth's estimation, in order for Clay's demise to offer insight about blackness, he must behave in ways that openly acknowledges the precarity of black life. But Roth does not account for how Clay's speech functions as a rupture that externalizes an internal monologue that circulates on lower frequencies and through discrete gestures: the exchange of a knowing look, a subtle shake of the head, or a determined crossing of the arms. Roth's charged response to the character of Clay supports an understanding of black rage as unimaginable in normative contexts.

The contexts that welcome the sound of Smith's and Parker's music refuse Baraka's "ranting" protagonist. Clay's references to Bessie Smith and Charlie Parker appear to align the speech with Baraka's valuable work in *Blues People* (1963), in which he charts the history of African American music to explain how the tradition articulates black people's history in America. Kimberly W. Benston explains, "Baraka's music criticism . . . seeks to demonstrate that black music 'is essentially the expression of an attitude, or a collection of attitudes, about the world.' . . . The 'attitude' (or approach to reality) that lies at the root of black music imbues this art form with a specific 'social and cultural intent.'"<sup>47</sup> In many ways, Clay's speech in *Dutchman* marks the multivalent quality of the blues. But instead of focusing on the blues as an expression of "near-tragic, near-comic lyricism," as Ralph Ellison defines it, Clay's speech creates room to understand the rage that results from racism as an emotion that challenges and disrupts normative racial scripts.<sup>48</sup> It is so dangerous that its articulation in Smith's music requires a misreading so that whites can maintain the illusion that black men either poorly approximate white middle-class respectability or are hypersexual animals.

Clay's final speech reveals that concealment both protects normative whiteness and insulates black people from violence. In *Dutchman*, Clay tells Lula that she cannot see his "pumping black heart."<sup>49</sup> The alignment of Clay's race with an organ ostensibly presents an essentialist notion of race. Clay's speech, however, is

the culmination of a dialogue and takes place in a New York City subway car. As the final word, the speech functions as a revelation about blackness that can only emerge underground. Riffing on Ralph Ellison's depiction in *Invisible Man* (1952) of the revelatory power of the underground, the location of Clay's speech amplifies the fugitiveness of his remarks. In the speech, Clay ties blackness to the musical performance of Smith and Parker, suggesting that blackness emerges through embodied acts—performance. His speech allows for different forms of blackness that range from a social position (the middle-class blackness Lula projects onto him) to a series of repeated acts (the musical virtuosity of Charlie Parker) to stereotypes of hypersexuality. Given the multiple ways blackness operates, *Dutchman* does not privilege an essentialist notion of race but instead provides an example of its construction. I agree with Benston's interpretation of blackness in the speech as "inextricable from the paradoxes of its articulation" and that it "finally transcends representation" because it situates blackness as something being worked toward rather than something that can be achieved through a singular performance of articulation.<sup>50</sup> Clay's speech demonstrates the sociality of racialization and how blackness emerges by way of individual actions that occur in a social context that connects the individual, either willingly or unwillingly, to a collective.

Clay pays for his objection to Lula's stereotypical misnaming with his life, but attaching the rage to Clay's corpse would misread the ways that emotion circulates and exceeds "the wounded subject" to emerge "as a civic tool."<sup>51</sup> Brooks's description of young black masculinity in "Open Channels" explains how Clay functions as a threat in *Dutchman*. She says, "I am interested in the ways that these protests [around the Grant and Martin cases] absorb, re-stage and magnify the mythical threat attached to young black manhood scripted by the State as social threat, as physical threat, as potently and perpetually always on the verge of disrupting order and therefore always holding out the promise of doing harm."<sup>52</sup> Her comment, which refers to a social state that produces groups of protestors, also offers a way to read Clay's vocal dissent in the play. Black rage mitigates fear in Hill's song and in Clay's speech. Clay's articulation of rage "shapes the surfaces of bodies and worlds" in an effort to refute Lula's assumption that middle-class white masculinity is the norm Clay should aspire to achieve.<sup>53</sup>

#### ANGER A RESPONSE TO RACISM

Lorde's "The Uses of Anger" explains how the expression of anger shapes a nonnormative collectivity's response to antiblack violence. The essay originated as a speech given at the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) conference in 1981. The association, established in 1977, "has as one of its primary objectives promoting and supporting the production and dissemination of knowledge about women and gender through teaching, learning, research and service in academic and other settings."<sup>54</sup> In 1981, the pool of faculty from which the NWSA drew its membership was overwhelmingly white and male. According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), in the periods 1976–1977, 1978–1979 and 1980–1981, less than 25 percent of full-time college and

university faculty were women.<sup>55</sup> From 1976 to 2009, the percentage of full-time women faculty with tenure remained relatively steady, fluctuating from 38.4 percent in 1976 to 34.6 percent in 2009.<sup>56</sup> In 1981, according to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, approximately one thousand black people earned doctorates.<sup>57</sup> In 1986, according to an article in the *New York Times*, researchers believed that blacks constituted “only about 1 percent of all faculty at predominantly white colleges.”<sup>58</sup> In the halls of the academy and the NWSA’s conference, normative meant white and male.

