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## Dreaming to *Get Out the "Sunken Place"*: Fantasy, Film, and the Inner-White- I(Eye)

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Dreaming to *Get Out the “Sunken Place”*: Fantasy, Film, and the Inner-White-I(Eye)

by

Jordan Battle

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Liberal Arts  
with a concentration in Africana Studies  
School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

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## **DEDICATIONS**

To my parents, Jamal and Jennifer Battle, who supported me even when it was difficult.

To my daughter, Kalani Ann Battle, words could never express how much I love you.

To my siblings, near or far our bond is uplifting and spirited.

To the loved one's we have lost too soon.

To all who fought and fight for, and who dream and dreamt of, a better future despite existential despair, and for those they fought and dreamt for.

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I would like to thank my colleagues, friends, family, and fellow graduate students who have engaged in dialogue with me related to my research interests, and my thesis. Jordan Daley, constantly gave me feedback on my work, and challenged and assisted me to think philosophically. Hilary Van Dyke, inspired me to work hard, and believed in my analytical capabilities. Gabriel Harris allowed me to explain my theoretical framework to him for hours until we both understood it more clearly. There are too many individuals who have in some way contributed to my thought and production of this thesis than I am capable of naming here without the risk disregarding a significant contributor.

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## ABSTRACT

Since its inception during the transatlantic slave trade, blackness within the collective unconscious of Western society has been sutured to negative stereotypes, images, and feelings. In modern discourse on race and racism the unconscious manifestations of anti-black racism adopted from cultural impositions, the impact of enslavement and colonization on the psyche of the subjugated, and the importance of the mind in revolutionary efforts, are all too often undertheorized. Through an Afropessimist framework, this thesis uncovers the origination of the black imago in Western society, how and why it is habitually recreated, and how black theorists, artists, political activists, and others have sought to challenge and destroy its authority. The research then shifts toward an analysis of the film *Get Out* to further demonstrate how stereotypical images, feelings, and attitudes regarding blackness formed during and as an excuse for slavery are cathartic for civil society and are challenged and even involuntarily reproduced by black creatives.

## INTRODUCTION

You got me out here in this creepy—confusing ass *suburb*. I'm serious, though. I feel like a sore thumb out here...All right, just keep on walking, bruh. Don't do nothing stupid. Not today, not me. You know how they like to do motherfuckers out here, man. I'm gone.

— Actor LaKeith Stanfield as Andre Hayworth in *Get Out*

I became an expert in the language of fear...People who were carrying on the conversation went mute and stared straight ahead as though a void in my eye would save them...I'd been walking the streets, grinning good evening at people scared to death of me. I did violence to them just by being on the street at night, I whistled popular tunes from the Beatles and Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. The tension drained from people's bodies when they heard me.

— Psychologist Dr. Claude M. Steele quoting *New York Times* Columnist Brent Staples

The above quotations document two African American men reacting to their identity threat in predominately white settings, a consequence of intersubjectivity. In 2010, Claude M. Steele published *Whistling Vivaldi*, a synthesis of studies focused on the relationships between identity, stereotypes, ability, and performance. Those studies proved that stereotypes could influence the behavior and performance of people of particular identities in specific scenarios. The title, *Whistling Vivaldi*, references the real-life story of Brent Staples, a *New York Times* writer. As a young black man who frequently walked through a *nice*, wealthy, and white Chicago neighborhood, Brent went out of his way to ensure he made the white people he encountered comfortable. Staples's story encapsulated many of the key terms Steele deployed to explain the implications of his experimental research.

Intersubjectivity describes knowing the stereotypes others may harbor for your identity in their conscious or unconscious minds in a specific scenario.<sup>1</sup> The particular feelings, thoughts, anxieties, discomforts, unfortunate circumstances, and other implications these stereotypes produce are stereotype threats.<sup>2</sup> These circumstances are also called negative identity contingencies, which are the unpleasant particularities of one's experiences and conditions based on their identity and its perceived value in society.<sup>3</sup> The terms Steele highlighted in his work are significant to the story behind the book's title *Whistling Vivaldi*. *Whistling Vivaldi* references the first-hand experience of a young black man, Brent Staples, as he whistled classical music and the Beatles to combat the stereotype threat he faced walking in a white neighborhood.<sup>4</sup>

In 2017, the opening scene of Jordan Peele's *Get Out* captured an identical encounter between a young black male and his stereotype threat. Andre Hayworth gets lost in a white suburban neighborhood while attempting to meet up with a friend in a wealthy white suburb in upstate New York. Hayworth displays clear signs of discomfort throughout the scene and seems to have phoned the friend he was meeting up with to discuss his feelings of anxiety. In this scene, Peele appealed to his American audiences' memory of the murder of Trayvon Martin by George

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<sup>1</sup> Claude M. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi : and Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us*. New York :W.W. Norton & Company, 2010.5.

<sup>2</sup> Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*,2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, Steele is concerned with forging solidarity through the notion that everyone suffers from some form of identity contingencies. Steele desire for solidarity shrouds the possibility of acknowledging how the black imago or negative identity contingencies that conjure stereotype threats for blacks are unique because not only are they externally imposed, but internally as well. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*, 60



Zimmerman in a similar residential neighborhood in Florida.<sup>5</sup> The murder of Trayvon Martin is one example of a repetitive spectacle of black death in white spaces, which undoubtedly adds to blacks' stereotype threats and intersubjective anxieties.

Staples and Hayworth's experiences were not isolated incidents but indicative of a paradigmatic structural relationship.<sup>6</sup> Staples whistling, like Hayworth's phone call and avoidance was spawned by anti-black stereotypes burdening his own intersubjective. Both Staples and Hayworth were aware of how their black skin is always already perceived as a threat in the unconscious of Western society. Thus, black people *perform* particular roles to ease the consciousness of nonblack people, or more precisely, the authoritative audience members they encounter.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, lead afro-pessimist scholar Frank Wilderson argued, through his reading of black French psychologist Frantz Fanon that, "For Blacks, violence is a matrix of (im)possibility, a paradigm of ontology as opposed to a performance that is contingent on symbolic transgressions."<sup>8</sup> Although Staple and Hayworth's are both under the impression that their performances might mitigate their potential for experiencing violence at the hands of the fearful minds they encounter, their performances can never guarantee nor solidify that mitigation. The inability for blacks to avoid this perception of their identity that precedes their presentation of

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<sup>5</sup> N. P. R. Staff, "In 'Get Out,' Jordan Peele Tackles The 'Human Horror' Of Racial Fear," *NPR*, February 19, 2017, sec. Movies, <https://www.npr.org/2017/02/19/515813914/in-get-out-jordan-peeel-tackles-the-human-horror-of-racial-fear>.

<sup>6</sup> Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke University Press, 2010), 36–37, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11cw61k>.

<sup>7</sup> Thinking here of Wilderson's statement "Make them feel safe the cardinal rule of Negro diplomacy. Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (Liveright Publishing, New York, NY, 2020), 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Wilderson, Red, White, and Black*, 84.

self, is solidified through acknowledging the fact of assimilation and one's internal predispositions.

The black man is already split, preoccupied, by a racist, a conscious-unconscious, imago.  
— David Marriott

Everything that is the opposite of this black behavior is white. This must be seen as the origin of the Antillean's negrophobia. In the collective unconscious black=ugliness, sin, darkness, and immorality...If I behave like a man with morals, I am not black.  
— Dr. Frantz Fanon

In contrast, these two quotations speak to the antiblackness inherent in black people in the modern world, that is the second focal point of this thesis.. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon, like Steele, found that if we desire to combat anti-black stereotypes, as many black Americans do, our actions inevitably become determined by the other—via our acting out a socially determined role.<sup>9</sup> Fanon also asserted that “European culture has an imago of the black man.”<sup>10</sup> David Marriott has termed this anti-black stereotype the black imago. Imago is a psychoanalytic term often used to describe an unconscious image. However, more accurately, the imago is an attained collection of fantasy: a stereotype that includes images, ideas, feelings, and behaviors.<sup>11</sup> The imago is socially constructed, not reflective of reality, and is an involuntary imposition in the psyche. David Marriott's reading of Fanon emphasizes that black individuals

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<sup>9</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 146, 187.

<sup>10</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 146.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. W. W. Norton and Company Inc. New York 1973.

are also socialized into a racially hierarchical society. Marriott argued that blacks in the modern world have a “white other residing in one's inmost depths.”<sup>12</sup>

Collectively, these four epigraphs reinforce the central argument of this thesis, that black people are always performing to combat stereotype threats, and those performances are never adequate in the modern world. On the one hand, this is due to the gratuitous violence of social death. On the other hand, this futile acting is a result of the authoritative white gaze incentivizing the performance, not only from the outside, but *within*. For example, in *Get Out*, Hayworth walks in the opposite direction of the car approaching him in the suburban neighborhood because of his intersubjective awareness of white people's beliefs and attitudes about black people, he expresses awareness of how his own presence is threatening in that context. Therefore, Hayworth deploys a set of compensatory dramatics black people learn to adopt in predominately nonblack environments. Hayworth *performs* not merely because he knows what white people will think about him but because he also understands his image to be threatening the way white people do. In the end, Hayworth is abducted despite of his performance.

Likewise, in *Whistling Vivaldi*, Staples whistles classical music in front of others on his walk through a nice neighborhood. As a black man in that context, Staples suffers from a stereotype threat. His intersubjectivity encourages him to perform as an assimilated black man to deescalate the fear produced by the stereotype and reflected in the face of his (anti-black)audience or the Other. However, Fanon also declared that these performances are inefficient because it is black skin, not the black mind, that is a phobic object within the cultural milieu.

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<sup>12</sup> David S. Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity*, African-American Studies (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 57.

Many Black studies scholars like Sylvia Wynter, Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, and Frantz Fanon have identified how interminable archetypes, emotions, and *scenes* associated with black skin within the European milieu are rooted in slavery and colonialism.<sup>13</sup> Yet, Wynter and Fanon, among theorists like Dawn Keetley and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, argued that these assumptions, tropes, and feelings linked to blackness were embedded into entertainment, film, and the overarching collective unconscious.<sup>14</sup> I seek to synthesize the theoretical contributions of this black studies scholarship concerning social death, the black imago, and double consciousness. Although Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* deals substantially with the split black psyche, it is my proposition that often deemphasized in much of the literature on double consciousness is the way the character traits associated with the black imago appear to reflect the split black psyche. This argument is not intended to reinforce the validity of such harmful stereotypes but to emphasize how white fantasies interpolate blackness and reality in an anti-black culture. Blackness only exists in relation to whiteness. Put another way, black people are always either performing as white(anti-black) or performing blackness, which only comes into fruition as a consequence of anti-blackness. Ultimately, this research will posit a map of the intimate history of black stereotypes, underline their origin in the social death of blacks on the plantation, interrogate the cultural attitudes developed toward black people based on those

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<sup>13</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, W.W Norton & Company, New York, NY, 2022; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Sylvia Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrels," *Social Text*, no. 1 (1979); Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987).

<sup>14</sup> Dawn Keetley, "Monsters and Monstrosity," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Horror*, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "Zombie Biopolitics," *American Quarterly* 71, no. 3, 2019; Dawn Keetley, ed., *Jordan Peele's Get out: Political Horror*, Columbus, The Ohio State University Press, 2020.

stereotypes, highlight the manifestation of these attitudes and caricatures in cultural representations, and detail how the black imago affects the mind of blacks assimilated into civil society.

My approach to this chronicle of anti-black stereotypes and feelings in the modern world is inspired by Afro-pessimism. Afro-pessimist scholarship identifies anti-black gratuitous violence as the causal factor for the deeply afflicting and asphyxiating identity contingencies and social death blacks face in civil society.<sup>15</sup> In 1982, Orlando Patterson introduced the concept of social death in his compendium on slavery titled *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. For Patterson, the three central tenants of slavery(social death) are gratuitous violence, natal alienation, and general dishonor.<sup>16</sup> Although Patterson never intended to correlate the experiences of the enslaved person with the black experience in contemporary society, Afro-pessimist theorists have extended his research to do precisely that. Indeed, my research builds upon Afro-pessimist theorists like Wilderson, who detailed that “anti-blackness manifests as the monumentalization and fortification of civil society against social death.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, this study elaborates on how anti-blackness is the symbol and self-reproductive practice that coheres civil society at the expense of the alienation of the enslaved (black).

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<sup>15</sup> Frank B. Wilderson, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke University Press, 2010), 90.

<sup>16</sup> For Patterson, Natal alienation means that all notions of familial relations were dismantled. General dishonor means you are shamed merely for your presence(for your black skin). As Frantz Fanon so eloquently phrased it in *Black Skin, White Masks*, “I am a slave not to the ‘idea’ others have of me, but to my appearance.”(119). And finally, gratuitous violence means subjection to unprovoked brutality toward the enslaved person. Social death renders one’s suffering incommunicable, elicits a feeling of a lost past and future, and, most horrifyingly, conjures a sense of self-possessed by another.

<sup>17</sup> Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 90.

I examine Jordan Peele's debut horror film, *Get Out*, to analyze the connection between the historical practice of enslavement and the contemporary black experience and stereotypes in America. *Get Out* was released amid the Black Lives Matter movement, after the final term of the first black president Barack Obama, and during the presidency of Donald Trump, a candidate endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan. The public, then yearning for broadcast recognition of the disregard for and terror of black life in America, were enthralled to witness the actor/comedian-turned-directors seamless blend of social commentary on race as horror brought to life on the big screen. *Get Out*'s emphasis on uncanny forms of terror is part of a growing trend in contemporary horror films, which have strayed from the genre's traditional jump scare, slasher, and gore cliches for more intimate expressions of terror.

Peele successfully captured the uncomfortable and horrific experience of social death or black existence. This morbid and othered state of reality for blacks is an effect of slavery and colonialism. *Get Out* speaks to the anti-blackness rooted in the collective unconscious of Western culture and how it reflects and affects the past, present, and future reality for blacks in the modern world. In *Get Out*, Peele artistically renders an anti-black society that fosters in whites a yearning to physically and psychically appropriate black bodies. Specifically, *Get Out* situates a relational dynamic between non-blacks and blacks through the film's most celebrated, analyzed, and misread aspect, the "sunken place." The "sunken place" is a visual rendition of the Du Boisian double consciousness from the perspective of *Get Out*'s producers.<sup>18</sup> The being *placed* in the "sunken place" becomes a zombified subject whose black consciousness has been imprisoned and partially overlaid by a white consciousness. The black characters subjected to

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<sup>18</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls Of Black Folks*, Penguin Random House LLC, New York, NY, 1903, 2018, 6.

this splitting of their psyche become the trademark uncanny symbols of blackness in the horror genre. Ironically, in Peele’s rendition of the zombie subgenre of horror, a caricature originally predicated on the lived experience of the enslaved blacks in Haiti, the white characters in the film steal the *brains* of the black characters.<sup>19</sup> The Coagula cult steals the brains of blacks only to discard them and replace them with their own. Black people are conscious of their existence in the “sunken place,” still present in the body, but not in control and unable to act. As Frantz Fanon did, you could say that their actions become determined by the other.<sup>20</sup> Thus the “sunken place” reflects the ultimate form of anti-black intersubjectivity—the unavoidable inner-white-I(eye).

The inner-white-I(eye) is directly correlated to the aforementioned external anti-black feelings and racial stereotypes within the collective unconscious of the modern world and the threats they produce for blacks). Thus blacks as members of the modern world colonized or formerly colonized societies, too, internalize an anti-black authoritative gaze. I refer to that internal gaze, fixed on and constantly attacking the external black body, as the inescapable inner-white-I(eye). This thesis seeks to illuminate how the intersubjectivity of black people in the modern world takes the form of an inner white gaze—an inner-white-I(eye) that implores blacks to act in certain ways—to either “act white” or, by contrast to act in direct opposition to whiteness in sort of a reverse mimicry. To “act black” is to act as the shadow of the imagined white self. When a black person makes the conscious decision to “act black” they are not producing an original black essence but instead reflect blackness interpolated by white fantasies

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<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, “Zombie Biopolitics,” *American Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2019): 625–52.

<sup>20</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 132.

and violence. The inner-white-I(eye) is the ultimate version of Steele's intersubjectivity because, as a black person in contemporary society, not only must he be aware of the stereotypes others may hold about him, but he perceives himself, at least partially, through that same lens. Further building upon Steele's observations, I contend that black people are in a perpetual state of fruitless performance because of black assimilation into the dominant white(anti-black) culture and the resultant inner-white-I(eye).

To help reveal the production and sustenance of the inner-white I(eye) of blacks in the modern world, I look to scholars of cultural theory, horror, psychology, philosophy, and Black Studies. I analyze the development of black representation in western cultural iconography and the contemporary film *Get Out* through the language of Afro-pessimism to reveal how sustained black imago and the slow consumption of cultural libido within the psyche of the black produces what W.E.B. Du Bois termed double-consciousness. In doing so, I expose a shared pedagogical philosophy within *Get Out* and Afro-pessimism. Both *Get Out* and Afro-pessimism contend that black people are not simply aware and affected by how they are perceived in Western societies but that they unconsciously view themselves through an anti-black lens. This lens results in a disillusioned self-identity. The Afro-pessimist framework allows for recognizing this deeper level of intersubjectivity and how it alters how we understand the psychological impacts of slavery and colonization on black individuals. Afropessimism also transforms our reading of the title, *Get Out*, into an ironic pun, and changes our perception of the film's multiple endings.

*Get Out* visually captured the most recognized and misunderstood impact of social death, double consciousness—which David Marriott expanded upon through Fanon's analysis of *that within*.<sup>21</sup> In *Get Out*, the abnormality imposed upon the black psyche by the white villains is

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<sup>21</sup> Marriott, *Haunted Life*,33.



called the “sunken place.” The “sunken place” is a hypnotic state that Psychiatrist Missy Armitage deploys to alienate a (black)subject from their (being)subjectivity and also functions as a metaphor for the effect that black life in white post-colonial and post-slavery societies, which is black life in social death, has on the unconscious mind of blacks. Likewise, *that within* is the effect that an internal white desire and black social death has on the black psyche in the white world. *That within* is best understood as an inner authority—which reflects particular cultural philosophies. In European societies, this Freudian superego is unavoidably white.<sup>22</sup> Are black then always already spellbound through the process of socialization? If black people are in fact unable to avoid intersubjectivity and therefore must internalize anti-blackness even if unwillingly, is it possible for blacks to get out of their white minds?<sup>23</sup>

Scholarship on *Get Out* is full of praise for its critique of liberalism, its disorientation of past and present, and its approach to portraying the subtle and systematic forms of contemporary racism against blacks.<sup>24</sup> However, what is often overlooked and what I map in this project is how Peele’s narrative, especially its ambiguous ending, alludes to a gap between emancipation and freedom. Additionally, most of this scholarship failed to recognize that Chris, as a black subject

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<sup>22</sup> Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 33-43.

<sup>23</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 18,27.

<sup>24</sup> Dawn Keetley, ed., *Jordan Peele’s Get out: Political Horror*, *New Suns: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Speculative* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2020); N. P. R. Staff, “In ‘Get Out,’ Jordan Peele Tackles The ‘Human Horror’ Of Racial Fear,” *NPR*, February 19, 2017, sec. Movies; Isabel Pinedo, “Get Out: Moral Monsters at the Intersection of Racism and the Horror Film,” in *Final Girls, Feminism and Popular Culture*, ed. Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Stacy Rusnak (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 95–114; Jada Yuan Harris Hunter, “How Get Out, the First Great Movie of the Trump Era, Got Made,” *Vulture*, February 22, 2018, <https://www.vulture.com/article/get-out-oral-history-jordan-peepe.html>.

born into white society, is fixed by the white gaze from within and without, and the implication that has for the film's ambiguous conclusion.

*Jordan Peele's Get Out: Political Horror*, edited by Dawn Keetley, is a collection of essays grappling with different ways to read *Get Out*. Several authors within this volume regard the film as uniquely revolutionary art. In Cayla McNally's "Scientific Racism and the Politics of Looking" she appears unaware of any distinction between emancipation and freedom, as well as Chris's inner-white-I(eye). McNally adopts Fanon's idea that blacks lack ontological resistance under the white gaze to suggest that Chris's camera defied white interpellation.<sup>25</sup> McNally assumes Chris can resist being fixed by whiteness if only he is conscious of it.

