

# The City As a Trap: 20th and 21st Century American Literature and the American Myth of Mobility

Andrew Joseph Hoffmann  
*Marquette University*

---

## Recommended Citation

Hoffmann, Andrew Joseph, "The City As a Trap: 20th and 21st Century American Literature and the American Myth of Mobility" (2019). *Dissertations (2009 -)*. 846.  
[https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations\\_mu/846](https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/846)

THE CITY AS A TRAP: 20<sup>TH</sup> AND 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY  
AMERICAN LITERATURE AND THE  
AMERICAN MYTH OF MOBILITY

by

Andrew Hoffmann

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,  
Marquette University,  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

May 2019

## ABSTRACT

### THE CITY AS A TRAP: 20<sup>TH</sup> AND 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE AND THE AMERICAN MYTH OF MOBILITY

Andrew Hoffmann

Marquette University, 2019

This dissertation reads twentieth and twenty-first century U.S. multicultural literatures, women's literature, and science-fiction film and literature to identify a tradition of literary representation of long-standing patterns of economic entrapment in American cities." I argue that the capitalist ideologies of opportunity and spatial, economic, and social mobility associated with American cities have been largely false promises, and that literature provides an avenue to investigate the ideological matrices and cultural narratives that American capitalism uses to situate bodies where it needs them, primarily in urban centers. I claim that this entrapment remains more or less a constant in American cities despite the fact that both capitalism and the space of the city have radically changed since the late 1930s. I further claim that the persistence of this entrapment across different instantiations of both the American city and American capitalism speak to its normalization, acceptance, and the fact of its continuing legacy. As the ideological narratives are culturally projected as ones of the promise and freedom of mobility in cities, and as the historical conditions of entrapment have proven so resilient, literature and film have constituted important tools for exposing just how these capitalist ideologies generate consent for hegemonic capitalism. The dissertation seeks to understand how a large percentage of urban populations are interpellated by the very capitalist machinery which fixes them in space and class while simultaneously denying them the benefits of American capitalism.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Andrew Hoffmann

When Neal Peart wrote in 1987 that “nothing can survive in a vacuum, no one can exist all alone,” I doubt very seriously that he had dissertation writing on his mind. And, yet it strikes me that the sentiment perfectly fits the community of friends, family, scholars, and colleagues (most of whom fit in more than one of those categories) who have made this academic journey possible.

And so, it is with great and humbling sincerity that, once again in the words of Neal Peart from 1987, that “I want to look around me now...and see more of the people and the places that surround me now.” First and foremost, I need to thank the person who surrounds me most closely. Without Nicole Mastaglio Hoffmann’s guidance, generosity, hard work, and support, I would never have been afforded the opportunity to begin this journey, let alone finish it. Thank you for everything. My sons, Noah Mastaglio and Ronald Tiberius Hoffmann, both of you provide the necessary distraction to recharge the academic batteries; thanks for all the games and thanks for all the baseball.

I also want to thank my immediate family. All my parents, but especially my mom, who supports me unflinchingly and unquestionably. My brother Tony, who is my best friend, who always listens to my ideas and allows me to call him several times daily. Kristin, Katie, Dan, and Ameer who been there for me at various times for a variety of things throughout this process, thank you.

Next, I need to thank my dissertation committee. Collectively you taught me how to write and research this kind of project. Dr. Jodi Melamed, you took me under your wing, guided me, and demonstrated the sort of academic generosity that I hope has come to influence not just the way I teach but the kind of person I am. Your expertise in critical race and ethnic studies has been invaluable to me and this project as a whole. Dr. Gerry Canavan, nobody can read and turn around a paper faster with more thoughtful comments than you can. (Where do you keep the cloned army of Gerry’s to produce so quickly?) Your office door is always open, and I believe I made a lot use of it. Thank you for being patient and always having a new idea for me. Your ability to quickly synthesize my ideas and suggest new resources was so important during this process. Dr. Leah Flack, your steadfastness, kindness, and encouragement is appreciated more than I have had a chance to let you know. And, Dr. Rebecca Nowacek (who is an honorary member of my dissertation team) thank you for always being willing to let me riff ideas, ask about kinds of writing, or just share a moment in which I could reconcile the pressures of being an academic and a parent. All of you have meant the world to me.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues both inside Marquette University and without. Each of you has been a sometimes reader, a sometimes soundboard, a sometimes laugh riot, a sometimes research partner, but always a comrade in arms. In no particular order: Greg Luedtke, Sam Zajac, J.T. Lorino, Sareene Proodian, Carol Trecek, Heather James, Elizabeth Gibbs, Taylor McNeir, Dr. John Curran, Dr. Heather Hathaway, Dr. Cedric Burrows, Adam Lownik, Justice Hagan, Brian Kenna,