Lorde’s speech offers anecdotal evidence of the working conditions the statistical whiteness of universities and their organizations produce. In “Uses of Anger,” she cites a list of practices that can be described as *microaggressions*—a term psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce coined in 1970 to describe routine insults and interactions that result from expressions of racial bias minor enough to appear benign if abstracted as singular iterations but persistent enough to foster racial hierarchies in the aggregate.<sup>59</sup> The relatively minor nature of the indignities makes it possible for white people to call into question the operation of race as the discriminatory factor and the salience of blackness as a coherent category. Microaggressions amount to daily experiences of racism. In the essay, Lorde recalls attending “an international cultural gathering of women, [where] a well-known white american woman poet interrupts the reading of the work of women of Color to read her own poem, and then dashes off to an ‘important panel.’”<sup>60</sup> The instance could be dismissed as having nothing to do with race; instead, it could be read as a reflection of the speaker’s lack of social grace. This is the power of microaggressions, which are slight enough to make the individual on the receiving end question if he or she is being too sensitive or imagining a dynamic that does not exist and yet are persistent enough to install normative affective dynamics. Lorde asserts, “My response to racism is anger.”<sup>61</sup> Instead of ignoring persistent and perpetual indignities, affronts, and assaults, Lorde responds to racism in a purportedly color-blind context. In the new millennium, such discrimination often emerges through feelings rather than physical interactions.

Lorde’s essay explicates how a structure of feeling serves to confront and counteract implicit forms of antiblack violence. This response does not deny the real physical violence of racism but calls attention to how microaggressions make explicit expressions of racism possible. She explains:

My anger is a response to racist attitudes and to the actions and presumptions that arise out of those attitudes. If your dealings with other women reflect those attitudes, then my anger and your attendant fears are spotlights that can be used for growth in the same way I have used learning to express anger for my growth.<sup>62</sup>

Lorde’s exposition offers insight into feelings that she assumes she does not share with her audience. The pronouns that direct the sets of feelings—“my anger” and “your attendant fears”—suggest that the work Lorde hopes to accomplish must occur through an interracial alliance. She also encourages members of her audience, which included a readership when the speech was published in her

collection of essays *Sister Outsider* (1984), to resist defining anger as a dangerous and destructive feeling.

The illegibility of black suffering to white observers predetermines how white audiences perceive black people's expression of anger. Lorde writes, "I have lived with that anger, ignoring it, feeding upon it, learning to use it before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight."<sup>63</sup> Although much has been written about Lorde's work as a lesbian black woman writer, scholars have offered little examination of this essay.

D. Soyini Madison suggests that expressions of anger give voice to a collective feeling and place black people in harm's way. Expressions of anger function as a rationale for antiblack violence, such as whites' descriptions of the "aggressiveness" of Michael Brown or the "belligerence" of Sandra Bland.<sup>64</sup> But Hill and Lorde contend that buying into the notion that black rage and anger is self-destructive curtails the important work such feeling can do to clarify how one will respond to the deleterious force of racism. Attending to the specific ways Lorde theorizes anger as a feeling that undercuts the affective dynamic of fear, Ahmed argues that "Uses of Anger" is oriented toward the future and the possibilities that turning away from anger foreclose.<sup>65</sup>

Lorde argues that the negative impact of not making use of anger exceeds the dangers of deploying it. "My fear of anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also."<sup>66</sup> As Hill does in her song, Lorde situates the expression of anger as a remedy for fear. She explains that the deadly cost of anger is *not* making use of it. In Lorde's formulation, anger does not stand in opposition to happiness but instead facilitates it by forging new political possibilities and modes of belonging. Lorde's command to make use of anger aligns with bell hooks's warning in *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* that accepting implicit forms of racism as "conditions of our life" "is a form of complicity."<sup>67</sup> hooks advocates persistent resistance to subtle indignities in the hope that such pressure will compel individuals to rethink racist behavior.