Similarly, Dr. Robert LaRue's "Holding Onto Hulk Hogan: Contending with the Rape of the Black Male Psyche" suggests that Chris rescues his consciousness and its constitutive identities by killing the Armitage family.<sup>26</sup> Yet, LaRue detailed how the black male psyche is interpellated "beyond his own consciousness" when living in Western societies.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, this thesis recognizes that the racist interpellation of blacks through the black imago created by racist anti-black fantasies incessantly reproduces a war within the inner and outer experience of blacks in post-slavery and post-colonial societies. Thus, before Chris meets the Armitage family and before any black man encounters a white person's gaze, they are always already afflicted by an inner-white-I(eye) or anti-blackness.

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<sup>25</sup> Robert McNally. Edited by Dawn Keetley. *Jordan Peele's Get Out : Political Horror*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press. 2020. 212-221.

<sup>26</sup> Robert LaRue. Edited by Dawn Keetley. *Jordan Peele's Get Out : Political Horror*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press. 2020.174-186.

<sup>27</sup> LaRue 2020.183.

Scholars have connected aspects of *Get Out* to the work of Afro-pessimist theorists and common concepts like the “afterlife of slavery,” “fungibility,” and “social death.”<sup>28</sup> However, these analysts do not adhere to the Afro-pessimist belief that antiblackness is not only of the outer world but also the inner world for blacks. Afro-pessimism contends that blackness is synonymous with slaveness and fungibility.<sup>29</sup> Although not an Afro-pessimist by name, Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman meticulously detailed how the racial category of “black” came into existence in relation to the commodification of African bodies on slave ships. Therefore, persons identified as black in Western societies have never and can never be considered Human, where human is a sociopolitical category, not a biological one.<sup>30</sup> Generally, Afro-pessimists believe the violence against Blacks reifies *nonblack-human* communal relations.<sup>31</sup>

Like Afro-pessimism, *Get Out* conveys how the enslavement of blacks continues to impact the present. Yet, many scholars that acknowledge *Get Out*'s connection to Afro-pessimism neglect to consider what it means to witness Chris *Get Out* of the Armitage home (a symbol for the plantation of social death) only to have likely returned to an anti-black world. Additionally, most fail to acknowledge the subtle antiblackness internalized within Chris himself that implores him to code switch throughout the film. Moreover, as implied through Chris's introductory scene where he applies his white shaving cream to his glowingly dark face, He is always already compelled to wear a white mask over his black skin. Chris's shaving implies that

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<sup>28</sup> Sarah Juliet Lauro, *Jordan Peele's Get Out*, 2020, 150.

<sup>29</sup> Wilderson *Red, White, and Black*, 52

<sup>30</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*. 1st ed, New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2007; Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe.

<sup>31</sup> Frank B. Wilderson. “Afro-pessimism and the End of Redemption.” Franklin Humanities Institute, 2018, 10.

he feels he must present himself a certain way to the Armitage family—that he must look presentable, *clean* shaven, “put together” or whole, youthful, and non-threatening.

Kelly Wilz commends Peele for Chris’s survival in “Getting the Final Girl Out of *Get Out*.” Although Wilz takes issue with Peele’s neglect of the agency of the black women, namely how the sole black woman in the film never gets out, unlike the black men in the film, she celebrates Peele’s removal of the final *white* girl.<sup>32</sup> For Wilz, Peele’s decision for Chris to survive a horror film as a black male is counter to the frequent black death within American cinema and the white supremacist logic that typically undergirds it.<sup>33</sup>

However, the survival of Chris as a black male, especially without a structural revolution, also insinuates the survival of structural anti-blackness and Chris’s inner-white-I(eye). Peele’s neglect to show a return to normalcy is refreshing. However, Peele does not accomplish this by alluding to the survival of the film’s hidden monster, anti-blackness. Rather, he does so by leaving the ending abrupt, incomplete, and ambiguous. There appears to be a hesitation on Peele’s end to take a definitive stance on the meaning and possibilities of getting out. We are not sure what is to come of Chris. Does he get in another interracial relationship? Would he seek acceptance from his next nonblack girlfriend’s family? Does he bring his revolution to the streets of America and overthrow the white supremacist social order? Or perhaps, the Coagula cult utilize their wealth and influence to have Chris promptly taken into custody and returned to their possession. In any case, there appears to be a hesitation on Peele’s behalf to take a definitive stance on the meaning and possibilities of getting out.

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<sup>32</sup> Kelly Wilz, “Getting the Final Girl Out of *Get Out*,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 44, no. 3 (July 3, 2021): 336, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2020.1834035>.

<sup>33</sup> Wilz, 336.

Even the few studies that correlate *Get Out* to Afro-pessimist scholarship conclude by attempting to use the film to challenge the theory rather than support it. For instance, Ryan Poll's "Can One *Get Out*? The Aesthetics of Afro-Pessimism" brashly asserts that Peele's work is a corrective for Afro-pessimism's inadequacies. For instance, Poll states, "Peele's movie narrates the deep truth of Afro-pessimism. Moreover, it gestures toward ways out of this seemingly historical fixity."<sup>34</sup> Poll continues, "*Get Out* does not fully commit to Afro-pessimism's absolutism. Rather; the movie suggests a more powerful and realistic way out—one in which aesthetics is central."<sup>35</sup> Part of Poll's argument is centered on Chris's encounter with the character Andre Hayworth, who is renamed Logan King after the Armitages' cult hijacked his body. Chris grows suspicious of Logan's unawareness of black cultural cues during the Armitage's annual party. Yet, because Andre looks familiar to Chris, he decides to snap a picture with his cellphone, to send to his friend Rod and see if he remembers Andre. Chris snapped the picture with his phone instead of his professional camera but forgot that his flash was on, and the light appeared to trigger Logan. Logan begins to visibly bleed from his nose, and then Andre regains control of his body before alarmingly pleading for Chris to "get out." The unseen mutilation of blacks within an antiblack yet "post-racial" society is symbolized through Andre's sudden hemorrhaging and made visible via the cellphone. Poll argued that by making the flash from the camera lens expose Andre's suffering, Peele underlines the utility of the cellphone for exposing black social death and organizing resistance.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ryan Poll, "Can One Get Out? The Aesthetics of Afro-Pessimism," *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 51, no. 2 (2018): 73.

<sup>35</sup> Poll, "Can One "Get Out?," 93.

<sup>36</sup> Poll, 94.

Camera phones have functioned as vital tools in recent activist efforts to document police brutality against black Americans. However, we have witnessed that cellphone footage capturing police brutalizing black citizens does not guarantee justice for victims, and it is undoubtedly not the way to *get out* of anti-black racism in America.<sup>37</sup> Even more horrifying is the research that examines how in particular circumstances cell phone footage and social media can reinforce the very system of anti-blackness that activists who utilize their cell phones to counter the racial hierarchical order are fighting.<sup>38</sup> Black and anti-black activism, although necessary, often seems to “cut both ways.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, Poll’s claim that the cell phone in *Get Out* is Peele’s symbol for radical black aesthetic praxis, as he understands it, is not convincing. Ultimately, Poll deemed *Get Out* a remedial effort to counter Afro-pessimist considerations on the permanence of antiblackness. In contrast, this thesis holds that anti-blackness is everlasting within the context of the modern world. In doing so, the conclusion to Peele’s allegory for black social death neither confirm nor denies the general Afro-pessimist lens. Like Afro-pessimist scholarship, Peele leaves his conclusion open-ended rather than purporting a disingenuous prescription.

David Marriott’s research revealed that if liberation is possible for the black “subject,” liberation from the white unconscious is crucial because our anti-black cultural impositions thwart any effort and desire to envision an anti-black world. In *On Black Men* and *A*

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<sup>37</sup> “Research on Body-Worn Cameras and Law Enforcement,” National Institute of Justice, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/research-body-worn-cameras-and-law-enforcement>.

<sup>38</sup> Charles “Chip” P. Linscott, “All Lives (Don’t) Matter: The Internet Meets Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism,” *Black Camera* 8, no. 2 (2017): 114, <https://doi.org/10.2979/blackcamera.8.2.06>; Nora Gross, “#IfTheyGunnedMeDown: The Double Consciousness of Black Youth in Response to Oppressive Media,” *Souls* 19, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 429, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2018.1441587>.

<sup>39</sup> Linscott, “All Lives (Don’t) Matter:,” 115.

*Haunted Life*, Marriott copiously fleshes out the difficulty of dreaming outside of the “real” from within it. The seeming impossibility to avoid the white gaze that is the black man’s “I,” and how the black imago haunts black consciousness and white society.<sup>40</sup>

Going forward, I look to black studies scholars to explore the historical emergence and continuance of stereotypes and emotions sutured to blackness in Western film, culture, and the collective subconscious. This contextual analysis of the black imago and its relation to slavery and the black-white unconscious provides the foundation for a more nuanced exploration of the contemporary film *Get Out*. I examine *Get Out*’s portrayal of a black being possessed by an inner whiteness, even before the more direct analogy to black double-consciousness and *that within*, the “sunken place” appears in the film, to unveil the inner-white-I(eye) overlooked by much of the scholarship on *Get Out*. I explore how black scholars over the last century have identified blackness as an object of white fantasy, and how that concept is encapsulated within the presentation of the “sunken place.” I then use these new considerations of the “sunken place” to interrogate the ambiguity of *Get Out*’s coda. Ultimately, the lens through which one analyzes *Get Out* alters the way we interpret the film’s revolutionary capacity and conclusion

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<sup>40</sup> Marriott. *On Black Men*, Viii,66-67. David Marriott. *Haunted Life : Visual Culture and Black Modernity*. New Brunswick N.J. Rutgers University Press. 2007.1-5.

## **CHAPTER ONE: SLAVES & ZOMBIES & BEASTS, WHITE EYE!: THE HORRORS OF BLANCHITUDE CULTURE IN RADICAL BLACK CREATIVITY**

In this chapter, I trace the history of the black imago in Western culture and film to reveal how and why certain ideas associated with blackness were/are etched into our cultural understandings. The black imago in Western culture is linked to the unending project of black social death in the modern world.<sup>1</sup> The technologies of social death were formed for and by the plantation system. Sylvia Wynter identified the plantation as the site most central to the foundation of the modern world. Through the plantation system, white capitalists transformed Africans into black resources in unending service of capital interests.<sup>2</sup> Although the political economy of chattel slavery is no longer present, certain social, political, cultural, and self-conscious subtleties sustain the master-slave dynamic between blacks and non-blacks. Today the mass incarceration of black men and the school-to-prison pipelines in black “ghettos” function as the new plantations where these dehumanizing mills or systems of social death reside.

Not only do social death technologies manifest in the physical world, but also in the metaphysical or the unconscious. The black imago is connected to the “double-consciousness” in African Americans described by Du Bois. I explicate this by examining how the theater has always functioned as a vital tool for and extension of this antiquated white bourgeois racial

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<sup>1</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1982. 337

<sup>2</sup> Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels.”



hegemony and its anti-blackness, which I refer to here as Blanchitude culture, and how that affects the psyche of both white and black audiences.

I explain how the anti-black libido of Western civilization is a product of white bourgeoisie that pollutes both imago of blacks and the black imagination. Thus, I begin this investigation by tracing the vital emergence of the black imago in Western society. I then examine the various forms of the black imago in Western horror to reveal how these “impulsive cultural impositions,” to borrow the language of Frantz Fanon, are reproduced and digested by modern society—including black artists.<sup>3</sup>

### **African Enslavement: the Birth of Black Imago in Western Libidinal Economy**

Historically, black intellectuals have toiled to expose and chart the existence of this imaginary conception of blackness within Western societies. In the fifteenth century, the Transatlantic Slave Trade initiated the slow formation of the black imago within the nations involved in the trade. Over time, the black imago has permeated the globe.<sup>4</sup> Critical theorists like Saidiya Hartman exposed how this conception of blackness persists in the “afterlife of slavery.” Hartman explicated how this imagined dilapidation attached to blackness across the globe is “a racial calculus and a political arithmetic ... entrenched centuries ago.”<sup>5</sup> This creation and interpolation of blackness began with those who stood to benefit the most from the enslavement of Africans before the black imago became ingrained into the hegemonic common sense.

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<sup>3</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 167.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion on the role of the Arab Slave Trade may have also played in the development of the idea that Africa is a land of slaves see Frank B. Wilderson III, “Social Death and Narrative Aporia in 12 Years a Slave,” *Black Camera* 7, no. 1 (2015): 134–49.

<sup>5</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux. New York, NY, 2007, 6.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scholars throughout various scientific disciplines solidified fictitious notions of inherited black temperaments and inadequacies through pseudoscientific investigations. These “studies” allegedly *proved* white supremacy and black inferiority. Consequently, multiple forms of entertainment have been utilized to relay these conceptions of blackness to inhabitants of the Western world and continually reinscribe blacks with that black imago. Since the inception of *blackness*(black imago), blacks in Western societies have acted in ways that resist their predestined type but can never escape this overdetermination of their being.<sup>6</sup> One form of this resistance to the black imago by blacks was to illuminate the presence of these unconscious notions of black types.

In 1940, W.E.B. Du Bois grappled with the idea of a black imago in his thesis *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*. However, Du Bois did not borrow the specific psychoanalytic lexicon. Du Bois’s chapter titled “The White World,” which signified the colonial annexation of the world by white European societies describes a hypothetical conversation between him and a fictitious white friend. Du Bois’s imagined friend in the story symbolized the white friends with whom he had shared similar conversations with. Throughout these conversations, Du Bois’s friend articulated his desire to live by the four code doctrine of *Christian, Gentlemen, American, and White Man*.<sup>7</sup> Du Bois exposed how, although contradictory, these four codes are conditional to the creation and sustenance of life in modern American society.

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<sup>6</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 95.

<sup>7</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of Race Concept*, Oxford Univ. Press. New York. 2007.80-84.

Furthermore, Du Bois indicated that race-based war, hatred, and propaganda are implicit within the ideological framework required for an *American-White Man*. Du Bois's fictitious white friend recognized the necessity for *American-White Man* propaganda to depict blacks as devils, criminals, and prisoners in stories, film, entertainment, and news. As Dubois's character proclaimed, blacks are represented as evil in white culture to "make true what ought to be true" and to expose children to this information "so that it will become instinctual."<sup>8</sup> The production and facilitation of this hate based on the black imago in Western culture is the only way to perpetuate the necessary race war to preserve whiteness as the dominant structural position. This positioning of whiteness and blackness as its debased foundation, within the global racial hierarchy, first initiated with African enslavement, slowly seeped into the cultural unconscious, or what psychoanalysts call the libidinal economy of nations across the globe.<sup>9</sup>

Dereck Hook's definition of libidinal economy constructed through readings of Freud and Fanon is:

[A] fundamental vector of group identification; the push-pull cohesion of its (symbolic) ego-ideal and (imaginary) ideal-ego investments ... constitutive of social bonds... tied to the Other (of prevailing societal-historical norms, ideological values, etc.) Rather than existing in a primary or unmediated form affects always 'find their feet' within a symbolic universe that is thoroughly saturated by laws of custom, structure, exchange<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, 82.

<sup>9</sup> Derek Hook, "Fanon and Libidinal Economy," in *Re(Con)Figuring Psychoanalysis: Critical Juxtapositions of the Philosophical, the Sociohistorical and the Political*, ed. Aydan Gülerce (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012); Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, Theories of Contemporary Culture (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Ashley Woodward, "'White Skin': Lyotard's Sketch of a Postcolonial Libidinal Economy," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 51, no. 4 (October 1, 2020); David Hancock, "The Currency of Desire: Libidinal Economy, Psychoanalysis, and Sexual Revolution, by David Bennett," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 10, no. 5, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Hook, "Fanon and Libidinal Economy," 165.

Thus the libidinal economy is a discrete yet powerful enchantment of normalized configurations and disseminations of libido, supported by a representative structure; that demands associations of impassioned regard and rejection; which sustains categories of communal association and maintains particular social arrangements. Whether expressed in relation to the society or the individual, the libidinal economy is a phantasy of wholeness—an external limit produced internally. The self and the society is simultaneously nurtured and threatened by that external Other, which it pursues and exploits to demarcate its outside from inside.<sup>11</sup> As Jean Lyotard describes in *Libidinal Economy*, communal interactions are written over the social body or the libidinal body(white).<sup>12</sup> Thus, Ashley Woodward’s reading of Lyotard argued that he associates Western libido(the possession and potential or currency of desire) with white skin, and lack with black skin.<sup>13</sup>

This description is emblematic of the role of the black imago in white Western culture, an idea numerous black theorists, including Fanon, Wynter, and Marriott, have since explored.<sup>14</sup> Fanon extended our understanding of the black imago in Western culture through his analyses in *Black Skin, White Masks*, published in 1952. Fanon repeatedly highlighted the existence of a black imago in several European and Europeanized societies. Early on in *BSWM*, Fanon revealed that his objective was not only to liberate the black man from his mind but, additionally, and this is the important part, to stop whites from interpolating their paradoxes within the world.<sup>15</sup> Like

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<sup>11</sup> Woodward, ““White Skin,”” 347.

<sup>12</sup> Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, 2,13,160,213.

<sup>13</sup> Woodward, ““White Skin,”” 341–43; Hancock "The Currency of Desire",479-481.

<sup>14</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Wynter “Sambos and Minstrel,”; Marriott, *Haunted Life*.

<sup>15</sup> *Fanon, Black Skin White Masks*, xii.

Du Bois, Fanon proposed that a plethora of anti-black “information and a series of propositions” produced by the white bourgeoisie “slowly and stealthily work their way into an individual through books, newspapers, school texts, advertisements, movies, and radio, and shape his community vision of the world.”<sup>16</sup> These trickled-down interpretations of black essence, based initially on the desires of those who sought to exploit black labor, become fixed into cultural understandings over time and almost disappear from conscious view. Fanon identified how, “the black man has to be portrayed in a certain way, ” irrespective of the medium delivering the message.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, as Sylvia Wynter rigorously detailed, what has come to be known as the civilized white world of modernity, or the world of man, came into being sutured to a notion of the uncivilized, submissive, and yet nefarious black unhuman.<sup>18</sup>

Wynter’s investigation of the white projection of black typecasts in unconscious Western cultural understandings extended concepts within the research of Du Bois and Fanon. In “Sambos and Minstrel,” published in 1979, Wynter proposed that the anti-colonial Negritude Movement “drew attention to the implicit cultural *blanchitude*,” the French word for “whiteness.”<sup>19</sup> Wynter describes attaining a “norm of culture,” referred to as white, in distinction to other marginalized and abnormal cultures(black). Furthermore, Wynter clarified how, through colonial expansion, cultural whiteness inscribed the globe with its own coding of value and no value.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 131.

<sup>17</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels,” 152–54.

<sup>19</sup> Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels,”150.

<sup>20</sup> Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels,”50.

Wynter identified the social construction of the Sambo and the Nat as a constitutive element of the production and continuity or “self-conception” of this blanchitude culture.<sup>21</sup> Here, Wynter illustrated how representing blacks as Sambo and Nat helped Europeans square their role as colonizers/enslavers with their egalitarian and religious beliefs.<sup>22</sup> Portraying blacks as docile(sambo) suggested that blacks desired their subjugation and exploitation. In contrast, the evil/violent/rebellious (Nate Turner) representation of blacks positioned whites as the protectors of the meek and just.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the Sambo and Nat perceptions of blackness in Western cultures are the dual manifestations and representations of the black Imago.

The black Imago also reveals how the place of the norm is constituted by and through certain virtuous traits and how the most desirable trait, “intellectual faculty,” is signified by the possession of whiteness.<sup>24</sup> The creation and evolution of the black imago was more than just the result of an othering of blackness by whites, but also the production of an unconscious cultural understanding of blackness as a symbol for, and the embodied representation of, lack. Whiteness

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<sup>21</sup> Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels,”153.

<sup>22</sup> Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels,” 150.

<sup>23</sup> These dual black minds that mirror the black imago are included in many films with slave narratives, including Quentin Tarantino’s film *Django Unchained*. In *Django*, the black imago is located dually in Samuel Jackson’s Uncle Tom-like character Stephen and Jamie Fox’s rebellious Nat Turner-like character Django. These are the only two permissible portrayals of blackness. Although one type(Nat) is arguably more commendable than the other, both these iterations of blackness are produced by and mask the Plantation’s production of blackness itself, a project of white fantasy. Quinten Tarantino, *Django Unchained*, Columbia Pictures,2012.