Anna Scanlon, Letha Miles-Edmondson, Mary Frenn, Molly Larkin, Rose Trupiano, Tara Bailargeon, Kathryn Hendrickson, John Brick, and Wendy Walsh. We did it!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	i
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION: THE URBAN DIALECT: IDEOLOGIES OF OPPORTUNITY AND NARRATIVES OF CRIME .....	1
II. THE ROLE OF WORK IN <i>NATIVE SON</i> AND <i>THE STREET</i> : URBAN ENTRAPMENT AND THE IDEOLOGY OF WORK .....	20
Richard Wright, Communism, and the Ideology of Urban Labor.	24
The Perception of Work as Opportunity in <i>Native Son</i> .....	33
Family, Consumerism, and (R)entrapment.....	42
The Perception of Proper Space .....	46
Ann Petry .....	55
The Perception of Work as Opportunity in <i>The Street</i> .....	57
Family, Consumerism, and (R)entrapment in <i>The Street</i> .....	60
The Perception of Proper Space in <i>The Street</i> .....	64
Policing Ideology and Death or Exile: Entrapment by Any Other Name .....	67
III. THE CITY IN CRISIS: RACE, CRIME, AND MASS INCARCERATION IN JOHN CARPENTER'S <i>ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK</i> AND RICHARD FLEISCHER'S <i>SOYLENT GREEN</i> .....	77
The Perception of Crime in New York City .....	80
<i>No Escape From New York</i> .....	89
The Racial Hierarchy of the New York Maximum Security Prison ..	92
The New York State Maximum Security Penitentiary: A Capital Solution .....	99
<i>Soylent Green</i> .....	104

<i>Soylent Green's</i> Women: A Slave by Any Other Name .....	111
IV. INSIDE THE GATES: POWER, ORDER, AND DISTOPYIAN SUBRUBS IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S <i>PARABLE OF THE SOWER</i> AND MARGARET ATWOOD'S <i>ORYX AND CRAKE</i> .....	115
<i>Parable of the Sower</i> and the Dystopian Suburb .....	121
The Irony of Hyper-Empathy and the Rhetoric of Value .....	125
Acorn the Gated Commune or Robledo Redux .....	131
<i>Oryx and Crake</i> and the Dystopian Suburb .....	135
Capitalism at the Expense of the City in <i>Oryx and Crake</i> .....	140
White Privilege, Drugs, Pornography, and Gaming in Suburbia ....	144
Dystopian Policing .....	149
V. URBAN GENTRIFICATION AND THE NEOLIBERAL TRAP IN ERNESTO QUIÑONEZ'S <i>CHANGO'S FIRE</i> AND MAT JOHNSON'S <i>HUNTING IN HARLEM</i> .....	156
<i>Chango's Fire</i> and the Exploitation of Labor in a Changing Neighborhood .....	163
Julio's Building: A Microcosm of Gentrification .....	167
Arson, Planned Shrinkage, and Julio's Side Job .....	174
<i>Hunting in Harlem</i> : Displacement, Death, Du Bois, and the Terrible Tenth .....	180
Piper Goines and the Problem of the Black Petty Bourgeois .....	184
VI. BIBLIOGRPHY .....	195

## **Introduction: The Urban Dialectic: Ideologies of Opportunity and Narratives of Crime**

Cities are often spoken about in anthropomorphic metaphors; they are said to have a pulse, to live, to breathe, to kill, and to consume. Although the list could go on, I choose these verbs in an effort to help define the city as a place of paradox, as a place that exists in a liminal space between survival and death. The American city in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century is and has been a place in which residents live their lives, seek their fortunes, find their happiness, or experience the opposite, death, entrapment, and poverty.