Lorde's essay on the uses of anger makes legible a structure of feeling that may unite individuals in the work of responding to racism. The support that connection produces works not only in the period of Lorde's speech-turned-essay but also across the times of Baraka's play and Hill's song. She explains: "[A]nger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we may have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies."<sup>68</sup> The recurrence of the structure of feeling produces intergenerational allies that apprehend the specificity and familiarity of their social context. Instead of acquiescing to interpretations of anger as a singularly destructive force, Lorde argues that anger may work to fortify individuals by drawing them into a recurring structure of feeling. She insists that "Hatred is the fury of those who do not share our goals, and its object is death and destruction. Anger is a grief of distortions between peers, and its object is change."<sup>69</sup> Lorde's essay marks a turning point in the black subject's relationship to anger because, unlike Baraka's description, which ends with Clay's death, Lorde suggests that the regulatory force of fear must not prevent

the expression of anger because expressing anger can lead to individual and collective change.

#### BRIDGING BLACK SOCIALITY

In this essay, I have emphasized how implicit forms of racism rely on the affective dynamic of fear and the social rhetoric of color blindness. Hill's song, Clay's speech, Lorde's essay, and, as I will show, Parks's play, register how post-structuralism renders race invisible, lacking in materiality, a construction. The lack of visibility places the race theorist in a quagmire regarding causality and eerily aligns her with Lula's position in *Dutchman*. In the play, Clay tells Lula, "You don't know anything except what's there for you to see. An act. Lies. Device."<sup>70</sup> Parks, who understands how race functions as a device, produces work that uses practice as a poststructural form of making meaning in order to undercut normative affective and social dynamics.<sup>71</sup> Given the constructedness, invention, and manufacturing of race in the theatre, which often trades in visual devices, Parks offers her audience another way of seeing blackness that does not reinscribe domination. Her theatre is no more true than "what's there for" Lula to see, but in its production it unsettles the veracity of racial stereotypes.

For twelve months, from 13 November 2002 to 12 November 2003, Parks followed the recommendation of many prolific writers: write every day. Parks did more than that; she wrote a play every day for a year. The effort resulted in her collection *365 Days/365 Plays*. Writing a play a day for a year and then having the plays staged daily around the country on their respective anniversaries introduced one of Parks's practices of theatre making to the world.<sup>72</sup> The daily release of her plays disrupted theatre production conventions, just as the release of "Black Rage" challenged the circulation of the song as a commodity. The production of the plays created a network of theatres that staged five thousand premieres.<sup>73</sup> Her practice matters to my discussion of rage and anger as an expression of a structure of feeling because it participates in the production of race on the minor scale. The daily and routine construction of race on the minor scale offers opportunities to contextualize blackness in moments of catastrophe. The death of a black person often serves as the most cogent and compelling example of antiblack violence. But as the 2015 federal investigation of the Ferguson, Missouri, police department illustrates, the persistent, routine, and ostensibly nonviolent dismissal of black citizens' rights and liberties created an infrastructure for the shooting of Brown.<sup>74</sup> Parks's practice offers a strategy for confronting the slow death that the daily erosion of liberties enacts. Her daily practice of creation counterbalances the slow attrition of national belonging that racism produces for black subjects.

Parks used her dramatic practice of writing short, concise plays to communicate in *The Bridge* that although we may understand the death of a black youth at the hands of a police officer or the individual left to die in the wake of Hurricane Katrina as extreme events, they actually express the acceleration of an unsaid national norm that alienates black people from civic belonging.<sup>75</sup> Parks's play appears in the midst of the essay "New Black Math," which she wrote in response to *Theatre Journal* editor Harry J. Elam Jr.'s question, "What is a black play?"

*The Bridge* supports the theme of the essay that a black play has no boundaries. Parks seems to ascribe such capaciousness to the term “black” that it becomes useless. However, Parks’s practice of indirection—in which she suggests that blackness functions as a historical category that does not resonate with contemporary experiences of race, and then demonstrates its ongoing potency as both an expression of a particular history of possibility and suffering, life and death—emerges in the use of a play as one of her primary pieces of evidence. Parks began the essay by recalling her attempt a decade earlier to answer the same question. She concluded that “the definition [of a black play] is housed in the reality of two things that occurred recently and almost simultaneously: 26 August 05, playwright and scholar poet-king August Wilson announces he is dying of cancer, and hurricane Katrina devastates the Gulf Coast. It feels like judgment day.”<sup>76</sup> Parks’s comment situated “the black play” in the context of tragedies for the nation and its theatre. Two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson transformed American theatre, making it habitable for playwrights of color. Although other playwrights of color preceded Wilson on the Great White Way, his proliferation of a ten-play cycle, one for each decade of the twentieth century, all produced on Broadway, demonstrated the long-term existence of an audience for a black playwright. Wilson’s announcement of his imminent death foreshadowed a devastating loss for American theatre because he uniquely personified the odd coupling of blackness and value that Parks implicitly suggests in aligning his death with the mass display of blackness as nonvalue in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.<sup>77</sup> The essay moves from the space Wilson’s career provides for the black playwright to the day of judgment that poor people and people of color along the Gulf Coast experienced as they learned that they were not valuable enough to warrant an immediate response to Katrina from their government.