<sup>24</sup> Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrel,” 153.

was inscribed as the most valuable feature, while blackness, on the opposite end of the spectrum of this slowly ingrained cultural understanding, signified no value.<sup>25</sup>

Frank Wilderson's research proposed that because a *human* is a construct and not essentially a being—a being that could not be human or inhabit that category within the “political ontology” of the world needed to be constructed.<sup>26</sup> Similar to Wynter, Wilderson argued that the profiteers of the Transatlantic and Arab slave trades disconnected African people from their genealogies and their heritage and subjected them to gratuitous violence, which resulted in the association of blacks with lack and nonhuman.<sup>27</sup> A worldly consensus of Africa as a land whose inhabitants lacked “political community” gave rise to this separation between black and non-black, or as Wilderson so frighteningly phrased it, “the divide between the living and the dead.”<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, Wilderson revealed that the distance between humans and non-humans, living and undead, black and white, was predicated on the value systems linked to masters and slaves.

As Philosopher Calvin Warren wrote in *Ontological Terror* “The Negro is not a human being that is simply mistreated, but is, instead, an invention designed to embody a certain terror for the world.”<sup>29</sup> Warren expounds upon the research of Fanon, Wynter, and Wilderson to render

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<sup>25</sup> Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrel”, 150-152.

<sup>26</sup> Frank B. Wilderson III, “The Vengeance of Vertigo: Aphasia and Abjection in the Political Trials of Black Insurgents,” *InTensions*, November 1, 2011, 4. Hortense Spillers “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” also denoted that if the black (women) didn’t exist, they would “have to be invented.”

<sup>27</sup> Wilderson, “The Vengeance of Vertigo,” 19.

<sup>28</sup> Wilderson, “The Vengeance of Vertigo,” 19–20.

<sup>29</sup> Calvin L. Warren, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 38.

their propositions on black existence even more salient. Like the black theorists Warren's work is indebted to, he acknowledges the metaphysical holocaust of the African—the distinction between African existence and black *being*.<sup>30</sup> For Warren, “African existence is transformed into black *being* through violence, transport, and rituals of humiliation and terror.”<sup>31</sup> This onticidal event—the murder of African ontology and its interpolation as blackness, is otherwise known as the transatlantic slave trade. However, Warren noted that transformation of Africans into calculated objects or instruments for and against humanity is not accomplished solely through the ritual of the transatlantic slave trade.

In *Ontological Terror*, Warren proposed that the unchallenged fear of western metaphysics is the central cause for the terror of antiblackness. For Warren, ontologism undertheorized the question of being due to its referent, or lack thereof.<sup>32</sup> Philosophers failed to locate “being” or its prerequisites because what permits one to be is simultaneously grounded in “nothing” and is nothing itself. Nothing cannot be articulated. Efforts to describe nothing using language transform and disfigure nothing into something, which it cannot be if it is nothing.<sup>33</sup> This insurmountable enigma which emerged during the labor of philosophers and the western world's attempt to verify its own existence, both horrified and revealed the limitations of metaphysical science.

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<sup>30</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 12.39. Warren strikes out being in relation to blacks because blackness lacks Being, in the Heideggerian sense.

<sup>31</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 39.

<sup>32</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 7.



Warren identified how the African slave trade allowed philosophical, scientific, and legal scholars to fashion an answer to the ontological freight of existence.<sup>34</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europeans deployed metaphysical instruments—that is science which seeks to anchor human existence with significance, to impose nothingness onto blacks. *Ontological Terror* clarifies how metaphysics is haunted by nothing—an implication for interrogating Being itself, and to solve this problem metaphysics imposed nothing onto black bodies to circumvent this debilitating truth or lack thereof.<sup>35</sup> Utilizing an assemblage of frameworks, Europeans positioned the black at a distance from the human being, and imposed nothingness or blackness onto the bodies of enslaved Africans. Metaphysics uses blacks to unknow the dismay of having unanswerable questions considering the fundamental elements of existence.<sup>36</sup> The result is that black people must embody nothing, remain on the fringes of modernity, and are repeatedly subjected to gratuitous violence. Thus, blackness could then be destroyed and maintained concurrently in place of the abyss of nothingness. The metaphysical foundations of modernity then formed in diverse and fluid modes which uphold the anti-black or anti-nothing power structure. Therefore, Warren outlined *Ontological Terror* as the unanswerable philosophical question, the reason antiblackness exists, and the justification for existence itself, which is merely blackness.

For Warren the metaphysical holocaust is the continued “systematic concealment, descent, and withholding of blackness through technologies of terror, violence, and abjection.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, the negro then is not merely an object but an object interpolated with nothingness—with

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<sup>34</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 28.

<sup>35</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 5–7.

<sup>36</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 13.

nothingness imposed upon it. Warren's *onticide* reinforces Wynter's research on technologies of social death, and Fanon and Wilderson's claim that blackness provides psychic value and coherence to the modern world.<sup>38</sup> In the end *Ontological Terror* is the origin story and blueprint of the process which turns something (African existence) into nothing (blackness/embodied lack).

Collectively, Black academics uncovered the normality and standardization of the dominant white culture in the west and the invention and maintenance of blackness as *something* negative, inadequate, unassailable, and abject within the unconscious of its inhabitants, even though, as Warren demonstrates, blackness is the corporealization of *nothing*.<sup>39</sup> These paradigmatic structural positions of white-black, master-slave, good-evil, human-nonhuman (monster/alien), and living-living dead are standard features of Western horror films.

### **Black Imago in Western Film: Typecasts, Monsters, and Deathliness**

Why do characters portrayed by black actors in Western horror films typically die, and what is the function of black death in the horror genre? The answer to these questions is closely linked with Wynter's blanchitude norm of culture and Fanon's black imago. Black scholars have rigorously displayed the centrality of western art, cinema, and particularly the horror genre for the documenting, relaying, and reinforcing of white (civil societies) cultural philosophies.<sup>40</sup> Like other cultural forms of entertainment, the cinema is where society goes to understand itself, live

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<sup>38</sup> Wilderson, "The Vengeance of Vertigo," 32; Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrels," 150; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 10, 108.

<sup>39</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*.

<sup>40</sup> Dawn Keetley, "Monsters and Monstrosity," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Horror*, ed. Mark Storey and Stephen Shapiro, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 183–98; Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrels," 149–56; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

out repressed desires, and relieve pent-up aggression. Thus, cinema is a cultural mirror of simultaneous projection and reflection.

Western horror films and the feeling they are meant to invoke are tailored to and tailor the racist imaginations of predominately white audiences of the dominant white culture. In 2015, a Hollywood diversity report detailed that 82 percent of directors, 83 percent of lead actors, and 88 percent of writers within the industry were white and predominately male.<sup>41</sup> This thesis recognizes how disturbing representations, symbols of blacks, and blackness in Western horror films wrestle with notions of taboo and terror while implying what is desirable.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the hypersexual, unintelligent, aggressive, and black characters, often one in the same, are killed off. Western horror is an art form usually produced by white filmmakers and for white audiences within the culture of blanchitude.

Traditionally, the horror genre reinforces social stereotypes by imposing negative attributes upon characters that do not survive the film. In *Horror Noire*, Robin Coleman illustrated how Hollywood has regularly equated blackness with images of beasts since D.W Griffith's *The Birth of A Nation*(1915).<sup>43</sup> Coleman detailed how *Blacks in Horror* have been portrayed as animalistic, paranormal, evil, invisible, or self-sacrificing, depending on the socio-political sentiments of the time.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Coleman suggests that European "films have

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<sup>41</sup> S. S. C. WebTeam, "NEW! 2015 Hollywood Diversity Report," UCLA Bunche Center, February 25, 2015, <https://bunchecenter.ucla.edu/2015/02/25/2015-hollywood-diversity-report/>.

<sup>42</sup> Robin R Means Coleman. *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films From the 1890s to Present*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. 2013. 13.

<sup>43</sup> Coleman, *Horror Noire*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Coleman, *Horror Noire*, 10-12.

contributed significantly to discussions and debates regarding not only blackness but also its proximity to interpretations of what is horrifying and where it is embodied” and that often monsters are implicit racial Others.<sup>45</sup> Thus, blackness itself is one of the archetypically vile traits of doomed and murderous characters in the history of Western horror. Western horror envisions blackness as repulsive, deadly, and primed for gratuitous violence.

In slight contrast to Coleman’s idea that blackness in horror reflects the political sentiments of the era, some African American studies scholars have considered not an unchanged but transmogrifying, long duration of a fixed stereotype of blackness within the horror genre.<sup>46</sup> Like Coleman, Dawn Keetley’s chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Horror* titled “Monsters and Monstrosity” identifies a link between the monsters of American popular culture and the trafficking, enslaving, and dehumanizing of its black inhabitants.<sup>47</sup> For Keetley, the project of turning blacks into monsters preceded and exceeded the emergence of the American film industry. Indeed, the system of slavery was justified in part by this conception of black as monsters(others).<sup>48</sup> Keetley’s proposal implies the presence of a cultural blanchitude and black imago that are demarcated and restricted by the master-slave paradigm. She states that the black man is transformed into a monster by a racist white ruling class ideology that conceals itself in common sense.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Coleman, *Horror Noire*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Wilderson, *Red White, and, Black*, 53-67.

<sup>47</sup> Dawn Keetley, “Monsters and Monstrosity,” 183–98.

<sup>48</sup> Keetley, “Monsters and Monstrosity,” 187.

<sup>49</sup> Keetley, “Monsters and Monstrosity,” 187.

Keetley signified how the horror genre “exploits the entanglement of the nonhuman and the human.”<sup>50</sup> She constructs this argument by uncovering how monsters are illustrated as impure hybrids in contrast to humans. Keetley adopts terms like formless, unassimilable, and others as descriptors for the monster in Western films. Though most salient in Keetley’s argument is her appropriation of early eighteenth-century anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep’s term liminality. Keetley asserts that in horror, monsters are liminal beings or “embody an ontological liminality.”<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Keetley identifies zombies as liminal beings, revealing how borders between humans and nonhumans have always been insecure.<sup>52</sup>

Gennep introduced the concept of liminality to help us understand cultural rituals or *rites of passage* constitutive of communal life. Although every society adopts these rituals, they differ in constants and variances.<sup>53</sup> However, the idea that select individuals are temporarily and spatially unassimilable into the community while in the liminal phase is constant among all cultural rituals reflective of this ontological transformation. Yet, as Thomassen indicated in “The Uses and Meanings of Liminality,” many theorists have extended Gennep’s concept of liminality to the group and social levels, not solely the individual. Furthermore, Thomassen argued that liminality can become permanent under the right conditions.<sup>54</sup> Thus, like *rites of passage*, the Middle Passage can be analyzed through the concept of liminality.

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<sup>50</sup> Keetley, “Monsters and Monstrosity,”193.

<sup>51</sup> Keetley, "Monster and Monstrosity,"184.

<sup>52</sup> Keetley, “Monsters and Monstrosity,”184-192.

<sup>53</sup> Bjørn Thomassen,“The Uses and Meanings of Liminality” 2, *International Political Anthropology* Vol. 2 (2009) No. 1 (2009): 1.

<sup>54</sup> Thomassen,“The Uses and Meanings of Liminality,”17-19.

The ritualistic capitalist process of trafficking enslaved Africans to the Americas on slave ships across the Atlantic Ocean beginning in the sixteenth century, referred to as the Middle Passage, worked to sever Africans from their indigenous roots and reaggregated them into blacks outside the social sphere of inclusion—the socially dead. In “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Hortense Spillers wrote,

Those African persons in "Middle Passage" were literally suspended in the "oceanic," if we think of the latter in its Freudian orientation as an analogy for undifferentiated identity: removed from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet "American" either, these captive persons, without names that their captors would recognize, were in movement across the Atlantic, but they were also *nowhere* at all...we could say that they were the culturally "unmade," thrown in the midst of a figurative darkness that "exposed" their destinies to an unknown course. <sup>55</sup>

With this passage, Spillers demonstrates how the formalized process of African enslavement resembled a ritual. Enslavers severed Africans from their cultures and familial relations and deliberately misrecognized their humanity as thingness. *African* beings were, in a sense, transformed into *black* commodities. Black people, like monsters, were invented to embody an ontological liminality. Although liminality can be applied to analyze a variety of groups that face oppression due to their identities, there is a distinction when the term is applied to describe the black experience. Unlike other minority groups that may inhabit a liminal position within society for some time, blacks *are* at the essential opposite end of the spectrum or permanently outside the societal organization.<sup>56</sup> In other words, black people exist indeterminately and immovably between subjects and objects or humans and nonhumans. Like monsters, Blacks reaffirm the norm's features (whiteness) by embodying the abnormal(other). Thus, black people are the

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<sup>55</sup> Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987),72.

<sup>56</sup> Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 65.

physical-symbolic referent for social inclusivity, recognition, and self-awareness. Therefore, the function of blackness and black people in blanchitude cultures, like the undead monsters of horror films, is to promote communion and psychological health for the nonblack world. As Wilderson detailed, the perception of black skin as a phobic object is “the lifeblood of White psychic integration.”<sup>57</sup> Here, Wilderson reiterated the idea previously developed by Wynter that the white bourgeois manufactured its self-meaning and value through and in contradistinction to its interpolation of blackness. The enslaved Africans gave rise to the notion of the living dead because that was the reality in which they existed.

A thorough analysis of why and how horrifying depictions of Blacks in Hollywood manifest, must adhere to Orlando Patterson’s assertion that “the human body is a major source of symbolism for notions of pollution, notions that focus on the entry and exit points of the body... the body is frequently a symbol of the entire social order.”<sup>58</sup> This explains why horror films often emphasize bodily disfigurement and the grotesque as sights of terror. Patterson recognized that these notions of polluted and unpolluted invoke life and death. Pollution signifies imminent, or at very least the potential of death. The naturally conservative horror genre maintains this notion of pollution as a sign of the unassimilable Other—for whom gratuitous violence is not only accepted but often enjoyed.

Elizabeth Maddock Dillon’s article “Zombie Biopolitics” further explores how white bourgeois interests and desires formulated ideas and images associated with blackness.<sup>59</sup> Dillon considers the zombie, a character adopted from the African-based Haitian religion of Voodoo

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<sup>57</sup> Wilderson, “The Vengeance of Vertigo,” 32.

<sup>58</sup> Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 323.

<sup>59</sup> Dillon, “Zombie Biopolitics.”625-52.

and Caribbean folklore, in relation to the enslaved Africans in Haiti subjected to the plantation systems technologies of social death. Dillion identified today's Zombie of western culture as an appropriation of an ideology founded by enslaved Africans in Haiti. Dillion praised Elizabeth McAlister's research for denoting that the practice of "Zonbi-making is an example of a nonwestern form of thought that diagnoses, theorizes, and responds mimetically to the long history of" social death in the Americas.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the Zombie is the "cultural creativity" of the socially dead. The zombie is the critique of the system of social death from within by turning a mirror to it. The Zombie was an analogy applied to expose the lowly, abject, disfigured, lacking, fungible, accumulated, and unconditionally violent state of existence of the life, I mean social death of enslaved Africans in Haiti. However, both Dillion and McCallister note that in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, American writers and travelers became infatuated with the Haitian zombie, due to the significance of a mutilated body severed from of its soul within the context of Christianity. Americans appropriated the Haitian zombie and in the process habitually overlooked its fundamental connection to capitalism, enslavement, fungibility, and consumption.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, even when enslaved beings attempt to practice sociality within the system of social death, those productions become the lifeblood of the very system they are forged to counteract. Today in America the zombie is a "profit making capitalist machine."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Dillon, "Zombie Biopolitics," 627; Elizabeth McAlister, "Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies," *Anthropological Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (n.d.): 468.

<sup>61</sup> McAlister, "Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites," 472; Dillon, "Zombie Biopolitics," 627.

<sup>62</sup> Dillon, "Zombie Biopolitics," 627.



For her investigation, Dillion adopts Michele Foucault's concept of biopolitics, which analyzes government interests and authority over the biological processes of its citizens. However, for Dillon, the biopolitics of the Plantation system functions differently because of the social death of the enslaved. Traditional biopolitics is complicated on the plantation because before the authoritative body seeks to protect the species body, it first seeks to bring the body to the precipice of death in order to evacuate it of individual subjectivity and extract as much value from the body as possible. Enslavers stripped Africans of their milieu, heritage, and, more generally, their lives, only to reanimate them as speaking implements whose lives needed to be preserved for the purpose of labor.<sup>63</sup> Dillion explained that "race slavery aims to produce and protect the living after it has killed them—race slavery creates the living dead." The maintenance of the plantation system requires now, as it did during enslavement, the repetition of blackness as others in the collective imagination and on public display, an othering that makes the dismemberment of black bodies, black families, black genealogies, black histories acceptable in law and custom.<sup>64</sup>

Keetley conveys how twenty-first-century horror films have increasingly blurred the lines between the normality and that which is other, tending to portray normalcy as a horror in and of itself and, in turn, calling into question the boundaries of the category of human itself.<sup>65</sup> The desire of these new counter-hegemonic iterations of horror to critique systems of dominance

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<sup>63</sup> Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*, 56. In elaborating on the notion that the black is a speaking implement Wilderson stated "the Black has sentient capacity but no relational capacity. As an accumulated and fungible object, rather than an exploited and alienated subject, the Black is openly vulnerable to the whims of the world."

<sup>64</sup> Dillon, "Zombie Biopolitics," 626-31, 652.

<sup>65</sup> Keetley, "Monsters and Monstrosity" 193.

leads to the reevaluation of the human classification's validity, uniqueness, and autonomy. Ultimately, Keetley appears optimistic about the capacity of humans to embrace themselves as monsters inextricable from their conventionally imagined others and become something new. Keetley's proposal mirrors Fanon's end of the world<sup>66</sup> and Warren's gaze into the abyss.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the central endeavor becomes to "imagine black existence without Being," which would be to embrace the void(nothing) rather than avoid it. But what, if anything, hinders this new imagining?

### **Double Consciousness: How the Black Imago and *That Within* Affect the Black Psyche**

What haunts are not the dead but the gaps left within us by the desires of Others.<sup>68</sup>

— Calvin Warren

For the worlds I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities were theirs, not mine.<sup>69</sup>

— David Marriott

In *The Souls of Black Folks*, Du Bois revealed how life in American society for blacks results in a splintering of the mind. Du Bois referred to this divide of the psyche as double consciousness, a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."<sup>70</sup> Negative illustrations and connotations precede and are attached to black skin within the American culture

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<sup>66</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 191.

<sup>67</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 171.

<sup>68</sup> Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 33.

<sup>69</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls Of Black Folks*, 6.

<sup>70</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, 7.

and make it necessary for blacks to identify with white American culture to attain any amount of social recognition and mobility, thereby producing this fracture. As inhabitants of Western societies, Blacks imminently assimilate into a culture in which the black is abject. For Du Bois, it is the black's identification with white culture and adoption of its (anti-black) value systems, coupled with the awareness of one's black skin, which produces an unending feeling of "two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body."<sup>71</sup> The word unreconciled is distinctly important here. Did Du Bois mean to imply that the dual halves of black consciousness have yet to be reconciled? Or worse, that black consciousness is irreconcilable—incompatible—two antagonistic dialectical programs of existence in one "being?" Is it possible for blacks to get out of this inner war *from within it*?

Fanon meticulously extended Du Bois's doubles consciousness by analyzing how cultural antiblackness affects the black psyche. Fanon disclosed that double consciousness is a debilitating split in the black mind caused by an overdetermination from the outside.<sup>72</sup> Blacks raised to associate with whiteness and who see themselves as white inevitably encounter the white gaze that maps the black imago over their ego. For instance, Fanon's consultations with black Antillean men disclosed that they all believed that marrying a white woman was the only means to pull themselves out of perpetual group liminality.<sup>73</sup> Marrying a white woman for black Antillean men was "a ritual initiation into symbolic manhood."<sup>74</sup> For Fanon, the black Antillean male's desire to vengefully dominate the white female because of what members of the white

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<sup>71</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls Of Black Folks*, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 95.

<sup>73</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 45, 53, 54.