American urban residents and modern consumers of American media are told that the city is alternately deadly and dangerous, that it is full of opportunity and life, that it is a place of malaise, a place of intense action and importance, a place of political corruption, or a shining beacon on a hill. These paradoxical urban representations create a space for analysis, because official urban narratives of freedom and opportunity often give way to other narratives that portray the city as crime-ridden and dangerous. What exists in between is often ignored, and what literature can offer here is a representation, that although fictionalized, cuts through dominant capitalist ideologies of opportunity and narratives of urban crime and presents a sometimes truer picture of how some urban citizens (particularly minorities) find themselves unable to take advantage of the supposed ubiquitous opportunities afforded by American capitalism.

This dissertation engages with what I consider to be one of the most dangerous paradoxes to be found in American urban spaces. Of the many narratives associated with American cities in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, two stand out; narratives of opportunity and narratives of crime. I describe the official narrative of cities (that is,

narratives offered by city officials) as ones that participate, encourage, and normalize capitalist ideologies of hard work, responsibility, and opportunity. These types of ideologies are part of the marketing strategy for attracting businesses and people in order to foster growth, increase tax revenue, and ultimately allow for politicians to be re-elected. Thus, we have Baltimore, “America’s Comeback City,” New York, “Empire City,” Cleveland, “The Best Location in the Nation,” and Milwaukee, “A Great Place by a Great Lake.” The official narratives of these cities and most American cities in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are ones which project flourishing economies, opportunity, and beauty.

And, while these official narratives remain static and consistently pair with capitalist ideologies other urban narratives arise and interrupt in order to adjust to the needs of capital.

When the city becomes too expensive for business or investment, when municipal unions exercise their power, or even when urban space is at a premium, capital might find a need to move itself to a location where investment can be maximized. Such was the case in New York in the 1970s where capital disinvestment and relocation to suburban areas occurred after a sustained narrative of urban crime. In his foundational book on neoliberal economics, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, economist David Harvey calls this period in New York’s history an “iconic case” of the fight between “capital accumulation and class power” (44). He notes that:

“capitalist restructuring and deindustrialization had for several years been eroding the economic base of the city, and rapid suburbanization had left much of the city impoverished. The result was explosive unrest on the part of marginalized people during the 1960s, defining what came to be known as ‘the urban crisis’ (similar problems emerged in many US cities)” (45).

The unrest that Harvey is referring to was in large part the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Peaceful protests such as sit-ins, marches, boycotts, and rent strikes were popularly interpreted as narratives of crime perpetrated by, according to historian Joanne Reitano, “communists, criminals, wild teenagers, and new migrants from the south” (168). This process of narrativizing legitimate (and mostly peaceful) protests as the work of outside criminals and inside malcontents lent itself to the idea that the inner city was rapidly transforming into an irredeemable war zone, more resembling “the bombed-out cities of post war Germany than the traditional beautiful brownstones and bodegas that New York had come to recognize (Cannato 128). Thus, just as the suburbs were “opened” at great profit to capitalists, the city is being described as a slum, and urban inhabitants are being described as criminals and savages.

This dissertation reads both the ideologies of opportunity in the city as false promises and narratives of crime as false narratives created by capital in order to control the spatial, economic, and social mobility of urban residents. I argue that the false promises generated by capitalist ideologies are exposed by the alternative narratives provided by authors and filmmakers of the twentieth and twenty-first century. I analyze a long movement in twentieth and twenty-first century literature and film that seeks to unmask the containment logic that exists behind the urban ideological mask of opportunity and criminal narratives. I further argue that literary and filmic representations of American urban centers, New York and Chicago in particular, provide an avenue to investigate the ideological matrices and cultural narratives that American capitalism uses to situate bodies where it needs them. This happens in several ways; I trace several instances in this dissertation of American capitalism leveraging urban