Parks’s play acknowledges how the attribution of value emerges from within communal practices and as a response to them. As a way of illustrating the apparent nonvalue that the United States ascribes to black people and the inherent value of characteristic modes of black expression, Parks’s play communicates an emergent structure of feeling with a familiar form of black cultural expression: signifying. The script begins with Parks’s assertion that “a black play is often characterized by healthy doses of word play such as ‘snaps’ and ‘yo Mamma’ jokes. A black play takes you to the bridge.” This is followed by:

*THE BRIDGE. A BLACK PLAY BY SUZAN-LORI PARKS*

*Characters: MOMMA, an older woman, and YO, her husband.*

*Setting: They sit atop their house which is under 20 feet of water. Helicopters from the National Guard in the near distance are about to perform a heroic rescue of our characters, but first:*

- YO: We just made the last payment on this house, too.  
MOMMA: Yo, sometimes it be’s that way sometimes.  
YO: Everything we own is washed away.  
MOMMA: Bank owned the house, then us.  
YO: Now the flood owns everything, looks like.



MOMMA: You know it, Yo.

YO

MOMMA

(rest)

YO: How can you tell a nigger thats crazy from a nigger that aint crazy?

MOMMA: I don't know. How *can* you tell a nigger that's crazy from a nigger that aint crazy?

YO: The crazy nigger is the nigger that aint crazy.

*Curtain*<sup>78</sup>

The bridge functions as both a geographical and musical location. In music, the bridge shifts the mood. When James Brown calls for his band to “take me to the bridge,” he is asking for an intensification of tempo and an elaboration of the instrumentality. But the bridge may also function to slow things down, providing relief to an upbeat song. The bridge usually occurs near the end of a song that follows the structure of intro, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, chorus, outro. The bridge shifts the melody of the song and consists of new chords. Because it is usually eight bars, it is also known as “the middle eight.” The bridge breaks up the status quo and calls for a new feeling to emerge. It functions below or above but never alongside the overall groove of the song. So when Parks says “A black play takes you to the bridge,” she is describing a feeling that distinguishes a black play from a play in general. At the same time, Parks sets her play in a liminal space—atop a roof—that recalls the striking images from Hurricane Katrina of the rescue of the individuals stranded along the Danziger Bridge. A bridge serves as a suspension, as in music, and a connection. It mediates a gap. The bridge’s ability to create mediation helps sustain the black figure from the contortionist logic that situates blackness as the cause of both racism and antiblack violence.

The feeling of Parks’s play, similar to the tone of much of her work, is dark humor. It may seem odd to conclude an essay on blackness as a performed dynamic enlivened through structures of feeling anger and rage with a comedic piece. Nevertheless, as Glenda R. Carpio’s study *Laughing Fit to Kill* demonstrates, black artists often communicate anger through humor in order to tap into the feeling’s transformative quality.<sup>79</sup> The names Parks gives the characters, “Yo” and “Momma,” show how the quotidian aesthetic practices of signifying may clarify articulations of black being in the face of death and devastation. Parks immediately establishes the potential existential crisis of black financial precarity with Yo’s statement that he and Momma have “just made the last payment on” the house and Momma’s seemingly nonchalant response that “it be’s that way sometimes.” Momma expresses the danger, as a black person, of investing in the dream of homeownership through the slip of an ambiguous pronoun that produces subject and object confusion. She explains, “Bank owned the house, then us.” The line renders ambiguous whether Momma is saying that the bank once owned the house she and Yo just finished paying for, or that the bank owned *them*, characters who are objectified through the process of paying willingly into a system that

brings no returns. It could be assumed that participating in such logic amounts to insanity, even though black people's inability or unwillingness to achieve or participate in the symbolic hallmarks of citizenship such as homeownership and marriage often is used as evidence of pathology. The play articulates the converse proposition: "The crazy nigger is the nigger that aint crazy."<sup>80</sup>

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Hill's "Black Rage" and Parks's *The Bridge* evidence a structure of feeling that responds to implicit expressions of racism. Drawing from a recurring history of racialized violence and articulations of black political subjectivity such as those found in Clay's speech in Baraka's *Dutchman* and Lorde's essay, Hill and Parks present the clarifying power of anger in order to foreground quotidian racial assaults that serve as a primary mechanism for securing racial hierarchies. Invisible forms of racism slowly eat away at black subjects—especially for "the crazy nigger . . . that aint crazy."