<sup>74</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 54.

race have historically subjected blacks while holding contempt for the black female, is indicative of an abandonment neurosis.<sup>75</sup>

To grasp how blacks, as a group, are entrenched in liminality requires a look into how blacks became unincorporated but inhabitants of western societies. Fanon's "The So-Called Dependency Complex" chapter in *BSWM* detailed how European colonization and enslavement of indigenous Africans required an initial physical and metaphysical destruction of the native culture. Fanon argued against the academic consensus of his era, which claimed certain races of people were prone to colonization due to an *inherited* dependency complex. In contrast, Fanon insisted that such a dependency complex is imposed upon the colonized through the philosophies of the dominant colonizer-culture, which they have no choice but to adopt.<sup>76</sup> The colonizer severed natives' cultural ties and perpetuated the idea that their culture had no value. The more the distance grew between the colonized and their indigenous cultures, the more powerful the myth of a biological dependency complex appeared. Thus, when Fanon declared, "in the Antilles, the vision of the world is white because no black manifestation exists." he means that this group of people, referred to as black, experienced a "metaphysical holocaust" which severed their way of being in the world, and were foisted with a new ontology by way of their captors.<sup>77</sup> All previously colonized groups position themselves in relation to the

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<sup>75</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 54.

<sup>76</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 64–78. Here Fanon's argument is explicitly situated against Monsieur Mannoni's *The Psychology of Colonization*.

<sup>77</sup> For more on the Metaphysical holocaust and its mechanisms see Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 131; Calvin L. Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 17; Frank B. Wilderson, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke University Press, 2010), 38.

dominant culture—the metropole.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, black Antillean men often seek a white female partner to counteract or mystify this loss (of nothing) tied to their black skin.<sup>79</sup>

Oddly enough, Fanon did not correlate the abandonment neurotic with that of the bourgeoisie conjured dependency complex or black life as social death. One of the most mystifying moments in *BSWM* is when Fanon examined Jean Veneuse's, also known as Rene Maran, double-consciousness through the term *that within*, which he borrowed from Harold Rosenberg's reading of Hamlet. In Veneuse's autobiography *Un homme pareil aux autres*, he is described as a visibly black man, born and raised in France. Veneuse resides in a solely white community, believed in black inferiority based on the existential racial hierarchy, and in love with a white woman. Thus, Veneuse professed to be, and was read by Fanon as, mentally white.<sup>80</sup> Although Andrée, Veneuse's white female love interest, loves him back, he cannot accept her love, even after he seeks and is granted permission from his white male friend to marry a white woman. Veneuse's friend even assured him that he is just a white person who looks black.<sup>81</sup> Here, Maran expresses a negrophobic consciousness that Fanon (later in *BSWM*) described as normal for the

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<sup>78</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 2.

<sup>79</sup> In a similar vein, Wynter revealed that the desire to project oneself as master reflected in the bourgeoisie enslavers master-slave model, was internalized even by whites who owned no slaves and the slaves themselves. Thus, any attempt to make a claim about equality needed to be structured in the context of the blanchitude norm or the bourgeoisie's universe of signification. Yet categorically, black slave, a tautological phrase, is the indispensable antithesis of the human. Fanon's analysis of the dependency complex and Wynter's research on the connection between enslavement, blanchitude culture, and black typecasts point to the destruction of black political community and how blacks are coerced into identifying with blanchitude culture. Wynter, "Sambo's and Minstrel," 150-153.

<sup>80</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 52.

<sup>81</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 50.

Antillean.<sup>82</sup> Despite Fanon's initial desire to explore black attitudes in white society through Veneuse, he concludes that Venuses' abandonment complex is not a result of blackness or racism. Fanon declared that Venuses' neurosis is what drives him toward an antagonistic relationship with other blacks and a desire for white affection. For Fanon, Veneuse is emblematic of an abandonment "neurotic structure of the negative-aggressive type," or infantile fantasies produced by childhood neglect, which haunts his psyche into adulthood.<sup>83</sup>

Yet, David Marriott's scrupulous engagement with *Black Skin, White Masks* in *Haunted Life* generated alternative conclusions based on the same evidence. Moreover, Marriott illuminated how other moments in *BSWM* substantiate his own claim that the abandonment neurotic is a universal symptom of blacks under the social death of blanchitude culture. Marriott argued that,

If we look at Fanon's reading of Maran...and his writings on Martinique...,we see the failure of black sovereignty in Martinique linked to a community of disavowal, and one that reveals an incomplete oedipal resentment or rivalry with French society; we see a black collective psyche *occupied* by a colonial power whose authority has been so internalized that there has been a collective failure to symbolize it—the end result of which is a cultural dependency and an hallucinatory state of being in which blacks fantasize themselves as white.<sup>84</sup>

In theater, corpsing is a shorthand for an actor who ceases to portray their assigned character. Veneuse and other blacks with white masks attempt to corpse the stereotypical avatar assigned to individuals labeled black in Western culture and subsequently reverse the former rejection of their ego. Through Marriott and Fanon, we can see how blacks in

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<sup>82</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 168.

<sup>83</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 60–62.

<sup>84</sup> Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 46.

white societies are always already performing and disavowing roles. Thus, Veneuse's desire for whiteness was not a deviation from the norm for blacks in white societies—an incidental and solitary neurotic as Fanon insisted, but rather was a patterned attempt to reap the social benefits of corpsing.

Veneuse does suffer from an abandonment neurosis but black existence in the Western world is one sutured to the severing of familial relations and metropolitan neglect. The black family structure in Western society, like the white one, mimics the anti-blackness of the state—the abjection of blackness. After all, “there is no disproportion between family life and the life of the nation” and “the characteristics of the family environment are projected onto the social.”<sup>85</sup> In attempting to “prove his doctrine, *that within* is a thoroughly neurotic structure,” Fanon asserts the impossibility of concluding “that Veneuse's neuroses are a symptom of his blackness, despite obviously demonstrating their derivation from experiences of black social death.”<sup>86</sup> An abandonment neurosis is a fact of black life in western society and much of *BSWM* speaks to this very conclusion.

For Marriott, Veneuse's, anxiety is driven by his realization that although he is white, he is unable to be acknowledged as white or equal in his community, yet he cannot and does not want to be black either. Marriott maintained that Veneuse is “affected” by a void that can be neither “avowed nor disavowed.” Moreover, Veneuse struggles

with an image of psychic life as one possessed, as one, in effect, forced to act out an unassignable command that both precedes and produces the self. An acting out understood as a blind, affective tie to an otherness of the other inside the self, an

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<sup>85</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 121.

<sup>86</sup> David Marriott, “Corpsing; or, The Matter of Black Life,” *Cultural Critique* 94 (2016): 60, <https://doi.org/10.5749/culturalcritique.94.2016.0032>.

otherness that comes from without, outside the self, in the hallucinations and phantasmas of the social world...“that within” testifies, then, to an overwhelming feeling of existential loss or abandonment: an enigmatic relation to otherness that speaks to cadaverous presence of the indwelling dead.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, *that within* signifies an incommunicable sense of loss, a loss of communal incorporation intrinsically tied to memory and fantasy and prompts self-hatred and angst within the black psyche. *That within* is a gap produced by the conflictual relationship between one’s sense of self–ego, their perception of self through the dominant social framework and how they are perceived by others. Therefore, *that within* haunts everyone black within Western societies.

To juxtapose the idea that blanchitude culture and its rudimentarily twofold black imago are birthed through social death and that black people are born *of, in, and give life to* that blanchitude is to recognize how *that within* is produced and entrenched. For Marriott, it was *that within* Fanon that spawned the gaffe in his conclusion and the momentarily forgotten contradictory qualitative data he shared. Marriott connects Fanon’s lapse in judgment here to his own abandonment neurotic, a condition linked to childhood betrayal from his mother and through his mother country. As Marriott explicated, near the end of *BSWM* Fanon detailed how his mother passed along blanchitude culture’s implicit and explicit anti-blackness. Fanon professed, “At home my mother sings me, in French. French love songs where there is never a mention of black people. Whenever I am naughty... I am told to ‘stop acting like a nigger.’”<sup>88</sup> Fanon’s mother’s repudiation of the totality of his being and her persuasion for his pursuit of a

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<sup>87</sup> Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 42.

<sup>88</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 168.



deathly and unattainable white ego ideal fosters his own *that within*. To fortify his claim, Marriott asserted that Fanon knows the subject's mother is

both the source and repository of that loss, the proof of what cannot be articulated at the level of the other, the ghost haunting him.. the punishing source of the recognition that, in so far as he is a negre, he is an undesired child....the symbolic mirror, Fanon suggests, in whom he sees his real image signified, with which he identifies himself.. who solicits this relationship in which he finds himself caught and which sees him splintered by the desired whiteness of his castrated being...It is the black child's wish to play his part so as to secure his mother's love.<sup>89</sup>

The cause of Fanon's misstep here is enigmatic, especially considering other moments in *Black Skin White, Masks* that appear to push back upon his conclusions regarding *that within*.<sup>90</sup>

Nevertheless, Fanon's contribution to our understanding of anti-blackness through *that within* approaches the inexplicable loss constitutive of the black experience and its roots in white fantasy, remains invaluable.

In summarizing Marriott's reading of *that within*, Frank Wilderson eloquently wrote, "The black psyche is in a perpetual war with itself...usurped by a White gaze that hates the Black imago and wants to destroy it...a divided self or, better,... a juxtaposition of hatred projected toward a Black imago and love for a White ideal"<sup>91</sup> Put differently, *that within* implies a self-possessed by an inner deathliness—the negative image of the Other mapped over the ego—the Other whom the self wills itself to be and thinks it is.

Fanon laboriously described how the representation of blacks in cinema is an effective tool of blanchitude for reproducing and reinforcing (anti)blackness and the black imago in Western culture. For Fanon, the cinema functions as a cultural catharsis in which white

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<sup>89</sup> Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 49–50.

<sup>90</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 7,19,89-110,122-126,128,132-152,186-190.

<sup>91</sup> Wilderson, "The Vengeance of Vertigo," 29–30.

repressions can be experienced and expunged, and white bourgeois desires can be transmitted, internalized, and reinforced through the screen.

Furthermore, Ibram X. Kendi's chronicle of racial ideology *Stamped From the Beginning* and Harriet A Washington's history of medical experimentation and malpractice upon black people *Medical Apartheid*, both identified how the science of eugenics was swiftly embedded into popular culture and strengthened the existent anti-black cultural impositions already in place. Washing cited *The Black Stork* a film about eugenics produced by and starring Dr. Harry J. Haiselden, a physician who routinely murdered "defective" babies, as having had a devastating influence on public perception.<sup>92</sup> Kendi pointed to the early twentieth-century classic novel, *Tarzan*, as cultural art constructed to square away the white supremacists logic.<sup>93</sup> *Tarzan* is a classic American tale about a white child orphaned in the Central African jungle. The apes raise the child and name him Tarzan, which means "white skin" in their language. Tarzan grows up to be the best fighter and hunter among all of the apes. Kendi noted the blatant racist narrative, has routinely reappeared ever sense; most recently in the James Cameron's record shattering film *Avatar*.<sup>94</sup> What appears to be lost among this scholarship however is the impact that these films have on the psyche of the assimilated black American.

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<sup>92</sup> Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present*, 1st ed (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 193.

<sup>93</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, Book club kit, First trade paperback edition (New York, NY: Nation Books, 2017), 299.

<sup>94</sup> Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, 300.

In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon suggested an experiment where a black person goes to see “Tarzan” in a theatre in the Antilles and then again in France.<sup>95</sup> Fanon noted that in the Antilles young black spectators, as members of blanchitude cultures automatically identify with Tarzan against the blacks(savages/apes).<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Fanon argued that although black spectators may also attempt to identify with the white protagonist in a European theater, it is complicated by the overwhelming presence of neighboring spectators that automatically “place him among the savages on screen.” Within the unconscious of the Western audience blacks are associated with the animals and savages in the film. This association juxtaposed to the assimilation of blacks into Western societies—their adoption of the same ideologies and value systems undergirded by anti-blackness affects the black individual’s psyche. Thus, because “the black man aims for the universal but on-screen his black essence, his black “nature” is kept intact,” the black man is “imprisoned as the eternal victim of his own existence”—he is hemmed in by racist white fantasies.<sup>97</sup> Yet, there is more than one screen and more than one theater present in a single movie theatre. Upon reading Fanon’s small footnote on Tarzan in *BSWM*, Marriott argued that the black man is unable to discern between “his self-image and the image he sees reflected back to him from the two screens and in the two theaters.” The motion picture screen, the retina of the European and Europeanized onlookers, the theater of public subconscious opinion—structured by Hollywood’s White bourgeoisie, and the theater of the black mind are all in agreement about the evil and Otherness of the blacks they perceive, produce, and reflect. The assimilated black cannot completely refute his perceived Otherness

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<sup>95</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*,131.

<sup>96</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 131.

<sup>97</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 163,152,18.

because the part of his psyche unavoidably influenced by blanchitude culture substantiates the claim. For Marriott and Fanon the fantasy tying the “active eye of the camera” to the white gaze, and the subservient, calcified gaze of the black viewer in the modern world, is central to the reproduction of the black imago.<sup>98</sup> Marriott contends that “Fanon’s War,” the war within all blacks in the modern world, is a subsequent product of the “ specular doubling in the very act of whites looking at blacks looking at a screen”.<sup>99</sup> The antiblackness of blanchitude culture where it meets the black(white) self-perception yields a double bind—dispossessing blacks from themselves—exhuming black bodies from their desire or ability to envision themselves anew.<sup>100</sup>

Is it possible to rid oneself of the black imago? Moreover, is it possible to consciously choose not to identify with the blanchitude norm of culture? The magnitude of these questions is amplified when considering Wilderson's statement that, “bonding with Whites and non-Blacks over phobic reactions to the Black imago provides the Black psyche with the only semblance of psychic integration it is likely to have.”<sup>101</sup> As we will see, in chapter two, Jordan Peele visually and narratively incorporated many of the most pressing issues and ideas argued within the realm of black studies into the film *Get Out*. In brief, Peele brings the veiled violence of white culture, black imago, black social anxieties tied to racism, and *that within* to the big screen in an eccentric and (untraditionally) intentional way.

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<sup>98</sup> David Marriott, “Waiting to Fall,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 13, no. 3 (2013): 165.

<sup>99</sup> Marriott, “Waiting to Fall,” 165; Marriott, *On Black Men*, 69.

<sup>100</sup> Marriott, *On Black Men*, xiv, 14.

<sup>101</sup> Wilderson, “The Vengeance of Vertigo,” 34.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE DEATHLY IMPLICATIONS OF *GET(TING) OUT(REVOLUTION)*

My research aims to explore black arts ability to counter the black imago, liberate and revolutionize the ontology and psyche of the black. Thus, in this chapter I focus on *Get Out*, a horror film widely considered revolutionary or counter-hegemonic.<sup>1</sup> Initially, I highlight *Get Out*'s ability to illustrate how the past is still remarkably present in the modern world as it relates to African enslavement, how blanchitude culture and the black imago infect and affect the black psyche, and how fantasy plays a role in black suffering and its potential remedies. I analyze *Get Out* with previously explored concepts like blanchitude, black imago, social death, (black)monsters of the modern world, double-consciousness, *that within*, and the inner-white-I(eye). *Get Out* visually captured many of these concepts and implied their connections, thus making them more tangible for large audiences outside the academy. I then expose the tendency for scholarship on *Get Out* to overlook how Peele alluded to the idea that black characters in the film who are not in the "sunken place," may already be occupied by a white unconscious to some degree. I then flip that argument to speculate on what incentivized Peele's inclusion of universalist and humanist concepts in *Get Out* using his own words from interviews, interviews of actors in *Get Out*, and close film analysis. This portion of the chapter argues that Peele, to

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<sup>1</sup> Linnie Blake, "Burning Down The House: *Get Out* and the Female Gothic," in *Jordan Peele's Get Out*, 39; Poll, "Can One 'Get Out?,' 77; Isabel Pinedo, "Get Out: Moral Monsters at the Intersection of Racism and the Horror Film," in *Final Girls, Feminism and Popular Culture*, ed. Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Stacy Rusnak (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 4.

borrow the words of Afropessimist theorist Frank Wilderson, concedes to the ruse of analogy.<sup>2</sup> Peele altered the original ending of his film to fit the needs of his white-minded(anti-black) audience. Like most palatable Western horror films, Peele’s protagonist killed its monstrous Other and returned to the *safety* of their quotidian experience. Black people know the identity threats they face in predominantly white and affluent spaces. Yet, one of *Get Out*’s most salient arguments, captured in the opening scene when Andre Hayworth is abducted from a middle-class neighborhood, is an attack on social assumptions regarding who is safe and in what environment they are safe. I conclude the chapter by asking what, if anything, restrained Peele from producing a more accurate depiction of the nature of black suffering in *Get Out*?

### **A Brief Synopsis of *Get Out***

*Get Out* centers around Chris and Rose, an interracial couple dating for nearly half a year. Audiences are introduced to the couple at a necessarily relatable point in their relationship—meeting the parents of a significant other. As Chris and Rose prepare for their journey to Rose’s parents (Dean and Missy) house in upstate New York, Chris shares his concern for her parent’s reaction to his race. After all, Chris is a black man living in America. The historical practice of enslavement and its anti-black socio-political ramifications play a significant role in the quotidian life of Americans. However, Rose assures Chris that his paranoia regarding the potential racist ideology of her parents is a product of his imagination. When Chris and Rose arrive at the Armitage family home, Chris is immediately subjected to dialogue riddled with racial undertones common to the black experience in predominately white settings. Yet, generally, the Armitage family appears relatively *normal* and liberal or “definitely *not racist*.”

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<sup>2</sup> Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 37.

In *Get Out*'s climax, we are made aware that the Armitages are cult leaders who commandeer black bodies for their own desires. On day two of Chris's visit, the Armitage family hosts their friends for an annual party—an event conveniently forgotten by Rose. During this gathering, Dean Armitage hosts a mock bingo game meant to hide that he is auctioning off Chris's body to the highest bidder in his Coagula cult. Like traditional eugenicists, the Coagula cult members believe black people are intellectually inferior.<sup>3</sup> However, the Coagula cult and many white people of America's past (and present), despite viewing black people as biologically and physiologically inferior, also believed black bodies were better suited for hard labor, athletics, and sex. Before Chris manages to flee from Rose's house, her psychiatrist mother, Missy Armitage places Chris under hypnosis. Throughout the film, Missy gradually initiates Chris's descent into her hypnosis, referred to in the film as the "sunken place." This places blacks into an uncanny and zombie-like trance necessary for the brain transfer practiced by the Coagula cult, which wrestles black people from their subjectivity. Thus, the Armitage family kidnaps black people, represses their psyches, and then replaces their minds with the "superior" minds of the non-black members of the group. Eventually, Chris does "get out" of the "sunken place," of the Armitage home and kills the members of the cult seeking to hijack his body.

Generally, *Get Out* underscores five key concepts related to black social death in America. First, Peele exposed the veiled violence of white culture through its critique of conventional horror. *Get Out* reversed conventional stereotypes and character traits so that the black male, normally the evil polluter of white purity, replaces the white female virgin

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Benedict Davenport, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1911); Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 163, 192-193; Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* (London: Macmilland, 1914), xxiv, 332-34.

reproducer of whiteness and the norm of culture. It is through this reversal of conventional roles that Peele magnified how traditional horror centers whiteness and imposes evil and alterity upon blackness.

Second, *Get Out* attacks and invalidates neoliberal notions of post-racist America. Peele wrote characters into the script that embody the archetypal liberal progressive who associates anti-black racism with bad people and the discourse of anti-racism with inherently good “not racist” people. Peele’s decision to make the villains or more accurately the monsters of this film seemingly “normal” and progressive white people, as opposed to the traditional backwoods white horror types, speaks to the ordinary violence of whiteness articulated by black cultural theorists.<sup>4</sup> Peel exploit these stereotypes and cliches to critique the anti-blackness of liberalism.<sup>5</sup>

Third, in *Get Out* Peele disclosed links between the past practice of the enslavement of Africans in America and the modern Black American experience. Identifies the possession of black bodies as a white fantasy. Peele manipulated American audiences unconscious assumptions of Northern and Southern treatment of black people by placing cliché antebellum symbols and objects in Northern territory.<sup>6</sup> This point is most strikingly reflected in the objects

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<sup>4</sup> Bernice Murphy, “Place, Space, and The Reconfiguration of “White Trash” Monstrosity,” in *Jordan Peel’s Get Out*, 72-73.

<sup>5</sup> Frank B. Wilderson, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke University Press, 2010), 57,81,88,90-91, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11cw61k>.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Juliet Lauro, “Specters of Slave Revolt,” in *Jordan Peele’s Get Out* 150-153; Brooke Hughes, “Our Sunken Place: ‘Post-Racial’ America in Jordan Peele’s *Get Out*,” 14 .Murphy, “Place, Space, and The Reconfiguration of “White Trash” Monstrosity,” in *Jordan Peel’s Get Out*, 72-73.



present within the infamous tea cup scene—fittingly, when the black male protagonist Chris is hypnotized and robbed of his Being.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, *Get Out*, in commonplace horror fashion, portrays blacks as not quite human, however, the irony is that these black bodies in the film are possessed by white desires. Thus, the art of horror imitates reality in *Get Out*. My argument here is aligned with Laura Thorp’s position in “The Fantasy of White Immortality and Black Male Corporeality in James Baldwin’s ‘Going to Meet the Man’ and *Get Out*,” that Peel detailed and depicted “the path from desire for power over the body to violent fetishizing and ultimate colonization of the other’s body as a way of defending a fantasy of white immortality that is rooted in a radical dependency on black male corporeality.”<sup>8</sup>

Finally, I examine how Peele spectacularizes a symbolic representation of DuBoisian double consciousness. Similar to Mikal J. Gaines, I contend that “sunken place” in *Get Out* dramatizes Du Bois’ idea of double consciousness as “a byproduct of inhabiting a black (male) body with conflicting aspirations” into an actualized paralysis that accompanies being forced to occupy a splintered sense of self as a principle condition of life, and “a tool of white supremacy through which white desire for black flesh can be enacted.”<sup>9</sup> Yet I want to distance my propositions from Gaines notion that Peele work is fundamentally differs from Du Bois. Du Bois did recognize one half of the conflicting psyche within blacks is a product of white supremacy

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<sup>7</sup> Dillon, “Zombie Biopolitics,” 646.

<sup>8</sup> Laura Thorp “The Fantasy of White Immortality and Black Male Corporeality in James Baldwin’s ‘Going to Meet the Man’ and *Get Out*,” *Jordan Peele’s Get out*, 201.

<sup>9</sup> Mikal J. Gaines, “Staying Woke in Sunken Places, or the Wages of Double Consciousness,” in *Jordan Peele’s Get out*, 161-162.

not just the result of a black consciousness that identified as an American but an American whose cultural foundation and perception is rooted in a racial hierarchical order.

The majority of this chapter is concerned with highlighting *Get Out*'s successes. However, this praise is preface for a discussion on the possibility of forming a better approach to detailing the root cause of black suffering on screen, and what that might look like. If we can understand that the black characters in *Get Out*, and the real world, are always already in the “sunken place,” before any hypnosis takes place, than the inner white-I(eye) of black folks—a mechanism of double consciousness—comes to light. Neither Jordan Peele nor any black artist/theorists/revolutionary is exempt from the process of socialization which produces this internal authoritative gaze of blanchitude culture grounded in racist fantasies.

### ***Get Out is a Counter-Blanchitude Black Horror Film***

The reason Chris in the film is falling into this place, being forced to watch this screen, that no matter how hard he screams at the screen he can't get agency across. He's not represented. And that, to me, was this metaphor for the black horror audience, a very loyal fan base who comes to these movies, and we're the ones that are going to die first. So the movie for me became almost about representation within the genre, within itself, in a weird way. -Jordan Peele <sup>10</sup>

In an interview with the Los Angeles Times Jordan Peele detailed how the “sunken place” is partly analogous for the black horror audience. Although blacks repeatedly turn out in support for the genre, most often neither their deepest fears nor their individualities are ever presented on the screen. *Get Out* is a part of a subgenre of modern horror films that directly challenges the status quo. Peele acknowledged in several interviews the influence groundbreaking horror films like *Night of The Living Dead*(1968) and *Rosemary's Baby*(1968), and *The*

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<sup>10</sup> Jordan Peele, “Seven Directors ‘weaponize Storytelling’ to Stand against Hatred and Violence - Los Angeles Times,” <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/la-en-mn-directors-roundtable-20171129-story.html#nws=true>.

*Stepford Wives*(1975) had on his narrative framing of *Get Out*.<sup>11</sup> Peele borrowed *Night of the Living Dead*'s inversion of the largely conservative genre of horror, to illustrate a link between historical anti-blackness and contemporary society. In the infamous conclusion to George Romero's zombie horror film *Night of the Living Dead*, the black male protagonist who used his wit to survive through the night wherein the dead reanimated and tried to consume the bodies of the living is then shot and killed by a militia of white males. Released during the Civil Rights era, it is no coincidence that a white militia of citizens and law enforcement, armed with rifles and dogs, take back "control" of their neighborhood from the invading, polluting, and consuming living dead—blacks. Additionally, Romero begins this scene with multiple shots of empty trees with long branches in open fields, and thus preconditions viewers to perceive this all-white militia as a lynch mob. After hearing the white men shooting the zombies, Ben comes out of the basement for a closer look and is swiftly shot in the head by the overzealous mob. A member of the white mob named Vince says to the leader of the mob Officer McClelland, "I think I heard something," and points toward the house Ben is just beginning to appear in the window of. As Ben approaches the window with his gun drawn, clearly displaying a level of cognitive ability inaccessible to the living dead in the film, the officer says, "A'right, Vince, hit *him* in the head right in between the *eyes*(emphasis mine)." Thus, the murder of Ben does not appear to be a case of mistaken identity—to the white mob, Ben *is* the living dead. Yet, Dillon's research on the link between the Hollywood zombie and the black slave, as well as Wynter and Fanon's portraits of the black imago and its manifestation in the unconscious normalcy of culture and entertainment,

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<sup>11</sup> Jada Yuan Harris Hunter, "How *Get Out*, the First Great Movie of the Trump Era, Got Made," *Vulture*, 2018, <https://www.vulture.com/article/get-out-oral-history-jordan-peeel.html>; Terry Gross, " 'Get Out' Sprang From An Effort To Master Fear, Says Director Jordan Peele," *NPR*, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/03/15/520130162/get-out-sprung-from-an-effort-to-master-fear-says-director-jordan-peeel>.

unveils the hidden significance of this scene. Romero's association of the black male to the zombies in *Night of the Living Dead* is not written to portray a rare anxiety-driven "freak accident" but a repetitive misrecognition of black as nonhuman—exemplified in the videos of violent attacks against nonviolent civil rights demonstrators rampant across mainstream news media at the time of the film's release.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, Peele gained inspiration from the films *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Stepford Wives* use of psychological paranoia to point to the sinister beneath the ordinary. Peele challenged the blanchitude American culture by explicitly countering stereotypical representations of blacks in American horror, and additionally, neoliberal notions of progress and post-racial philosophies. Thus, Peele labeled his hybrid schema for *Get Out* a "social thriller."<sup>13</sup> *Get Out* illuminates anti-blackness embedded within the status quo.<sup>14</sup> Yet, as Wynter detailed, blanchitude is the fundamental element of European hegemony, and since *Get Out* also critiques the assumed innocence and its standardization of whiteness within the cultural milieu of American society, we can understand the film as counter-blanchitude.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Audie Cornish, "How The Civil Rights Movement Was Covered In Birmingham," *NPR*, June 18, 2013, for an image of Black protesters fleeing their tents after Mississippi State troopers attacked them with tear gas during the March Against Fear demonstration in Canton, Mississippi in July of 1966, as well as, additional images of white mobs attacking nonviolent demonstrations against Jim Crow Segregation by blacks at this link <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/06/18/193128475/how-the-civil-rights-movement-was-covered-in-birmingham>.

<sup>13</sup> Condé Nast, "Jordan Peele on a Real Horror Story: Being Black in America," *GQ*, 2017, <https://www.gq.com/story/jordan-peeel-get-out-interview>.

<sup>14</sup> Isabel Pinedo, "Get Out: Moral Monsters at the Intersection of Racism and the Horror Film," in *Final Girls, Feminism and Popular Culture*, ed. Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Stacy Rusnak (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 97.

<sup>15</sup> Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrels," 153–55.

What *Get Out* does so well is to highlight how nonblack people need not be driven by race hatred to mistreat, dehumanize, or even kill black people. In *Get Out*, what incentivizes the harm of blacks by whites is an obsession with blackness and certain traits socially assigned to blacks in society's collective unconscious. These traits associated with blackness are linked to the Nat and Sambo stereotypes defined by Wynter.<sup>16</sup> The Armitages' desire to hijack black bodies ties heavily to the athletic, freakishly strong, muscular, carnal Nat Turner trope. Their nerve to run such an operation is fueled by the Sambo trope within the black imago of Western blanchitude culture. Yet, it turns out Chris is far more Nat Turner at heart *and* in mind than Sambo. Peele counters both of these black types throughout the film.

The mere fact that Peele produced a horror film in which the protagonist and sole survivor of the film is a black male is alone *Get Out*'s most recognizable attack on traditional horror. Daniel Kaluuya's character, Chris, a black photographer in his mid-twenties from an urban area, is the hero of the film. Peele is perhaps familiar with James Baldwin's statement that "no one", in American cinema, "makes his escape personality black."<sup>17</sup> Is it possible Baldwin meant to insinuate that *there is no escape for blacks*? Peele's film appears to reach a different conclusion.

Eddie Murphy built upon James Baldwin's statement on black escape personalities and cinema during his acclaimed *Delirious* standup comedy show. Murphy argued that real black people would ruin scary movies because they are hyperaware of unsafe situations unfolding and

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<sup>16</sup> Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrel," 150–52.

<sup>17</sup> Brandon Tensley, "'Get Out' Is a Welcome Rejection of the White Savior," *Pacific Standard*, March 7, 2017, <https://psmag.com/news/get-out-is-a-welcome-rejection-of-the-white-savior>. James Baldwin, "The Devil Finds Work," in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998) 500.

promptly depart before any haunting can occur.<sup>18</sup> “Too bad we can’t stay, baby.”<sup>19</sup> This classic Eddie Murphy joke is among Peele’s long list of inspirations for writing *Get Out*. Murphy’s influence can be read in Chris’s ability and sharp wit. Chris is not your typical white or black horror character ignorant to the blatantly alarming environment they have placed themselves in or that is slowly unfolding around them. As a black man in America, he is hyper-aware of his changing circumstance, especially regarding race. Peele appears to suggest that black people, including Chris, do not have the privilege to ever genuinely feel safe. Today, black people can never be sure of their safety, no matter how seemingly harmless their social environment might appear. As a black person, jogging through the neighborhood adjacent to yours might just seal your fate, as it did for Ahmaud Arbery three years ago today.<sup>20</sup> Awareness can, at any moment, determine life or death. When the threat of death becomes real for Chris toward the end of the film his survival instincts kick in. Intelligently Chris plugged his ears with cotton to avoid being hypnotized and outsmarted Rose’s seemingly Jiu jitsu trained brother and his self-proclaimed superior intellect.

Peele constructed his character Rod to invert another stereotypical representation of blacks in Western film, the unintelligent and overly dramatic Sambo caricature. Like Chris, Rod is *also* a black male. To differentiate the agency of blacks in his film from other horror films,

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<sup>18</sup> Angelique Jackson, “EXCLUSIVE: Jordan Peele Unmasks America’s ‘Post-Racial Lie’ With ‘Get Out’ | Entertainment Tonight,” February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017, [https://www.etonline.com/features/211209\\_jordan\\_peele\\_talks\\_get\\_out\\_and\\_post\\_racial\\_america](https://www.etonline.com/features/211209_jordan_peele_talks_get_out_and_post_racial_america).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, Jackson, “EXCLUSIVE,” 2017.

<sup>20</sup> “Ahmaud Arbery Day Run 2023 | Mother Wanda Cooper-Jones Speaks | 11alive.Com,” accessed February 24, 2023, <https://www.11alive.com/article/news/local/wanda-cooper-jones-speaks-ahmaud-arbery-day-run-2023/85-35f5fe75-d453-4fa3-816b-78ca2638cd2f>.

Peele's black male protagonists are sharp and strong-willed. Chris and Rod are afforded a level of agency that is not only highly uncommon for blacks in horror and film.<sup>21</sup> Rod is the first to allude to the potential danger Chris could face when isolated alone with whites. Although Rod's exaggerated claims initially encourage audiences to perceive his character as solely comic relief, he is clearly the primary voice of reason by the end of the film. Rod, against all opposition, follows his intuition and, in the end, rescues Chris. Thus, Peele scripted two black male heroes into *Get Out* to double down on his criticism of the status quo. The traditional white savior so common in horror films and Western films capitalizing off of black trauma is absent from *Get Out*.

Peele intentionally constructed Chris's identity in direct contrast to the conventional and conservatively ideal virgin-white-female survivalist of Western horror. The survival of the white female is essential, for she is the site and mechanism for the reproduction of blanchitude.<sup>22</sup> The white female is the last and most important line of defense against the monstrous-other-blackness and in turn the status quo. The "final girl" of Hollywood horror films traditionally are young middle-class-white woman, living in suburbia, who adopt characteristics associated white males, to defeat the monstrous Other(black) and symbolize the continued reproduction of whiteness and normativity, and whiteness-as-normativity.<sup>23</sup> The oversexualized black imago in American

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<sup>21</sup> Brandon Tensley, "'Get Out' Is a Welcome Rejection of the White Savior," *Grist Magazine Inc*, March 7, 2017, <https://psmag.com/news/get-out-is-a-welcome-rejection-of-the-white-savior>.

<sup>22</sup> Alison Bailey and Jacquelyn Zita, "The Reproduction of Whiteness: Race and the Regulation of the Gendered Body," *Hypatia* 22, no. 2 (2007): vii–xv; "Race and Ethnicity II: White Women and the Possessive Geographies of White Supremacy - Anne Bonds, 2020,"; Kelly Wilz, "Getting the Final Girl Out of Get Out," *Women's Studies in Communication* 44, no. 3 (July 3, 2021): 323–39.

<sup>23</sup> Pinedo, "Get Out," 104.

culture is linked to this fear of blackness as the potential pollutant of purported white purity and of the projection of white guilt onto victims of white male patriarchy (black men and women).

In *Get Out*, Chris is never paraded as sexual and is almost degendered via his lack of sexual desire. As Isabel Pinedo reasoned, Chris is in a sexual relationship with Rose (*this thang*), but Peele does not display any sexual act or tension between the two.<sup>24</sup> Chris's gender is mystified by his submission in the film during the interaction with the police officer, Jeremy during the dinner scene, and Missy during the hypnosis scene. Chris's desexualized image is a play on the prerequisite sexual unavailability of Western horror's final girl. Yet, he is also frequently objectified and sexualized by the whites desiring his body in the film. During the Armitage's party a white elderly white woman gropingly squeezes Chris arm, and then turns to Rose (as if Chris is not there or cannot speak) to ask if sex with him is "better" than with a white man. All the while, Peele never permits the camera to objectify Chris, like is so often done in Hollywood films where black men are in a central role, or the way the white characters do in the film.<sup>25</sup> The camera never zooms in on his body for too long or sexualized features.

While Pinedo argued that Peele turned Chris *into* the final girl, Wilz purported that Peele totally removed the final girl from the film altogether.<sup>26</sup> However, I assert that though both of these perspectives are vital for an adequate analysis, they are both incorrect. Peele chose to deemphasize Chris's masculinity to counter the frequent hypersexualized image of blacks in film, the fact that this reflects the final girl of horror is not the central point. After all, in contrast to Wilz proposition, *Get Out* does have a final girl in Rose, and Chris kills her. White

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<sup>24</sup> Pinedo, 103.

<sup>25</sup> Pinedo, 105.

<sup>26</sup> Wilz, "Getting the Final Girl Out of Get Out," 324–25; Pinedo, "Get Out," 102–3.



normativity is the monster in *Get Out*, thus it is only fitting that the heroin of the traditionally conservative horror genre, is the terror of this film which seeks to counter-white hegemonic culture.

Thus, critics, academics, and casual viewers recognize *Get Out* as a counter-narrative that flips the above tropes on their heads.<sup>27</sup> *Get Out* counters the normalcy of whiteness and its accompanying systems of value. I argue *Get Out* is counter-blanchitude because, although the film is undoubtedly counter-hegemonic, the particular form of hegemony the film is critical of is the white supremacist and anti-black status quo. After all, as Wynter detailed, blanchitude is the fundamental element of European hegemony.<sup>28</sup> *Get Out* is a counter-blanchitude film because it stresses the violence of whiteness, its assumed innocence, and its standardization within the

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<sup>27</sup> Wilz, “Getting the Final Girl Out of *Get Out*”; Henry, “A Review of *Get Out*”; Pinedo, “*Get Out*”; Poll, “Can One ‘Get Out?’”; Keetley, *Jordan Peele’s Get Out*. jesssterr (with an e) [@jstrrrdoodledoo], “Day 14 What’s Scary about *Get Out* (Jordan Peele,2017) Is That the Bad Guys Aren’t Racist Conservatives but Are White Liberals Glorifying POCs and It Makes Things Harder for Them, and It’s Scary Because It Also Parallels Real Life. #artph #artistontwitter #GetOut #ArtistofSEA <https://t.co/CnhekJhCOS>,” Tweet, *Twitter*, October 14, 2020, <https://twitter.com/jstrrrdoodledoo/status/1316295651831943168>; Nosey Mandela [@afrovocative], “I Love This, However I’ll Point out with the Exception of *IKWYD*, *Final Destination* and *The Faculty*’s Are Nothing like *Scream*. Not Even a Close Copy Cat. These Films Copying the ‘*Get Out*’ Peele Formula Are Bootleg Replicas per the Script at the Roots.” Tweet, *Twitter*, June 22, 2021, <https://twitter.com/afrovocative/status/1407443158686998540>; Hector Navarro [@imhectornavarro], “Jordan Peele Ryan Coogler Giving People of Color Great Stories and Roles in Hollywood <https://t.co/CiJhVw86GY>,” Tweet, *Twitter*, July 26, 2022, <https://twitter.com/imhectornavarro/status/1551956017289863168>; King Pierre. [@pierrefleury\_], “Some of y’all Are Upset about the Jordan Peele Comment I Made and Let Me Say This... I Don’t Believe Any Horror/Suspenseful Movie Existed before Jordan Peele’s *Get Out*. Jordan Peele Invented Horror/Suspenseful Movies. Now What? <https://t.co/OwK4pxJD7e>,” Tweet, *Twitter*, June 22, 2021, [https://twitter.com/pierrefleury\\_/status/1407305608831897601](https://twitter.com/pierrefleury_/status/1407305608831897601); Xavier Omär [@XvrOmar], “I Love That Jordan Peele’s Films Are Classified as Horror, Not Because They’re Scary, but Because the Horror Is If We Decide to Ignore the Subjects of the Films; Racism, Classism, Being Consumed by the Spectacle.” Tweet, *Twitter*, July 30, 2022, <https://twitter.com/XvrOmar/status/1553519958612639744>.

<sup>28</sup> Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels,” 153–55.

cultural milieu of American society. Peele's inclusion of overt and implicit convictions against American liberal ideology, and its unconscious racisms within the film, further substantiate the counter-blanchitude title.

### **Peele's Critique of Liberalism**

*Get Out* is often mistaken for a comedy by particular audiences. After the 2018 Golden Globes award voting committee labeled *Get Out* a comedy rather than a drama or horror, Peele responded with the tweet, "'Get Out' is a documentary."<sup>29</sup> However, Peele was neither surprised nor upset by the mislabeling of *Get Out*. After all, the film has comedic qualities, and its producers suggest it is a genre-bending synthesis of several conventionally distinct genres.<sup>30</sup> The comedic elements in *Get Out* are deployed strategically to critique contemporary liberal ideology.<sup>31</sup> Peele dismantles the common liberal beliefs of linear progress in American racial equity, the myth of a ceaseless endeavor to "live up to" the *virtuous* ideals in the constitution, and notions that America is currently in a state of post-racism. In interviews, Peele identified the inauguration of the first black president in North America, Barack Obama, as foundational for the imagined post-racialism of liberal ideology.