## ENDNOTES

1. "Lauryn Hill Black Rage Live Atlanta 2014 & 2012—GASTATE9 EXCLUSIVE," YouTube video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7Eih8SfAk0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7Eih8SfAk0); "Black Rage by Lauryn Hill Live from The Electric Factory 11/7/12," Philadelphia, 2012, YouTube video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2grfx-yXTE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2grfx-yXTE); "Black Rage by Lauryn Hill DAR Constitution Hall, Washington DC 11/4/12," YouTube video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPB-ZFdYMDs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPB-ZFdYMDs); "Lauryn Hill—Black Rage (Wiltern Theater Nove[mber] 30th)," Los Angeles, 2012, YouTube video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKVzGcGBRVg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKVzGcGBRVg); "Lauryn Hill—Black Rage Acapella [*sic*] (Wiltern Theater November 30th)," Los Angeles, 2012, YouTube video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZBm1mOJqY8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZBm1mOJqY8); "Lauren Hill—Black Rage," Rio de Janeiro, 23 November 2012, YouTube video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YkvPrEglSU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YkvPrEglSU); "Lauryn Hill—Black Rage (Live) @ Chicago Congress Theater," 2012, YouTube video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-ExjuGQNj8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-ExjuGQNj8); "Lauryn Hill Performs Black Rage in Denver," 2013, YouTube video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU3RwhzhRak](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU3RwhzhRak); "Ms. Lauryn Hill—Black Rage 2014," Valencia, Spain, YouTube video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_0M4egd4rs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0M4egd4rs); "Black Rage Lauryn Hill ATX," Austin, TX, n.d., YouTube video [www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz5nh1LuaMM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hz5nh1LuaMM); all accessed 17 and 18 February 2016.

2. "Black Rage by Lauryn Hill Live from The Electric Factory 11/7/12."

3. *Ibid.*

4. "Black Rage (Sketch)," Ms. Lauryn Hill, 20 August 2014, <http://mslaurynhill.com/post/95329923112/black-rage-sketch>, accessed 18 February 2016.

5. Kory Grow, "Lauryn Hill Dedicates 'Black Rage' Song to Ferguson," *Rolling Stone*, 21 August 2014, [www.rollingstone.com/music/news/lauryn-hill-black-rage-new-song-ferguson-20140821](http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/lauryn-hill-black-rage-new-song-ferguson-20140821) (whence the quotation); Lisa Respers France, "Lauryn Hill Releases Song in Support of Ferguson," *CNN*, 22 August 2014, [www.cnn.com/2014/08/22/showbiz/celebrity-news-gossip/lauryn-hill-song-ferguson-michael-brown/](http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/22/showbiz/celebrity-news-gossip/lauryn-hill-song-ferguson-michael-brown/); Cate Matthews, "Lauryn Hill Releases 'Black Rage' Recording in Light of Events in Ferguson," *Huffington Post*, 25 August 2014, [www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/25/lauryn-hill-black-rage-ferguson\\_n\\_5709831.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/25/lauryn-hill-black-rage-ferguson_n_5709831.html); Samantha Grossman, "Lauryn Hill Dedicates Her Song 'Black Rage' to Ferguson: Listen," *Time*, 21 August 2014, <http://time.com/3154587/ferguson-lauryn-hill-black-rage/>; all accessed 24 March 2015.

6. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

7. *Ibid.*, 131.

8. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York:

Columbia University Press, 1996); Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2003); E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); and Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

9. In a conversation with MSNBC correspondent Joy Reid on 17 February 2016 at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York, Michael Eric Dyson argued that the language of postrace actually amounts to a prohibition against engaging with an ongoing animus toward blackness. He asserted that postrace functions as a code for postblack. See “Between the Lines: Michael Eric Dyson,” Livestream, accessed 18 February 2016, <http://livestream.com/schomburgcenter/events/4721660>, at 9:39–56.

10. In *The Problem of the Color[blind]: Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), Brandi Wilkins Catanese explores how color blindness emerged as a response to the late-twentieth-century culture wars. She argues that “for reasons both well intentioned and sinister, a significant number of Americans believe that a total ignorance of race is the obvious, and only, solution to the problems that an acute attention to race has brought our society” (6).

11. Although Hill’s song gained national attention through her dedication, recordings of the song from 2012 to 2014 circulate on the Internet, illustrating how a performed dynamic constitutes blackness by evoking a feeling. As Peggy Phelan has argued persuasively, ephemerality and disappearance distinguish performance as a mode of cultural production. See *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

12. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 4.

13. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, “My Favorite Things,” 1959; ASCAP Work ID: 430114253.

14. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 7.