Dean Armitage's salient insistency to display his admiration for the first black president is a signifier for his liberal-post racial performance. Furthermore, Peele's critique of liberal thought is underlined by Rose's confrontation with a police officer who asks for Chris's

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<sup>29</sup> Adam Epstein, "Is 'Get Out' a Comedy? Jordan Peele Has the Perfect Answer," Quartz, November 15, 2017, <https://qz.com/quartz/1130200/get-out-was-called-a-comedy-by-the-golden-globes-and-jordan-peelee-has-the-perfect-answer/>.

<sup>30</sup> Adam Epstein, "Is 'Get Out' a Comedy," 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Jillian Boger, "Criticize Post-Racial White Liberalism in Jordan Peele's," *The Graduate Review*, 3, Bridgewater State University (n.d.): 155.

identification after her car accident. Rose became combative seemingly utilized her white female privilege to refute the officer's demand. Rose's white privilege is the comfort of knowing transgressions regardless of magnitude, are unlikely to lead to her death or brutality—or at the very least a level of comfort in knowing the mere presence of black skin is more likely solicit that level of aggression.<sup>32</sup> However, Rose is also putting Chris's life in danger with her aggressivity. In any case, with this scene Peele accentuates the liberal impulse to emphasize their morality, an action that differentiates them from their conservative counterparts. Upon first viewing, audiences are lead to believe Rose, although reckless, has good intentions. After all, she is attempting to defend Chris from the racial bias of a white police officer. However, she never attacks or objects to the prejudice remarks from her family and family friends directed at Chris. Later it becomes evident that Rose's confrontation was a strategic means to avoid leaving documented evidence of Chris's whereabouts. With this scene, Peele alludes to the nefarious underpinnings of liberal performative politics.

Rose's dismissal of Chris's worries, her suggestion that race is only on his mind and not in her family's, is symbolic of contemporary whites who frequently dismiss or overlook the existence of microaggressions and systematic racism while only acknowledging overt and individual acts of racism. In fact, the dialogue throughout the first half of the film is littered with questionable remarks from its white characters, like when Rose tells Chris that her father, Dean Armitage, "would have voted for Obama for a third time" and "the love is so real," to imply that her dad harbors no prejudice. Ironically these overcompensating gestures are just microaggressions that nonblack people often express while intending to make black people feel comfortable. However such efforts reinforce and impose Otherness onto blacks. This attack on

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<sup>32</sup> Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 57,81,88,90-91.

liberalism appears again when Dean Armitage himself asks the couple, but really just Chris, “So how long has this been going on this...this thang?” These remarks complicate Chris’s thoughts and spawn internal paranoia.

For most of the film, Chris and viewers are compelled to contemplate whether his or our fears are justified regarding the intentions of the white people in the movie. On the one hand, it appears as though Rose and her parents are trying hard to seem hip and aware of social injustices, while, on the other hand, their words can be viewed as a *performance* to obscure their racist beliefs. This unnerving and dangerous tension between Chris and the white people in the film, although reflective of our real history here in America, most often appears in the reverse order within American cultural entertainment, philosophy, and milieu.

Nevertheless, Peele exploits this cultural understanding by making the white people the evil villains of his(tory) and the unsettling presence of blacks in the film as result of their subjection to white fantasies or the whites that control their being. Peele underlined the traditional black American internal struggle to decide whether questionable interactions with non-black people are conscious or unconscious occurrences of anti-blackness or simply a product of black peoples own overthinking and insecurities. Similarly, Peele also exploited American assumptions about the location of anti-blackness particularly as it relates the practice of enslavement within the dichotomy of the North and the South. *Get Out* exposed how, aside from liberal microaggressions, specific environmental settings also invoke intense angst within blacks.

### ***Get Out’s* Northern Relics of the Plantation System**

The strategic location selected for the Armitage home in *Get Out* is another example of concealed terror of whiteness and an intentional jab at the neoliberal episteme. Andre Hayworth’s abduction from a the wealthy-white “*suburb*” in the opening scene foreshadows the

film's pending critique of post-racialism and liberalism. The so-called "good" neighborhood is distinguished as a horrifying and deathly space for black life. In her chapter "Place, Space, and The Reconfiguration of "'White Trash' Monstrosity," Bernice Murphy noted how *Get Out* "begins in a liminal space," the white suburb, and dramatizes its latent racial anxieties "from the perspective of the nonwhite 'outside,'" more frequently recognized as a criminal than a victim.<sup>33</sup> As Andre Hayworth traverses through this clean and quiet residential area, it is clear that he is experiencing Steele's intersubjectivity. Andre states, "I stand out like a sore thumb," which indicates his awareness of anti-black stereotypes that participate in making him "out of place" in specific settings.<sup>34</sup> White subjectivity is normalized within the modern world—the one in which Andre is performing as assimilated to in this moment. His performance centers and is scrutinized by the white gaze. When Andre asserts, "I stand out like a sore thumb" he doesn't need to include an object in the sentences predicate because we already know to whom he stands out—white normativity. Andre knows from a blanchitude cultural standpoint that he does not belong in the community and appears particularly threatening at night. The geographical choices made by Peele and other writers of *Get Out* not only reveal critiques of liberalism but also exhibit how the past enslavement of blacks impacts the contemporary black experience in America.

Peele places symbols of slavery often only associated with the conservative antebellum South into northern liberal neighborhoods and homes. This political dichotomy of the North and South is a staple of liberal thought. Peele, as a black man in America, is a natural (or coerced) student of American, or the perceptions of his target audience. Thus, Peele, places these cultural

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<sup>33</sup> Murphy, "Place, Space, and The Reconfiguration of "'White Trash' Monstrosity," in *Jordan Peele's Get Out*, 72-73.

<sup>34</sup> Claude M. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi*, 5.

artifacts reminiscent of the Southern ties to enslavement in the homes of Northern liberal whites to invert traditional notions of a separation between North and South regarding racism and enslavement. In other words, Peele deploys these symbols to augment his critique of liberal thoughts on the place, time, and role of racism in America. Peele's argument is in line with recent academic scholarship which shatters notions of the North as a distinctly liberal place on matters of race, when compared to the South.<sup>35</sup> This black history scholarship illuminates the vast oppression and segregation in the North in the sectors of housing, education, and employment.

In *Capitalism and Slavery*, political scientist and historian Eric Williams detailed how the Triangular Trade funded the historic British and American Industrial Revolutions.<sup>36</sup> British merchant vessels filled with British manufactured goods would venture to Northwestern Africa and exchange these goods for African slaves. The British slave ships would cross the Atlantic and trade the slaves to the American plantation system for the raw materials they produced. Then those same British ships carried the acquired raw materials back to England, or to New England and other North American cities.<sup>37</sup> Williams revealed how England's Northern colonies in the Americas not only received raw materials from southern plantations that proliferated their subsequent industrial production, but northern colonies also benefited from producing food,

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<sup>35</sup> Komozi Woodard, Jeanne Theoharis, and Brian Purnell, *The Strange Careers of the Jim Crow North: Segregation and Struggle Outside of the South* (New York: NYU Press, 2019); Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, First edition. (New York ; Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2017); Douglas S. Massey, "American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass," *American Journal of Sociology* 96, no. 2 (1990): 329–57.

<sup>36</sup> Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

<sup>37</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 51-52.

trafficking slaves, and supplying the agricultural tools for southern colonies.<sup>38</sup> Southern plantation owners found that dedicating their acreage to the sole production of cash crops and then shipping in sustenance from elsewhere was strategically more profitable than producing their own food. When discussing how sugar monopolies fueled tensions between England's northern and southern colonies did not lead to an embargo, Williams suggested that if mainland colonies did boycott British sugar islands it would have been equivalent to cutting off one's nose.

Additionally, Williams detailed how the plantation system structured the industrial and social organization of government, and slavery was a program enforced to sustain that system of production.<sup>39</sup> If we consider that after the American Revolution many of those same leaders aligned with the plantation system in England's southern colonies then fashioned and lead the federal American government, distinctions between northern and southern roots in the plantation system can be viewed as arbitrary. *Capitalism and Slavery* identifies how significant the practice of enslavement was to the early life and fuel of the northern colonies regardless of how invisible the practice appeared in the daily lives of white Northerners.

Yet, the practice of slavery was far more visible in the daily lives of Northerners than popular retellings tend to acknowledge. Many liberals, especially those in northern states, have this impression of slavery existing merely on the fringes, if at all, of early North American society. Susan Stessin-Cohen and Ashley Hurlburt-Biagini's "In Defiance: Runaways From Slavery in New York's Hudson River Valley" is a compilation of hundreds of advertisements regarding slaves in the Hudson Valley, New York, region from the eighteenth to the early

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<sup>38</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 110.

<sup>39</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 27.

nineteenth century.<sup>40</sup> Northern rural communities system of enslavement consisted of smaller groups of blacks working for particular families doing construction, farming, or chopping wood.<sup>41</sup> This, along with draconian laws which banned the gathering of blacks in large groups, explains the generally masked presence of the enslaved in the north. Stessin-Cohen and Biagini's historic collection illuminates the extent to which enslavement of Africans in the North manifested in the quotidian experiences of North American citizens. The black fugitive and "criminal" slave's various occupations, skills, hobbies, personalities, and facial and bodily features (which signifies their socialization) were intentionally etched into these advertisements to assist white citizens and vigilantes in identifying the enslaved person. Stessin-Cohen and Biagini's work reveals that the presences of slaves in the North was not only archived in commodity logs, but also in cultural artifacts like slave bounty advertisements and invitations to publicized beatings of the black enslaved. Contemporary liberals denial of the role their ancestors played in the enslavement of Africans, the subsequent generational benefits they received, and their current schemas of denying humanity to blacks is precisely what Peele looks to highlight in *Get Out*. As Peele insinuated, his crosshairs were not on the consciously racist conservatives but on the "liberal elite who tended to think they're—we're—above this."<sup>42</sup>

In *Get Out*, Peele complicates the liberal philosophy of a drastic separation between northern and southern and liberal and conservative American treatment of black people. Peele's

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<sup>40</sup> Susan Stessin-Cohn and Ashley Hulbert-Biagini, *In Defiance: Runaways From Slavery in New York's Hudson River Valley 1731-1825*, Black Dome Press, Delmar, NY, 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph E Diamond, "Owned in Life, Owned in Death: The Pine Street African and African-American Burial Ground in Kingston, New York." *Northeast Historical Archaeology* 35 (2006): 22.

<sup>42</sup> Adams, "In Jordan Peele's Horror Movie, *Get Out*, the 'Monster' Is Liberal Racism."



obfuscation of place and time is represented in subtle yet revealing visual choices early in the film. For instance, as Rose and Chris journey to the Armitage house in upstate New York, the trees that race past them all appear to blend together. In some ways, the woodsy upstate region of New York resembles rural areas in the American south below the Mason-Dixon line. As the speed of the film rapidly increases, the trees begin to bleed into one another to signify migration over a period of time or time travel. In a sense, Peele is problematizing the difference between past and present, as well as Northern and Southern racism and enslavement. Although Chris and Rose are moving forward through time and traveling Northward, the scene can be read to suggest the inverse is also true—that the couple is traveling back in time. However, Rose and Chris do not travel back in time at all, nor do they drive below the Mason-Dixon line. Instead, they travel upstate, yet their experiences in the North are identical to those associated with the antebellum South. For Peele, Rose is a sort of time-traveling slave bounty hunter, not in that she actually travels through time in the film, but instead, her actions invoke the histories of enslavement and racism within audiences necessary for Peele to connect the past to the present.

Not only does Peele exploit environmental features associated with the antebellum South to denote a close resemblance between north-south and liberal-conservative as it relates to racism and slavery, but Peele also incorporates a plethora of cultural objects with connotations that reflect slavery to deploy his critique. The geographies of the Armitage family home very closely resembles the classic plantation house of the Antebellum South. The brick architecture, rocking chairs on the porch, barn, acreage, and, most strikingly, its black maid and maintenance worker are symbols of the antebellum South.

As Sarah Juliet Lauro explained in “Specters of Slave Revolt,” Dean and Missy’s home resembles “‘the big house’ of the plantation economy not only visually but also because of the

centrality of its role in the ensuing drama.<sup>43</sup> The Armitage home, like the big house of the southern plantation system, is the site where technologies of social death are performed on blacks. Here, blacks are stripped of their agency and forced to take an almost literal backseat within their own lives to fulfill the physical and psychic desires of whites. As Fanon identifies in “The Black Man and Psychopathology” chapter of *BSWM*, the family is in many ways an extension of the state.<sup>44</sup> The organization or relational schemas of the family mirror that of the state and society at large. The family estate reflects the societal state. Lauro further underscored this idea when she tied Dean’s emphasis on the ownership of space as he gives Chris a tour of the home denoting “his den, Missy’s office, and Grandmothers kitchen,” to the organization of a plantation. Thus, the Armitage family home is simultaneously a place of business, labor, control, production, imprisonment.

The Armitage home represents the Order of the Coagula cult that traffics and commandeers black bodies for their own desires, in the same way, the big house was reflective of the American Southern Plantation System. In “Our Sunken Place: ‘Post racial’ America in Jordan Peele’s *Get Out*,” Brook Hughes also addressed the connection between the Armitage home and the plantation home of the south when she advised that neither could have existed without the technologies of social death and the exploitation of black bodies they allowed for.<sup>45</sup> Technologies of social death are responsible for not only the capital used to purchase and the labor used to construct the “big house” *of the North* but also many of the assets that furnish and embellish it.

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<sup>43</sup> Lauro, “Specters of Slave Revolt,” in *Jordan Peele’s Get Out*, 151–53.

<sup>44</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 120–21.

<sup>45</sup> Hughes, “Our Sunken Place,” 14 .

Like Dillon detailed in “Zombie Biopolitics,” the celebrated scene where Chris is hypnotized by Missy is “haunted with colonial geographies,” which function to connect the past to the present.<sup>46</sup> A variety of objects within the scene are embed with cultural significance that invokes notions of race, racism, slavery, and colonization. For instance, central to the scene is Chris’s hoodie, *tobacco* addiction, the chair he sits in which (we later realize) is stuffed with *cotton*, Missy’s *tea cup*, the *tea*, *sugar*, and her *silver spoon*. None of these items are without significance to the overall narrative and its aspiration to connect enslavement and colonization to the present. Immediately apparent are the staple crops of the plantation system in the scene: tea, sugar, tobacco, and cotton. As Eric Williams detailed, that large scale production of cash crops in the Americas that stimulated capitalist expansion and produced the wealth of Europe and America, was only possible through enslavement.<sup>47</sup> Ironically, Peele chose to make the cotton Chris picks and stuffs into his ear later in the film as a critical for his fight to “freedom.” Missy’s silver spoon and tea cup both symbolize generational wealth and the antebellum South. Silver spoon is a cliché used to signify the children of elites that inherit generational wealth and thus whose lives are exceptionally easy compared to the rest of society. The offspring of the wealthy are then imagined to be fed with particularly expensive utensils symbolizing their plightless existence.

In contrast, Chris’s hoodie is a contemporary symbol of privation and vulnerability, particularly for black Americans after the death of Trayvon Martin. Every object in this scene is meant to invoke the history of black enslavement within contemporary society. Thus, it is fitting that this is the moment in the film where Chris is robbed of his agency by the white cult. Chris’s

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<sup>46</sup> Dillon, “Zombie Biopolitics,”646.

<sup>47</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*,6.

physical body is transformed into an object of which he has no control or ownership of, an image reminiscent of the socially dead enslaved. As Kevin Henry's "A Review of *Get Out: On White Terror and the Black Body*" indicated, "The line of demarcation between slavery and 'post-slavery' is collapsed in *Get Out* with the abducting, selling, and using of black bodies."<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Brooke Hughes, in "Our Sunken Place," commended Peele for his ability to link contemporary anti-black thought and rhetoric to similar patterns of dehumanization and fungibility that transformed Africans to black property during the era of enslavement.<sup>49</sup>

Shannon Winnubst's article, "The Many Lives of Fungibility: Anti-blackness in Neoliberal Times," reveals how neoliberalism masks the anti-black framework that yields the political ontology of modernity, liberalism, and capitalism.<sup>50</sup> The transatlantic slave trade turned Africans into black cargo. Imposing economic and mathematical language on the interpolation of those designated as black via ceremonial extraction, dehumanization, and exchange, transformed Africans ontologically. The transformation of Africans into corpses directly resulted from the commodification of black bodies and labor. Ultimately, Winnubst uncovered how fungibility birthed blackness conceptually and "blackness-as-fungible."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kevin Lawrence Henry, "A Review of *Get Out: On White Terror and the Black Body*," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 50, no. 3 (July 3, 2017): 334.

<sup>49</sup> Hughes, "Our Sunken Place."12-14.

<sup>50</sup> Shannon Winnubst, "The Many Lives of Fungibility: Anti-Blackness in Neoliberal Times," *Journal of Gender Studies* 29, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 102–12.

<sup>51</sup> Winnubst, 105.

## **“Sunken Place,” Double Consciousness, and Zombies**

Arguably the most studied and celebrated aspect of *Get Out* is the “sunken place.” The “sunken place” is a seemingly boundless space of dark nothingness. Entrance into the “sunken place” is triggered by a state of hypnosis that renders an individual’s body immobile, vegetative, emotionless, yet conscious. The victim is, in a sense, placed in the passenger seat of their own life and *drive*. Missy puts Chris into a trance by exploiting his vulnerabilities and his past. While hypnotizing Chris against his will, Missy invokes his mom's death. Chris’s mother died after an accident on the way home from work, and perhaps because he was too young, he did nothing to help her. Once Chris is visibly under Missy’s control, yet still locked in the memory of his younger self, she demands that he “sink into the floor.” In the subsequent scene (young), Chris cascades into a wormhole that materializes in his memory and reappears as adult Chris falling into an endless abyss of darkness, kicking and screaming toward the screen or window to his life. At this moment, audience members are inflicted with that all too familiar feeling of sinking one gets when falling, or imagining falling, toward an unknown destination. Experienced black audience members, and now Chris, know that certain social environments alone stimulate this anxiety.

As standard American horror films do, *Get Out* unabashedly equates blackness with the uncanny and monsters. The “sunken place” evacuates Chris and several other black characters in the film of any agency. It is how the “sunken place” relegates one to an abyss, severs them from their essence, and produces this detached look upon their face, which yields this uncanny feeling whenever the hypnotized black characters appear in the film. Yet, *Get Out*’s clever and central twist is that the film’s black characters are transformed into zombie-like nonbeings via a white

cult(ure)'s desire to hijack their flesh. Thus, *Get Out*'s "sunken place" is a white composition that terrorizes blacks.

While discussing *Get Out*'s connection to the psychology of race and racism and Du Bois's double consciousness, Mikal Gaines proposed that, "We must also account for how the projection of hatred toward blackness has always been comingled with lust, fascination, envy, and other unstable patterns of desire."<sup>52</sup> This hatred of blackness, a blackness that is merely a product of white fantasies, is sutured to blanchitude culture and thus manifests within the monsters of horror. As the work of Wynter, Fanon, Du Bois, and others argued, white hegemony is what interpolated and interpolates blackness as monstrosity and living dead, in fantasy and into reality.<sup>53</sup> Similar to how enslaved African in Haiti applied the original zombie to critique the system of social death, Peele sought to mock paradigmatic antiblack themes in horror, like the portrayal of blackness as othering-monstrosities and the living dead, by turning a mirror to blanchitude cultures imaginary blackness and exposing its underpinnings.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, the way *Get Out* depicts blacks characters as the zombified horror of its narrative, however a horror constituted by white fantasies, is identical to the foundations and functions of cultural blanchitude and the black imago. When Sylvia Wynter argues "the value of white being needs to be constantly realized, recognized, attained by the social act of exchange with the

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<sup>52</sup> Mikal J. Gaines, "Staying Woke In Sunken Places, or the Wages of Double Consciousness" Kietley, *Jordan Peele's Get Out*.163.

<sup>53</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrels," *Social Text*, no. 1 (1979): 149–56; Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008):on page 17 Fanon states, "Whether he likes it or not the black man has wear the livery the white man has fabricated for him," and then deploys cultural examples of the Black imago to back his claim.; W.E.B Du Bois *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of Race Concept*. Oxford Univ. Press. New York. 2007.80-84.

<sup>54</sup> Dillon, "Zombie Biopolitics," 627.

relative non-value of black being, a non-value represented by the Symbol Negro/Sam” and when Fanon argues that the data in his study was provided by, “the Other, the white man...who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories,” they are noting how blanchitude and black imago reinforce one another.<sup>55</sup> Eric Lott noted the same idea in his study *Black Mirror: The Cultural Contradictions of American Racism*. However, Lott substituted the term cultural blanchitude for white racial hegemony. Lott coined the term “black mirror” to signify the “black mask for my white face, all the beautiful (or demonic) attractions of ‘blackness’ generated out of a thousand media sources and ideological state apparatuses.”

Furthermore, he explains that this blackness is a “fundamental precondition for the reproduction of national white selfhood if not dominance.”<sup>56</sup> For Lott, white society grasps its identity by projecting its own violence and culpabilities onto its imagined Other to form a conjoined essence of innocence and wholeness. Thus, Lott explains how blackness is a construction and reflection of white desire, both infatuation, and sadomasochist. The ability to reflect one’s fullness through that Other required the prior severing of those Others from their subjectivity. This is the work of the technologies of social death in the plantation system.

*Get Out* exploits *and* inverts the traditional “zombie cinematic tropes associated with personal agency, loss of identity, and racialized power” to counter blanchitude culture and its black imago.<sup>57</sup> Classic zombie and body-snatching films, in which a foreign force reanimates a body or disconnects one from their cognitive agency, is a product of what Wynter called the

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<sup>55</sup> Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels,” 153; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 91.

<sup>56</sup> Eric Lott, *Black Mirror: The Cultural Contradictions of American Racism*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA. 2017,6.

<sup>57</sup> Erin Casey Williams, edited by Keetley, *Jordan Peele’s Get Out*, 64.

plantation system and takes the form of Fanon's black imago.<sup>58</sup> Like Dillon's elaboration on the correlation between the zombie and enslavement, Peele's *Get Out* removes the curtain behind the zombie to reveal a rich white puppeteer. As Dillon revealed, the model for the original zombie was an enslaved, socially dead African in Haiti.<sup>59</sup> Hortense Spillers documented how the process of enslavement, or turning the African body into black flesh, entailed splitting subjects from their past, denying them a future, interpolating them as objects in the present, and "severing the captive body from its motive will, its active desire."<sup>60</sup> Read alongside Kaiama Glover's description of the zombie as "a being without essence...without any recollection of its past or hope for the future" that "exists only in the presence of its exploitation," Spiller's description of the African slave becomes indissociable from Glover's zombie.<sup>61</sup> In the mind of the dominant white society, the essence of the zombie and the enslaved African are virtually the same. The zombies desire to consume ones flesh reflects the fantasy of the blacks cannibalistic and violent nature—the white fear of being consumed and turned into feces(the abject) via blacks(zombies). Additionally, the groaning of the zombie might be thought of as the echo of incommunicable loss or the invisible lack within the hyper-visual black skin. Thus, both Glover and Spiller signify a "tangible entity that enables us to mark the boundaries of what is (ideally) human."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrels," 153; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 91.

<sup>59</sup> Dillon, "Zombie Biopolitics," 626-27.

<sup>60</sup> Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," 67-72.

<sup>61</sup> Kaiama L. Glover, *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon*, 1st ed. (Liverpool University Press, 2010), 59.

<sup>62</sup> Glover, *Haiti Unbound*, 59.



This passage allows us to understand the significance behind the sunken place or the technologies of social deaths that function on the plantation. As Dillon noted, “The living corpse—whose cultural avatar we can recognize as the zombie—is relegated to a zone of nonbeing in the primal scene of colonial modernity and racial capitalism: namely, the plantation.”<sup>63</sup> *Get Out*’s plantation is the Armitage family house where black characters are imprisoned in/as flesh.

Misrepresentation is more central to the project of the plantation system than underrepresentation. Blacks are not underrepresented in film. Instead, the manifestations of blackness in film, a product of the black imago, symbolize blackness as already interminably wretched. This explains how blackness may be overrepresented in specific anti-black spaces, while at the same time, the beingness of blacks in these areas is still impossible due to white fantasies of black types that helped invent “black” in the first place. Furthermore, the misrepresentation of blackness exceeds the screen and precedes to audiences. Therefore, blacks are misrepresented in the libidinal economy of American culture.

Keetley’s described how blacks, zombies, and monsters exist on the edge of being, emulating the bounds of the social world, and are uncategorizable. In other words, Keetley proclaimed that blacks in society and blacks in horror zombies/monsters are “liminal beings.” In *Get Out*, the concept of liminality can be applied to the black characters placed in the sunken place. The moment when Chris cannot categorize Andre Hayworth as black or white during the Armitage family gathering points to this state of liminality.

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<sup>63</sup> Dillon, “Zombie Biopolitics,” 626.

In other words, on an abstract level the “sunken place” Hayworth is fixed to also represents the political-ontology of blackness in this world, by which I mean black social death.<sup>64</sup> In *BSWM* Fanon notes that, “the black man has no ontological resistance in the face of the white,” meaning the white man had detached blacks from their roots and thus blacks cannot interpolate themselves as subjects except in relation to whiteness.<sup>65</sup>

In closing, this section sought to stress a link between the “sunken place”, double consciousness, and zombies. I have argued that social death is both what constitutes the split within the black psyche and produces the resultant zombie-like and uncanny image of blacks in *Get Out/Western film*. After all, both the “sunken place” and, as Wynter described, the depiction and conceptualization of blackness as *lacking*(sunken) in European culture are products of white fantasies and foundational for the concept of the transcendent subject (human). I revealed how the black imago is constituted by the plantation system reproduction of the Nat and Sambo black types in European society, as detailed by Wynter, and explicated how those black types are embodied in the living dead and mirror the organization of black double-consciousness. Thus, double-consciousness is the tension between the white unconscious of black inhabitants of white societies and their exposure to the black imago, a tension which produces a gap between identity and self/social recognition.

Peele’s depiction of black characters in this not-quite-human to communicate how that inner and outer image is a sinister invention of white culture is revolutionary black art. However, as groundbreaking of contribution to the Black Horror genre as *Get Out* is, it is also bit less

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<sup>64</sup> Wilderson III, “The Vengeance of Vertigo,” 4.

<sup>65</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90.

radical than it is generally imagined to be. Perhaps, if we direct our attention to Peele's desire and drive to alter the film's ending, more insights into the film's missteps may appear.

### ***That Within Peele's Inner-White-I(Eye)***

Common in reviews of *Get Out* is the idea that one can choose between staying "woke" or falling into the "sunken place."<sup>66</sup> These academics preserve the sunken place as a void where blacks are asleep (post-racial liberals) or those (conservatives) who avoid all manifestations of prejudice, and the violence inherent within whiteness culture are relegated.<sup>67</sup> However, far more horrifying is that the "sunken place" can more accurately be understood as an unavoidable void to which even the supposedly apolitical, intellectually gifted, and devout anti-racist blacks are subjected—through the system of social death. As Fanon stated, "The black man is attacked in his corporeality," that is, his bodily experience, "it is his tangible personality that is lynched."<sup>68</sup>

Additionally, *Get Out*'s "sunken place" is often portrayed as a two-tiered symbol. The "sunken place" symbolizes systematic anti-black racism and the lack of social agency afforded blacks within non-black settings.<sup>69</sup> However, if one can think abstractly enough, there is a third level to the "sunken place" allegory. *Get Out*'s Blu-ray DVD release special features include

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<sup>66</sup> "Is the Sunken Place My Safe Space? | The Daily Nexus," *The Daily Nexus / The University of California, Santa Barbara's Independent, Student-Run Newspaper*. (blog), February 7, 2019, <https://dailynexus.com/2019-02-07/is-the-sunken-place-my-safe-space/>.

<sup>67</sup> Alison Landsberg, "Horror Vérité: Politics and History in Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017)," *Continuum* 32, no. 5 (September 3, 2018): 636.

<sup>68</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 142.

<sup>69</sup> "The Sunken Place | Feminist Guide to 'Get Out,'" <https://journeys.dartmouth.edu/feministguidetogetout/2017/05/24/sunken-place/>.

commentary from Director Jordan Peele in which he revealed that while writing *Get Out*, he began to perceive the “sunken place” as an analogy for both the prison industrial complex and the psychological experience of horror’s black viewers. Peele stated,

This movie...was an answer to the lack of representation, our lack of ability to talk about race, specifically the prison industrial system complex, and the disproportionate number of Black people, mostly men, who are literally abducted, thrown into a hole and tossed to the back of our minds, literally and figuratively, and the sunken place is a metaphor for that marginalization.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, the sunken place represents both the physical manifestations of systematic racism and the lack of representation of blacks in horror. Yet, the marginalization Peele identified is not only outwardly imposed onto blacks but inwardly as well. Moreover, recalling Marriott’s argument that blacks are always already acting in predetermined roles, it is clear that the cinema mirror’s the social sphere (and vice versa). Again, blacks suffer from *that within*—that is the ceaseless collision between their identification with blanchitude, and how subsequent anti-black cultural impositions they adopt through this identification alters the way they are perceived in the world and their self-perceptions.. I refer to this critical, authoritative, and prejudice internal voice as the inescapable inner-white-I(eye).

Yet Fanon’s *that within*—the elaboration on Du Bois’ double-consciousness, and *Get Out*’s “sunken place” are all developing the same concept. Like double consciousness, *that within* is intimately related to the “sunken place.” *That within* is an endless struggle that wages inside the splintered unconscious of a black person in an anti-black society and produces an interminable gap(void) between their identity and how they are identified. It is important to note that all of this is based on fantasies constitutive of existence for and by the Other(modern society).

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<sup>70</sup> William Bibbiani, “Get Out Is About the Holy Grail, and 5 More Things We Learned from the Blu-Ray,” IGN, May 28, 2017, <https://www.ign.com/articles/2017/05/28/get-out-is-about-the-holy-grail-and-5-more-things-we-learned-from-the-blu-ray>.

Chris descends into a dark and mystical void—his only available perception is through a small window reminiscent of a theatre screen. As Chris sinks into the “sunken place,” he moves further away from this screen that connects his inner awareness to his corporeality. A gap is created. In the real world, this psychological split results from an awareness of blanchitude culture’s black imago, the internalized antiblackness which is a prerequisite for recognition in Blanchitude culture, and the awareness of one’s own bodily features associated with a blackness that precedes and overshadows the subject’s presentation of self. Fanon suggested that in the black person, there is a “fracture of consciousness between a dark and a light side. Moral standards require the black, the dark, and the black man to be eliminated from consciousness. A black man is therefore constantly struggling against his own image.”<sup>71</sup> Blackness has a particular reputation within white culture, resulting from a negative projection. A black man cannot present himself because the reputation of *the black*—a phantasmic invention of white society—always precedes him.

Particular directorial decisions from Peele appear to confirm that Chris is in the “sunken place” at the film’s beginning, middle, and end of the film. In *Get Out*, when Chris is first introduced to the audience, he is staring into the mirror, applying white shaving cream to his dark skin. This scene can be read as both a foreshadowing of the film’s big reveal—white people are attempting to confiscate black bodies, as well as a nod to the title of Frantz Fanon’s first study *Black Skin, White Masks*. The title of Fanon’s text, much of his argument, and *Get Out*’s narrative all underscore how black people are forced to present themselves a particular way. That is, black people must broadcast their relation to whiteness, to approach yet never to attain recognition and incorporation into blanchitude culture. The black person’s agency is sutured to

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<sup>71</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 170.

white desires “since only the Other can enhance his status and give him self-esteem at the ethical level.” However, what both *Get Out* and *BSWM* also reveal is that blacks are not only compelled to position themselves in relation to whiteness by the outer world but also from within their own psyche, which is inextricable from and perhaps impossible without the outer world. That is, “inner” and “outer” are, in fact, misnomers. Chris is not only shaving his face to appear clean and *presentable* to the Armitages’ on the surface, but his interactions with the Armitage in contrast to his dialogue with his black friend Rod is reminiscent of code-switching. Chris self-polices his vernacular to appear wholly assimilated into white upper-middle-class culture when engaged in conversation with the Armitages and their guests.

I refer to the antiblackness black people inherit from white culture as an *inner-white-I(eye)*. The term *inner-white-I(eye)* appeared to capture the entity internally blinding and possessing blacks highlighted within the research of Fanon and Marriott. While discussing the representations, ideas, and feelings related to blackness in the unconscious of Western society, Fanon declared, “The eye is not only a mirror but a correcting mirror. The eye must enable us to correct cultural mistakes. I do not say the eyes; I say the eye—and we know what the eye reflects: not the calcarine fissure, but the even glow that wells up out of van Gogh’s reds.”<sup>72</sup> Fanon implied that the eye, like the “I”/Freud’s “ego,” does not reflect the totality of reality but rather obscures our visual perception. It is a sense of self constructed through bodily experiences, influenced by the “cultural impositions” Fanon described through the text, and confined by the will of Others.

Juxtaposing the inner psychic divide indicative of the black experience in Western society and the dualistic misrepresentations of black essence in the Western milieu makes

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<sup>72</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 178.

Peele's depiction of those relegated to the sunken place as classic horror zombies so intriguing. For instance, Dillon argues that the zombie is composed of the "captive undead spirit and revolutionary antislavery force."<sup>73</sup> In other words, this dualistic representation of slaveness(blackness), known as the zombie, is comprised of both the Sambo and the Nat types of blackness designated by Wynter.<sup>74</sup> The zombie embodies the totality of the black imago, or the perceptions and feelings associated with black skin in blanchitude culture. Therefore, Dillon suggests that zombie can be read as a direct symbol for the enslaved blacks characteristics in the cultural unconscious of the western world.<sup>75</sup>

Here Fanon's elaboration of the impact the black imago has on our consciousness, *that within*, which builds upon Du Bois' double-consciousness, is again vital to this study. Dillon's undead and rebellious branching of the zombie's traits also mirrors the structure of *that within*. *That within*, the eternal and internal battle that exists within all blacks on an unconscious level is produced by the juxtaposition of the *inner-white-I(eye)* one develops as a result of socialization in the blanchitude culture of the Plantation system and the conflicting knowledge of one's blackness. Thus, the inner-white- I(eye) can be thought of in relation to the imbecilic zombie and the submissive enslaved person. As Kara Keeling professed, "Affect and what Fanon calls "historicity" the set of past images of blacks that comes to reside in each consecutive appearance

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<sup>73</sup> Dillon, "Zombie Biopolitics," 638.

<sup>74</sup> Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrels."151-52. The Sambo represents the docile and submissive enslaved African stereotype, frequently rendered synonymous with "House negro." The "Nat" is a black typecast that personifies rebelliousness and terror, a reference to the mind and revolution of Nat Turner.

<sup>75</sup> Dillon, "Zombie Biopolitics."642.

of a black person, are the only accessible content to blacks.<sup>76</sup> Thus, blacks cannot help but internalize some form of this imago because it is constitutive of their being and one of many technologies of social death transforming African subjects into black “objects.”<sup>77</sup>

On the one hand, Peele claimed to have intentionally hedged his art to avoid compounding the ceaseless traumas that his black audience, as members of Western societies, are constantly bombarded with. On the other hand, Peele’s impressive ability to, through film, invoke the visceral effects of racism on black people within multiracial audiences is diluted by his under-theorization of the root of antagonism between blacks and non-blacks.

Yet, to produce a successful narrative in Hollywood, it was imperative that *Get Out* proceed the way it does. Or put differently, Chris needed to *get out* for audiences to enjoy *Get Out* and for the film to become successful and be marketable in the modern world. Nonblack audiences require the ability to analogize their suffering with that of blacks to identify with the black protagonist. To destroy the black is the only means to place oneself in their shoes. In fact, *Get Out* received negative test screenings reviews that identified a shared dislike for the film’s original ending and compelled Peele and its producers to rewrite the film’s conclusion.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Kara Keeling, “‘In the Interval’: Frantz Fanon and the ‘Problems’ of Visual Representation,” *Qui Parle* 13, no. 2 (2003): 100.

<sup>77</sup> For more on black “objects”, as opposed to subjects, see Fanon’s description of the black experiences as *thinghood* in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Hortense Spiller’s discussion of *flesh* in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” and Calvin Warren’s black ~~being~~ in *Ontological Terror*.

<sup>78</sup> Adam Chitwood, “Get Out Filmmakers Explain Why They Changed the Ending,” Collider, February 22, 2018, <https://collider.com/get-out-alternate-ending-explained/>; “Get Out’s 2 Alternate Endings Both Saw Chris Lose,” accessed February 27, 2023, <https://screenrant.com/get-out-movie-alternate-ending-chris-loses/>; Harris, “How Get Out, the First Great Movie of the Trump Era, Got Made.” In these articles, Peele, *Get Out*’s producer Sean McKittrick, and cast Bradley Whitford, Daniel Kaluuya, Marcus Henderson all explain how after test screenings, audience reception of the films uncomfortably realistic ending persuade rewriting and reshoots.



In the original ending, Chris does not, or does not appear to, “get out.” Chris’s friend Rod did not emerge from behind the door of the white car with the blue and red flashing lights. Rather, an actual white police officer appeared, who, as expected, immediately profiled and arrested Chris. The screen fades to black, and we witness Rod visit Chris in prison. This ending would not suffice for the test screeners. Chris needed to escape the dangers of his identity the same way anyone, not black, could. The structural and socially unconscious manifestations of racism hinted at throughout the film could not reanimate in the final scene like the monsters of horror movies frequently do. American audiences needed reconciliation after *Get Out* took them on an emotional and racially charged rollercoaster, But as Wilderson’s work detailed, Black suffering is not analogous to other minority and oppressed groups suffering.<sup>79</sup> Black people suffer from a form of violence that is not contingent and from which no safe spaces exists.

In a way, the only means to render the inexplicable nature of black suffering intelligible or palatable to a modern-*human* audience is to skew its reality. As Wilderson detailed, “Black “achievement” in popular culture and the commercial arts requires the bracketing out of that nonexistence in hopes of telling a tale of loss that is intelligible within the national imagination.”<sup>80</sup> To truly capture the essence of black social death on screen, the “sunken place” would be the only scene within the film. Meaning that Chris and the other black characters in the film would remain in the same within that void of existence regardless of the Coagula cult’s surgery and hypnosis. As Fanon affirmed in *BSWM*, the “black man is not,” and more pointedly,

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<sup>79</sup> Wilderson, *Red White & Black*, 89.

<sup>80</sup> Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 65.

in response to Sartre, he asserted that when compared to the suffering of Jewish people, blacks don't just feel oppressed or inferior, they feel "non-existence."<sup>81</sup>

The theatrical ending depicted Chris burning down the "big house" of the plantation. Yet, to read this moment as Chris "getting out" or grasping true freedom—completely escaping from the "sunken place"—is to misunderstand the film entirely, if not reality itself. Bernice M. Murphy reminds us in her analysis of *Get Out* that the Coagula cult members are not the standard maniacal lone killers of the horror genre but a wealthy and powerful organization that justifies dehumanizing others for self-interested desires. The Coagula cult is sure to continue its selfish pursuit and objectification of blacks and their bodies. Murphy emphasized that at the end of the film, Chris and Rod are not escaping to freedom but returning to a society where "dehumanizing racial attitudes that have shaped [it] for centuries remain embedded in the nation's political, environmental, and psychological landscape."<sup>82</sup> Thus, the title *Get Out* does not imply the possibility of eradicating or even avoiding all the harmful impacts of anti-black racism—it does not entail circumventing social death. Rather, what Chris eludes or "gets out" *of* is looming physical death and bondage.

By setting the plantation ablaze, Peele is not symbolizing freedom from the modern terrors of anti-black racism and social death, which he had been mapping throughout the film, but rather that moment of emancipation. For Peele, burning down the big house, or emancipation, was what Fanon called a "now you see me, now you don't" type of victory.<sup>83</sup> It was the removal of the

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<sup>81</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xii, 118.

<sup>82</sup> Bernice M. Murphy, "Place, Space, and the Reconfiguration of "White Trash" Monstrosity," Edited by Dawn Keetley. *Jordan Peele's Get Out : Political Horror*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press. 2020.85.

<sup>83</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 99.

physical chains and the spectacle of immanent death. It was not, however, a way to *get out* of social death or the structural position assigned to those with black skin.