15. Several competing schools of affect theory debate whether affect precedes cognition. I agree with the general consensus in affect studies that affect precedes cognition and functions as its own system. Elin Diamond draws attention to how feminists deploy affect theory, referencing Anu Koivunen and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. She also analyzes the relationship between affect theory and performance theory in the work of Bertolt Brecht, suggesting that his theory of the disruptive force of *gestus* aligns with the affective dynamics that shift individuals into new social positions. While both of Diamond’s theoretical genealogies prove useful to her project, I am interested in examining social relations that emerge in response to the affective dynamic of fear within the context of racism and color blindness. Therefore, my work draws from the theories of Sara Ahmed, Raymond Williams, José Esteban Muñoz, Amiri Baraka, and Audre Lorde, which foreground feeling and emotion rather than affect. In Ahmed’s theory, emotions accrue meaning based on how they operate and do not reinscribe hierarchies of cognition over feeling or affirm gender stereotypes. See Diamond, “Deb Margolin, Robbie McCauley, Peggy Shaw: Affect and Performance,” in *Contemporary Women Playwrights: Into the 21st Century*, ed. Penny Farfan and Lesley Ferris (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 258–74, at 260.

16. Williams, 132.

17. See Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage, 1999); Clyde Woods, “‘Sittin’ on Top of the World’: The Challenge of Blues and Hip Hop Geography,” in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, ed. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (Toronto: Between the Lines, and Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), 46–81. See also Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *In a Shade of Blue: Pragmatism and the Politics of Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

18. Frank B. Wilderson III, “Grammar & Ghosts: The Performative Limits of African Freedom,” *Theatre Survey* 50.1 (2009): 119–25, at 119.

19. Ibid.

20. José Esteban Muñoz clearly describes the affective turn in theories of identity in “Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho’s *The Sweetest Hangover (and Other STDs)*,” *Theatre*

*Journal* 52.1 (2000): 67–79. Muñoz’s groundbreaking essay lays the foundation for establishing a mode of minoritarian collectivity that reaches beyond identity politics that understand collectivity as based on histories of affiliation rooted in nationalism and/or biological models of kinship. Muñoz focuses primarily on the cultivation of *latinidad* but makes clear that his theory may apply to “other minoritarian” groups. As a basis for the theory, Muñoz uses the term “an ‘identity-in-difference,’” which he borrows from Chicana feminist Norma Alarcón’s formulation. He explains, “In this schematic an identity-in-difference is one that understands the structuring role of difference as the underlying concept in a group’s mapping of collective identity” (67). While Muñoz points out that the notion of being in difference does not necessarily result in the obfuscation of the Other, he emphasizes that “normativity is accessed in the majoritarian public sphere through the affective performance of ethnic and racial normativity. This performance of whiteness primarily transpires on an affective register” (68). Muñoz argues that normativity emerges through performance that resonates at an affective level.

21. On 10 July 2015, Officer Brian Encinia stopped Sandra Bland for failure to signal a lane change. Dashcam video (see link below) from Encinia’s police car captured part of the exchange between Encinia and Bland, which includes her questioning the reason for the stop and Encinia forcing her from her car with a Taser and arresting her. Three days later, Bland was found dead in a jail cell in Waller County, TX. Erik Ortiz, “Newly Released Dashcam Video Shows Sarah Bland Traffic Stop,” NBC News, 22 July 2015, [www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/newly-released-dashcam-video-shows-sandra-bland-arrest-n396191](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/newly-released-dashcam-video-shows-sandra-bland-arrest-n396191), accessed 2 May 2016.

22. I borrow the idea of occupation from Daphne Brooks’s query “What does it mean to ‘occupy’ a song?” See Brooks, “Open Channels: Some Thoughts on Blackness, the Body, and Sound(ing) Women in the (Summer) Time of Trayvon,” *Performance Research* 19.3 (2014): 62–68, at 66.

23. In an appearance on the MSNBC program *Melissa Harris-Perry*, Brooks used the word “citational” to describe the work of singer Janelle Monáe. See the video at CADCE [Mark Anthony Neal], “MHP Show: Beverly Bond, Daphne Brooks, and Joan Morgan Discuss Black Girls & Music,” *NewBlackMan* (in Exile), 4 November 2013, <http://newblackman.blogspot.com/2013/11/mhp-show-beverly-bond-daphne-brooks.html>, accessed 24 March 2015. She also discusses singer Amy Winehouse’s “musical citations” in Brooks, “‘This Voice Which Is Not One’: Amy Winehouse Sings the Ballad of Sonic Blue(s)face Culture,” *Women & Performance* 20.1 (2010): 37–60.

24. For the lyrics to Hill’s song, see “Black Rage (Sketch),” Ms Lauryn Hill, 20 August 2014, <http://mslaurynhill.com/post/95329923112/black-rage-sketch>, accessed 2 May 2016.

25. The original subtitle for Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was “The Man That Was a Thing.” See Robin Bernstein’s *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 17.

26. See Nina Sun Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 58–94; quote at 60.

27. The literature in black performance and literary studies that analyzes the distinctive qualities of black sound is rich. See, for example, Fred Moten’s theorization of “mo’nin’” in *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 196; and theories of the blues to which I refer above. This essay builds on theories of black sound to consider a tradition of black articulation in the service of creating a political collective organized through a shared feeling.

28. See Harvey Young’s description of how racial violence and prejudice configure blackness and produce what he calls “black habitus” in *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 20.

29. Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race,” *Social Text* 27.4 (2009): 67–94, at 69.

30. Wilderson, 123.

31. Charles Johnson, “The End of the Black American Narrative,” *American Scholar* 77.3 (Summer 2008): 32–42; posted 1 June 2008, <http://theamericanscholar.org/the-end-of-the-black-american-narrative/#.VxY62PkrL80>, accessed 19 April 2016. Charting a parallel line of development, Gloria Wong, Annie O. Derthick, E. J. R. David, Anne Saw, and Sumie Okazaki argue that “scholars

have agreed that blatant forms of racial discrimination have decreased in frequency and intensity since the 1960s. . . . However, a different and more subtle form of racial discrimination[,] known as racial microaggressions, continue[s] to exist and is experienced by various racial minority groups.” See “The What, the Why, and the How: A Review of Racial Microaggressions Research in Psychology,” *Race and Social Problems* 6.2 (2014): 181–200, at 181. Wong et al. thus make the case that the form of racial discrimination has changed instead of drawing the conclusion that race no longer functions as a coherent category of difference and therefore as a basis for discrimination.

32. In Darren Wilson’s grand jury testimony, he described the experience of grabbing Michael Brown, who was six foot five and weighed 289 pounds, as being “like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan.” Darren Wilson is six foot four and weighs approximately 210 pounds. Wilson also described Brown as looking like a demon. Wilson’s hyperbolic comparison of the difference between his size and Brown’s communicates a distortion based in racial stereotypes that often present black men as brutes with animal-like strength. “Case: State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson,” Transcript of Grand Jury Volume V, 16 September 2014, [www.documentcloud.org/documents/1371057-grand-jury-volume-5.html](http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1371057-grand-jury-volume-5.html), 212, 225.

33. For wealth disparities, see Rakesh Kochhar and Richard Fry, “Wealth Inequality Has Widened along Racial, Ethnic Lines since End of Great Recession,” Pew Research Center, 12 December 2014, [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/12/racial-wealth-gaps-great-recession/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/12/racial-wealth-gaps-great-recession/), accessed 24 May 2015. For a comparison of employment disparities, see U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity, 2013,” *BLS Reports*, Report 1050, August 2014, [www.bls.gov/opub/reports/race-and-ethnicity/archive/race\\_ethnicity\\_2013.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/race-and-ethnicity/archive/race_ethnicity_2013.pdf), accessed 2 May 2016; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey,” last modified 1 April 2016, [www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee\\_e16.htm](http://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm), accessed 2 May 2016.

34. See Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 7.

35. Brooks, “Open Channels,” 65.

36. Muñoz, 68.

37. See Kimberly W. Benston, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 1–7 and 10–12; and Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, “Introduction: From ‘Negro Expression’ to ‘Black Performance,’” in *Black Performance Theory*, ed. DeFrantz and Gonzalez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 1–15, at 4.

38. Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), *Dutchman*, in “*Dutchman*” and “*The Slave*” (New York: HarperCollins, 1964), 3.

39. *Ibid.*, 32–4.

40. *Ibid.*, 34.

41. *Ibid.*, 34–5.

42. Howard Taubman, “The Theater: ‘Dutchman,’” *New York Times*, 25 March 1964, 46.

43. Edith Oliver, “Over the Edge,” *New Yorker* 40.7 (4 April 1964), 78–9, at 78.

44. Philip Roth, “Channel X: Two Plays on the Race Conflict,” *New York Review of Books*, 28 May 1964, 10–13, [www.nybooks.com/articles/1964/05/28/channel-x-two-plays-on-the-race-conflict/](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1964/05/28/channel-x-two-plays-on-the-race-conflict/), accessed 10 March 2016.

45. Taubman, 46.

46. Roth.

47. Kimberly W. Benston, *Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 73.

48. Ralph Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues,” in Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage International, 1964), 78. I borrow the language of “scripts” from Bernstein’s “Dances with Things.”

49. Baraka, 34.

50. Benston, *Performing Blackness*, 11.

51. Brooks, “Open Channels,” 63.

52. *Ibid.*, 62.

53. Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22.2 (2004): 117–39, at 121.
54. "About," National Women's Studies Association, [www.nwsa.org/about](http://www.nwsa.org/about), accessed 11 March 2016.
55. John W. Curtis, "Persistent Inequity: Gender and Academic Employment," unpublished paper, fig. 2, [www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/08E023AB-E6D8-4DBD-99A0-24E5EB73A760/0/persistent\\_inequity.pdf](http://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/08E023AB-E6D8-4DBD-99A0-24E5EB73A760/0/persistent_inequity.pdf), accessed 11 March 2016.
56. *Ibid.*, fig. 5.
57. "News & Views: Doctoral Degree Awards to African Americans Reach Another All-Time High," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, n.d. (ca. 2006), [www.jbhe.com/news\\_views/50\\_black\\_doctoraldegrees.html](http://www.jbhe.com/news_views/50_black_doctoraldegrees.html), accessed 11 March 2016.
58. Brent Staples, "The Dwindling Black Presence on Campus," *New York Times*, 27 April 1986, [www.nytimes.com/1986/04/27/magazine/the-dwindling-black-presence-on-campus.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/1986/04/27/magazine/the-dwindling-black-presence-on-campus.html?pagewanted=all), accessed 11 March 2016.
59. Tori DeAngelis, "Unmasking 'Racial Micro Aggressions,'" *Monitor on Psychology* 40.2 (2009): 42–46, [www.apa.org/monitor/2009/02/microaggression.aspx](http://www.apa.org/monitor/2009/02/microaggression.aspx), accessed 24 March 2015.
60. Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 9.3 (1981): 7–10; reprinted in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 124–33, at 126.
61. *Ibid.*, 124.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*
64. D. Soyini Madison, "Crazy Patriotism and Angry (Post) Black Women," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6.3 (2009): 321–6.
65. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 175.
66. Lorde, 124.
67. bell hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 10–11.
68. Lorde, 127.
69. *Ibid.*, 129.
70. Baraka, 34.
71. Harry J. Elam Jr., "The Device of Race: An Introduction," in *African American Performance and Theater History*, ed. Harry J. Elam Jr. and David Krasner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–16.
72. The plays were staged from 1 November 2006 to 30 November 2007.
73. Campbell Robertson, "A Playwright's Cycle, with a New Work a Day for an Entire Year," *New York Times*, 10 November 2006, [www.nytimes.com/2006/11/10/theater/10park.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/10/theater/10park.html?_r=0), accessed 11 March 2016.
74. As Ta-Nehisi Coates notes, even if we are to believe the Justice Department's findings that Officer Darren Wilson "had not committed 'prosecutable violations under the applicable federal criminal civil rights statute 18 U.S.C. § 242,'" the Justice Department also found that institutionalized racism funds the Ferguson Police Department. He explains: "Ferguson's law enforcement practices are shaped by the City's focus on revenue rather than by public safety needs. . . . Ferguson's own data establish clear racial disparities that adversely impact African Americans." Coates concludes that law enforcement's "discriminatory intent" makes any policing of black people in Ferguson dubious because "white supremacy—as evidenced in Ferguson—is not ultimately interested in how responsible you are, nor how respectable you look. White supremacy is neither a misunderstanding nor a failure of manners. White supremacy is the machinery of Galactus which allows for the potential devouring of everything you own." Coates, "The Gangsters of Ferguson," *The Atlantic*, 5 March 2015, accessed 16 March 2015, [www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/03/The-Gangsters-Of-Ferguson/386893/](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/03/The-Gangsters-Of-Ferguson/386893/).
75. See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 5.
76. Suzan-Lori Parks, "New Black Math," *Theatre Journal* 57.4 (2005): 576–83, at 576.
77. For a trenchant examine of blackness of value, see Lindon Barrett, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

78. Parks, 579–80.

79. Carpio argues that humor functions in three ways: as a form of relief, as a way to establish superiority, and as a way to reestablish order and disrupt expectations. According to Carpio, Parks's play provides examples of all three types of humor and provides "a balm, a release of anger an aggression, a way of coping with the painful consequences of racism." Carpio, *Laughing Fit to Kill: Black Humor in the Fictions of Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5. *Laughing Fit to Kill* includes analysis of Parks's early work. For analysis of *The Bridge*, see Anthony Reed, *Freedom Time: The Poetics and Politics of Black Experimental Writing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 154–56.

80. For a consideration of the relationship between African American performance practice and madness, see La Marr Jurelle Bruce, "'The People inside My Head, Too': Madness, Black Womanhood, and the Radical Performance of Lauryn Hill," *African American Review* 45.3 (2012): 371–89.