Ultimately, Peele and fellow producers of *Get Out* mystified their stance on this pressing issue within the sphere of Black Studies. What incentivizes an artist to center a film around past and present, and past-present manifestations of anti-black racism and title the film *Get Out*, yet hedge their supposition of the potential to *perform*, in its fullest sense, the action in the title? An Inner-white-I(eye) might be a central aspect of Peele's reservations.

In closing, this section considered whether the *inner-white-I(eye)* is what thwarts Peele and other black(and non-black) citizens, revolutionaries, academics, and creatives from producing language, art, critical theory, and narrative literature that does not reify black ontology as social death. In attempting to appease the white eye(both his own and his audiences') Peele capitulates to a heroic, progressive, cathartic narrative structure that has always aimed to render black suffering coherent and explainable and thus without the need for structural remedy. Chris defeats the manifestation of antiblackness in the film, thereby diminishing the extent of antiblackness and absolving the audience's past, present, and future consumption of black bodies and lives. The art of self-perception and representation and the imaging such intellectual labor requires is obstructed for blacks in the modern world through ingrained cultural anti-blackness, the stereotypical representations of blacks in media and the negative feelings they invoke, and an awareness of being labeled black within the social world.

## Looking to *Get Out*: *That Within* and the Limitations of the Invaginated Gaze

“The person who experiences this hemorrhaging may be black, but the “I” acting as witness to the scar is, unexpectedly and bizarrely white. In moments such as these, the “I” becomes aware that it is an indeterminate presence within the self, a dissemblance that reveals blackness as self-image.”<sup>84</sup>

-David Marriott

Rather than contributing to Hollywood’s recreation and commodification of black trauma on the screen, Peele sought to challenge the anti-blackness of the status quo. However, in the end, *Get Out* reproduced the precise paradigmatic framework it set out to challenge. It is clear why scholars are compelled to perceive *Get Out* as revolutionary, but what prevents them from perceiving this film's errors?

*Jordan Peele’s Get Out: Political Horror*(2020), edited by Dawn Keetley, is a collection of essays that explore the historical, racial, gendered, and political subtleties in the film, that speak to Hollywood cinema, Western culture, and the modern world more generally. Cayla McNally’s chapter “Scientific Racism and the Politics of Looking” borrowed Fanon’s idea that the black man lacks ontological resistance under the watchful eye of white society to explore Chris’s use of cameras in the film<sup>85</sup>. McNally argued that Chris returns the gaze through his camera lens and becomes imperceptible, which ultimately defies white interpellation. However, my contention is that it is not possible for the black people to simply defy white interpellation through action or intent. Sarah Benesch, through reading Louis Althusser, defined interpellation as the identification of people, groups or castes by others that are assumed by all to be accurate

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<sup>84</sup> Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 43.

<sup>85</sup> Erin Casey-Williams, “Get Out and the Zombie film,” Edited by Dawn Keetley. *Jordan Peele’s Get Out : Political Horror*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press. 2020.64.

accounts of (and consequently crafts) a coherent reality.”<sup>86</sup> Additionally, Benesch argued that interpellation is a vital implement of hegemony, and in echoing the likes of Antonio Gramsci, she suggested that hegemony requires consent and can be challenged by meticulous resistant thinking.<sup>87</sup> However, Wilderson helps us to *think* differently about thinking differently as a source of resistance to the anti-black hegemony that black people are subjected to in the modern world through his article “Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society.” For Wilderson Marxian and Gramscian philosophy “assumes a subaltern structured by capital not by white supremacy,” and subsequently assumes a subaltern subjected to contingent and ideological violence rather than gratuitous and ontological.<sup>88</sup> McNally’s scheme to defy white interpellation by returning the colonizers gaze—turning a mirror to it(as in showing it to itself)—documenting it on film, is insufficient because as Fanon detailed “the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man,” and as we have witnessed that vision is not only external. White interpellation happens without and within the black.<sup>89</sup> It appears McNally overlooked Chris’s interpellation that comes from within—via his inner-white I(eye). To be fair this idea is left ambiguous within the *Get Out*’s conclusion. We are never quite sure if, from Peele’s perspective, Chris escaped the miniature plantation to reenter the plantation of the world or if Chris liberated himself from all threats and effects of racism. In any case, Chris is a black male and like all black

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<sup>86</sup> Sarah Benesch, “Critical Media Awareness: Teaching Resistance to Interpellation,” in (*Re-*)*Locating TESOL in an Age of Empire*, ed. Julian Edge, Language and Globalization (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2006), xvi,54.

<sup>87</sup> Sarah Benesch, “Critical Media in Awareness”, (*Re-*)*Locating TESOL in an Age of Empire*, 52,53.

<sup>88</sup> Frank Wilderson, “Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?,” *Social Identities* 9, no. 2 (June 2003): 225,229, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350463032000101579>.

<sup>89</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90.

males in previously (or presently) colonized societies, the gaze(or the violence) of the colonizer also occurs within himself. Put differently, Chris has an inner-white-I(eye) that is antagonistic but inescapable/unreconciled component of his own self-perception. This inner conflict produces a vulnerability within Chris and other blacks in the film, a prerequisite for their descent into the sunken place. As Marriott described via his reading of Fanon, it is both an inward and outward racist fantasy through which blacks are interpolated. Marriott writes,

Through repeated acts of rhetorical war, the black man appears to be already at war with himself, with the imago of himself. In this estrangement of the black psyche by a fantasmatic unconscious, by a foreign body which displaces the self, the act of waging a war becomes a metaphor...for Fanon's conflictual relationship with the imago of the black"...and "his own ambivalent relationship to psychoanalysis and film."<sup>90</sup>

Robert LaRue's chapter, "Holding Onto Hulk Hogan: Contending with the Rape of the Black Male Psyche," does, however, consider the correlation between the moment of Chris's interpellation captured in Peele's film with the infamous interpellation of Fanon by a young white French boy.<sup>91</sup> Yet, for LaRue, there is a difference between the power Rose's psychiatrist mother Misty has over Chris that the French child doesn't over Fanon.<sup>92</sup> LaRue believes Misty's hypnosis fixes Chris into a position that renders him lesser than her; that is her being exceeds his own, while the French boy's demeaning remarks merely reduce Fanon's agency to that of a child or his own. Thus, For LaRue, the illustration of a adult-child relation versus a child-child one distinguishes Peele's depiction from Fanon's.<sup>93</sup> However, let's consider Fanon's "zone of non-

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<sup>90</sup> Marriott. *On Black Men*, 70.

<sup>91</sup> Robert LaRue, Edited by Dawn Keetley. *Jordan Peele's Get Out*: Ohio State University Press. 2020.174-186.

<sup>92</sup> LaRue, "Holding out on Hulk Hogan,"180.

<sup>93</sup> LaRue, "Holding out on Hulk Hogan," 180.

being” as a description of Fanon’s ontological state during his notorious encounter with the white French child on the train, rather than the experience of his psyche. This act does not merely reduce his being but completely negates it. The child’s gaze transformed Fanon into “an object among other objects,” not into a child whose being is lesser value but into nothing or nonexistence.<sup>94</sup>

Additionally, LaRue convincingly indicates that Peele’s insinuated premise of the film—“white people are abducting black people in order to ride through life in their bodies.”—appears to be more metaphorical than it truly is.<sup>95</sup> Yet, the harmony between LaRue’s work and my own is ruptured by his suggestion that Peele’s protagonist Chris somehow saves *his* consciousness and its constitutive identities by killing his girlfriend’s sadistic black body-snatching family.<sup>96</sup> Before this articulation, LaRue had identified how the black psyche is interpellated “beyond his own consciousness” simply by residing in Western civilizations.<sup>97</sup> Thus, before Chris ever meets the Armitage family and before the black man (living in a previously colonized society) encounters the gaze of a white person, he is *always already* afflicted by an inner whiteness or anti-blackness, which attacks his corporeal schema—the inescapable inner-white-I(eye). The death of the Armitages’ does not free him from the sunken place even if it allow his emancipation from the plantation. In her engagement with the everyday terror of the black experience, Saidiya Hartman problematized our conceptions of emancipation and its relation to freedom for blacks. Hartman argued, “Certainly one must contend with the enormity of

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<sup>94</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 89.

<sup>95</sup> LaRue, “Holding out on Hulk Hogan,”184.

<sup>96</sup> LaRue, “Holding out on Hulk Hogan,”184-85.

<sup>97</sup> LaRue, “Holding out on Hulk Hogan,”183.

emancipation as both a breach in slavery and a point of transition to what looks more like the reorganization of the plantation system than self-possession, citizenship, or liberty for the ‘freed.’”<sup>98</sup> Thus, although Hartman is careful not to negate the achievements of those who have fought to create space for black social life in black social death, the paradigmatic relation of Master-slaves persists nonetheless. Like the Armitage house in the film, the plantation and its physical chains were legally abolished with the Emancipation Proclamation, yet the Coagula cult and the social, political, libidinal plantation system—the ceaseless process of black fungibility and accumulation remained intact. LaRue determined that the black man's progression in America is “a phantasmagoric prestidigitation.” However, LaRue previously argued that Chris “fights to keep [his] body filled with his consciousness and his constituent identities.”<sup>99</sup> LaRue neglects to consider how his research and the film imply that Chris formed constituent identities he is trying to retain in the context of a dominant white culture. Thus, I question which aspects of those constituent identities are particularly of Chris’s essence, or “black,” for that matter?

Ryan Poll argued that *Get Out* is an example of Fred Moten’s radical black aesthetic, which disfigures afro-pessimist readings of the film's inadequacy.<sup>100</sup> Poll centered his case around *Get Out*’s theatrical ending as opposed to the original, which may be preferred from an afro-pessimist point of view. *Get Out* ends in the way its title implies, with its (black) protagonist

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<sup>98</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2022)11-12.

<sup>99</sup> LaRue, “Holding out on Hulk Hogan,” 183.

<sup>100</sup> Poll, “Can One “Get Out?,” 95.



escaping the plantation. Yet, as Hartman detailed, escaping the plantation system is something else entirely.<sup>101</sup>

Poll argued that Peele intended to combat the centrality of policing and state violence in the discourse on black oppression by depicting red and blue lights coming to Chris's rescue in the end rather than killing or imprisoning him.<sup>102</sup> However, the original ending had displayed Chris incarcerated and therefore still locked up within the inescapable "sunken palace" that is black existence in America. Thus, the alternative conclusion rings true to afro-pessimist theorizations. Peele claimed to have altered the conclusion of his film after a few unproductive test screenings with smaller audiences.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, the DVD release of *Get Out* included Peele's commentary over the original ending in which he exclaimed the growing popularity of the BLM movement led him to believe Americans were waking up to the myth of their post-racial society.<sup>104</sup> Thus, Peele became reluctant to further traumatize black characters in his film and black viewers with a reflection of their grim reality. Peele's statements imply that his decision to compromise his narrative hindered the accuracy of his conclusion. As Wilderson writes, "By acting as if the Black is present, coherent, and above all human, Black film theorists are 'allowed' to meditate on cinema only after 'consenting' to a structural adjustment."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 9–17.

<sup>102</sup> Poll, "Can One 'Get Out?'," 92.

<sup>103</sup> Yaun, Jada, and Hunter Harris, "How to Get out, the First Great Movie of the Trump Era, Got Made," Vulture, Vox Media Network, 2018. <https://www.vulture.com/article/get-out-oral-history-jordan-peeel.html>.

<sup>104</sup> *Get Out* Blu Ray DVD Commentary from Jordan Peele. "Watch Get Out | Prime Video," <https://www.amazon.com/Get-Out-Daniel-Kaluuya/dp/B06Y1FYX25>.

<sup>105</sup> Wilderson, *Red White & Black*, 2010. 38

Therefore, producing a film with a coherent narrative, let alone one of redemption for blacks, requires the perception of the Middle Passage as merely an act of forced migration and not, as Wilderson argued, a metaphysical holocaust that turned Africans into Blacks<sup>106</sup>.

Peele continued in the Blu-ray DVD commentary of the film to confess that his original ending is still true to his experience. Peele states, “My feeling is that what would happen in this movie is that Chris would end up in jail...And even though he’s in prison like many black men are unjustly in, but his soul is free.”<sup>107</sup> Peele claimed Chris freed his soul by trying to save Georgina, who, at the moment, reminded him of the traumatic experience of his mother’s death and his inability to help her. His decision to try and save Georgina allowed him to reconcile with the guilt of his past, which haunted him. However, the guilt Chris carries due to the death of his mother is not his only demon. Chris is also haunted by his inner-white I(eye). Chris ignores micro and macroaggressions from his girlfriend’s family and their friends, which spawned from a desire to be accepted. The overwhelming anxiety Chris feels about Rose’s parent’s perception of his blackness leading up to the trip to their house indicates that something else is also *eating away* at Chris. This is not to suggest that Chris’s anxieties are unwarranted, but the fact that they are justified makes the psychic haunting even more salient.

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<sup>106</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 12, 19, 25; Wilderson, *Red, White & Black*, 5.

<sup>107</sup> *Get Out* Blu Ray DVD Commentary from Jordan Peele “Watch Get Out | Prime Video,” <https://www.amazon.com/Get-Out-Daniel-Kaluuya/dp/B06Y1FYX25>.

## CODA: EYEING NOTHING AT THE WORLD'S END

In this thesis I examined Black Studies scholarship to identify the origins of black social death, uncover its continuance through technologies of social death/metaphysical instruments, and specifically, in Western cinema's horror genre. Additionally, I uncovered how the black psyche is a product of, affected by, and imitates social death's black imago.

The film *Get Out* can be viewed as a contemporary allegory for the black social death that substantiates and preserves the foundational semantic field and communal relations of the modern world. Our analysis of Peele's "sunken place" through the theoretical framework of Fanon, Marriott, Warren, among other theorists exposed that "to exist as black, is to inhabit a world of permanent 'falling,' a 'fall into nothing.'"<sup>108</sup> *Get Out* is an example of how black artists have sought to counter the fall produced by black social death through one of the very mechanism which reifies and fortifies it. Marriott reminds us, "The camera has played a key role in defining how" blacks are seen," and today, "Blacks are phantasmatic images of white desire," whose own vision or dream work, "is an eye fixed by someone else's fascinations and repulsions, a distorting emanation sent to possess, to consume us."<sup>109</sup>

Yet, this research also identified how Peele's film and seemingly his subconscious mind is affected by the inner-white-I(eye) of black social death. After *Get Out*'s release, Jordan Peele

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<sup>108</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 13; David Marriott, "Waiting to Fall," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 13, no. 3 (2013): 214; Wilderson III, "The Vengeance of Vertigo, 3; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xii, 27, 152.

<sup>109</sup> Marriott, *On Black Men*, 40–41.

published a tweet on Twitter which implied that black life is *lived* in the “sunken place.” Peele tweeted, “The sunken place means we’re marginalized. No matter how hard we scream, the system silences us.”<sup>110</sup> However, Peele’s post contradicts *Get Out*’s title and coda. Peele’s tweet complicates the potential of escape. Or, at the very least, Peele’s tweet motivates an interrogation of the slippage between emancipation and liberation. Like Fanon, Peele believes that the hypnosis has already transpired; blacks are always already in the “sunken place.” If blacks are already in the “sunken place,” Chris cannot be (re)placed there. Like Fanon, Chris’s violent revolution and awareness arrive too late for him to *think* or dream his way out.<sup>111</sup> Thus, I argue here that on the one hand, *Get Out* succeeds in constructing a narrative and characters that counter the violent normativity of whiteness and the anti-black stereotypes of Hollywood cinema. On the other hand, in a sense, Peele narratively throws a rock and hides his hand. We are left pondering whether the implicit indications of Chris as always already in the sunken place in the film, which Peele’s tweet vis-à-vis reality and the “sunken place” also implied, were misconceptions of the scenes. We do not know where Chris and Rod drive off to and what Chris’s “freedom” looks like going forward.

Ultimately, this research suggests that what’s at stake is a much broader question concerning the role and possibility of film for the project of black liberation. As a concluding meditation, it is vital to ask whether getting out is desirable—desirable in the sense that it is wanted, but more importantly, that which can be desired? For how can a thing manifest through art which is not desired?

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<sup>110</sup> Jordan Peele [@JordanPeele], Tweet, *Twitter*, March 17, 2017, <https://twitter.com/JordanPeele/status/842589407521595393>.

<sup>111</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 100.

Marriott assists our thinking through what is capable of being desired when one is possessed by the fantasies of an Other. Marriott describes the inner-white-I(eye) that complicates desire as an “unwillingly and inevitably...haunted way of seeing the world where consciousness is collected and reproduced like the movement of film through a camera's body.”<sup>112</sup> Marriott’s statement produces an image of the eyes devouring cultural impositions and reproducing them within your subconscious mind or inner film /SD card. Ultimately consumption or diet is not merely related to the nutrients individuals intake, but also the media and experiences they ingest as well, none of which are negotiable as a child, which is why Marriott is careful to label the inner-white-I(eye) as unavoidable and involuntary. As Fanon so eloquently described throughout the course of his life, the black man is injected with “extremely toxic foreign bodies” by the white world, which “casts a spell from afar.”<sup>113</sup> This invocation produces an authoritative white superego—an inner critique based on philosophies of paternal European institutions that continually lynches the black man’s ego.<sup>114</sup> As Marriott detailed “The dangerous split in the black identity between black abjection and white superegoic ideal”...“between body ego and unconscious fantasy,” is produced, sustained, and magnified by visual culture.<sup>115</sup> Thus, like Warren, we can view cinema as one of many metaphysical instruments (words, iconographies, images, and representations) applied to the perpetual African American holocaust or black social death.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 13.

<sup>113</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 19,7.

<sup>114</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 128,142.

<sup>115</sup> Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 215.

<sup>116</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 144.

It is often said that eyes are the window to the soul, but this research appears to suggest the opposite is true. If the soul is the mind or the “I,” that is what produces our vision. In his book *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippman discussed the way socio-cultural ideologies construct an individual’s visual and intuitive perception of reality, regardless of a moral or conscious opposition. Lippman stated that, “For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see ... we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.”<sup>117</sup> The “I” or the “souls” of black folks then, is in large part a product of white cultural fantasies. This perception derived from the blanchitude culture is what I mean when I say black (and white) people are inhabited by an unavoidably inner-white-I(eye).

Black art, Black consciousness, Black Dreams—the inner vision of possibility is petrified by an intruding Other that is out for blood. Marriott reflected on the nightmare of black dreams in the modern world when he proposed:

[T]hose fantasies that enter our lives so early, so uninvited, so irresistibly, so much in conflict with our pleasures and our freedoms—so relentless in our lived experience—may already be an unwitting part of that dreaming and its future provenance. If our identification with those fantasies produces a fractured doubling of self, how can we distinguish what is interposed from what is properly desired?... How, then, can we hope to dream a reprieve from the real when that real is already a part of our dreaming?<sup>118</sup>

The only solution that can be drawn from Marriott’s words for annihilating the system of social death, its black imago, and its inner- white-I(eye) is that of “self” sacrifice. For Marriott, a forgoing of the ways modern humans come to know ourselves as full selves and members of local and global communities must cease to exist. Thus, Marriott advised the extermination of all

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<sup>117</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), 81.

<sup>118</sup> Marriott, *On Black Men*, viii.

cultural-historical-social identity attributes—a black-and-white annihilation of the self. Specifically, to counteract the inner-white-I(eye), Marriott proposed that blackness must become philosophy. In other words, blacks must collectively and continually commit a racialized suicide of blackness and the white overarching structure that produces and confines it while reimagining community in a raceless future.<sup>119</sup>

Marriott's texts, like encounters with racism, continues to haunt me. As the mechanisms he identified appear to haunt the work of all black artists, theorists, and revolutionaries alike. It may be that, as Fanon argued and Wilderson stressed, the only route toward reprieve is to burn down the “big house” of the external and internal world from within it.<sup>120</sup> Then and only then might we imagine a new means of existence on the ashes of the old physical and epistemological grounds of modernity—a gaze into Warren's abyss.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> David Marriott. *Whither Fanon? Studies in the Blackness of Being*. Stanford. Stanford University Press. 2018. 318-327,361-363.

<sup>120</sup> Jared Ball, “Irreconcilable Anti-Blackness and Police Violence w Dr. Frank Wilderson,” *IMWiL!* (blog), October 1, 2014, <https://imixwhatilike.org/2014/10/01/frankwildersonandantiblackness-2/>; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 63,175,191.

<sup>121</sup> Warren, *Ontological Terror*,8.

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