narratives to situate people. For example, to abandon minority and poor people in cities while simultaneously opening the suburbs as happened in the 1970's, in New York, or forcing Black people to work in neighborhoods they are not allowed to live in as happened in the 1930s and 1940s in New York and Chicago. I argue this is a form of economic and spatial entrapment, and more than that, it also traps them ideologically to believe in capitalist ideologies that cannot serve to lift them socially or economically. I claim this entrapment is more or less a constant in these cities despite the fact that both capitalism and the city have radically changed since the late 1930s. I further make the argument that this ideological entrapment across different instantiations of the both the American city and American capitalism speak to its normalization and acceptance. In order to make these arguments I examine the literature and films by a diverse set of creative artists including Ricard Wright, Ann Petry, Margaret Atwood, Octavia Butler, Ernesto Quiñonez, Mat Johnson, John Carpenter, and Richard Fleischman.

Because this dissertation focuses on works of literature and film, it must, and does participate in a long tradition of urban literary criticism. Beginning in the modern period, though not exclusively belonging to it, authors of literature increasingly represented the city a place of alienation. Some authors attempted to employ “the power of art to save us from the deadening features of everyday life, especially the desensitizing elements in urban industrial society...” (Lauter 888). The result of this artistic focus on the city as a prevalent site of burgeoning consciousness led some critics to analyze how the city was being represented and imagined by authors. Richard Lehman, in *The City in Literature* for example offers us a broad interpretive reading of both American and European literature culminating in the late modern period in an effort to understand how authors

thought of the American city, and ultimately suggested that “as the city became more materialistic, it engendered a hostility in the literary imagination—a hostility that went hand in hand with a distrust of Enlightenment values. From Ralph Waldo Emerson to Ralph Waldo Ellison, writers have depicted the material city cut off from a spiritual energy” (5). Carlo Rotella in *October Cities* looks at the time period following Lehman’s study, 1949-1960s, but rather than focus on how cities are represented, he instead suggests that authors are having difficulty representing a rapidly changing urban landscape. Though his study is focused on the more formal elements of the novels discussed, Rotella notes that as “the new social landscape took recognizable form, the standard representational habits and divisions of intellectual labor shaped to the task of representing the industrial city increasingly seemed inadequate to represent the transformed metropolis—especially it’s suddenly unfamiliar inner city” (7). This dissertation discusses literature from these time periods but does not limit its scope to only these periods. This dissertation agrees with Lehman’s increasingly pessimistic view through readings of Ann Petry’s *The Street* and Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (and also in works by Butler, Atwood, Quiñonez, and Johnson), but rather than accept the idea that authors are unable to imagine the city instead suggests that speculative films of the period studied by Rotella, such as John Carpenter’s *Escape From New York* and Richard Fleischer’s *Soylent Green* offer an alternative to existing dominant urban narratives and as such their formal choices are carefully chosen representations of American cities of the 1960s and 1970s.

And although other studies of urban American literature also focus on specific time periods, the main thrust of the study need not be temporal, it may be focused on

racial and ethnic studies or it may, for example, challenge a specific theoretical framework of literary studies. And yet, all of these studies are linked by their focus on the American city. For example, Yoshinbu Hakutani's and Robert Butler's 1995 collection of essays "The City in African-American Literature" seeks to redress the assertion by Historian and Philosopher Morton and Lucia White that there has been an "anti-urban roar" in "our national literary pantheon" (9), by suggesting "a substantial reversal of this anti-urban drive in American literature may be found in African-American writing..." (9). In an effort to accomplish this, in part, Richard Wright scholar Hakutani himself makes the claim (one I disagree with in Chapter one) that "Bigger Thomas of *Native Son*, buttressed by Wright's own experience in Chicago, is depicted as a hero able to transcend these obstacles of city life and gain self-confidence... (57). Of course, not all studies of literary criticism find such favorable representations of the city. For example, Tyrone R. Simpson II's *Ghetto Images in Twentieth-Century American Literature* (2004) makes the case by literary analysis that "the state's restructuring of rustbelt cities in the mid-twentieth century created racialized zones that through uneven financial investment ratified the idea that blackness was a miserable social condition that lacked value (7). Simpson reads literature about the city, and then reads the city in an effort to show a long-standing program of devaluing American cities and by extension the minority residents who live there. This methodology is also employed by James Kyung-Jin Lee in his 2004 *Urban Triage: Race and the Fictions of Multiculturalism*, which focuses on literature of the 1980s and 1990s to claim that liberal multiculturalism as a theoretical framework was meant to generate equality but had an opposite effect in American urban spaces during this time period. He writes:

The fantasy of multiculturalism's practitioners depends on this parallel movement of more equitable representation and resources: to win the hearts and minds in the space of our imagined communities, to gain the bread and land for those living in the landscapes of our real neighborhoods. This book contends, however, that this recent history of multiculturalism and those who have written literature in its era have noticed and altogether different movement, one in which the work of representing race differently, the work of crossing lines, has not resulted in the work of redistributing resources. In many ways, it has not helped break down walls, but has instead built them higher (xiv).

Like both Simpson and Lee, I employ of the methodology of reading literature in order to read the city, in an effort to expose the racialized incongruity between the promise of equality and equal opportunity for minority urban residents in American cities. But whereas Lee focuses the two decades of liberal multiculturalism's dominance and failure to redress equality and equal opportunity, and whereas Simpson focuses on a similar time frame as this project to demonstrate that "marginal urban spaces in the U.S. rustbelt [act] as sites of symbolic if not literal blackening..." (6), this project joins and expands these studies by examining the ways in which authors challenge accepted urban ideologies of opportunity and narratives of crime in order to demonstrate the ways in which racial subjugation is enacted and disguised in American cities.

In order to accomplish this, this dissertation focuses on the relationship between American capitalism and American cities in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century and proceeds from two important premises. 1. That American cities align themselves with capitalist ideologies in order to survive economically, and 2. that American capitalism is fundamentally racialized. Our contemporary understanding of racial capitalism is perhaps best summarized by Professor of American Literature and Africana studies Jodi Melamed who quotes political theorist Cedric Robinson. She writes:

“The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material

force...racism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism.' Capital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups...antinomies of accumulation require loss, disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value, and racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires" (77).

Thus, if the advent of American capitalism was based on the inequalities inherent in (and profits made from) debt peonage and chattel slavery, and social ideology followed the same inherent inequalities, American capitalism is founded on, and carries with it, a legacy of racialized privilege. Based on the high percentage of minorities living in twentieth and twenty-first century American cities, these urban areas are the crucibles in which racialized capitalism is largely experienced.

It is important for this dissertation to remember that the early industrial American city was often thought of as one of capital progress, indeed, one tied to capitalism, and marketed as a space of interlocking opportunity, technology, and mobility. It was the promise of this advanced cultural and economic opportunity that lured black southerners to Northern American industrial cities in the 1920s and 1930s. Sociologists and anthropologists St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Clayton noted that black "southern migrants reacted enthusiastically to the economic opportunities and freer atmosphere of the North" (73) and that in the years between 1920 and 1944 the population of black people in Chicago more than tripled from 109,458 to approximately 337,000 (8).

Historian James N. Gregory notes in *The Southern Diaspora* that the "North as 'Promised Land' was one of the oldest themes in black culture," and that black newspaper man Robert Abbot of Chicago's *The Defender* pitched Chicago to black southerners as the land of hope and deliverance, not from slavery, but from abuse and poverty, not from Ole Massa but from Jim Crow. Chicago's promise was jobs, dignity, and...excitement (52).

Richard Wright himself, in *12 Million Black Voices*, details these promises. He describes the Bosses of the Buildings, his name for city capitalists (as opposed to the Lords of the Land, the name he reserves for southern agrarian employers), as sending:

men with fair words down from the North, telling us how much money we can make digging in the mines, smelting ore, laying rails, and killing hogs. They tell us that we will live in brick buildings, that we will vote, that we will be able to send our children to school for nine months of the year, that if we get into trouble we will not be lynched, and that we will not have to grin, doff our hats, bend our knees, slap our thighs, dance, and laugh when we see a white face... (86-87).

This narrative served to help create a belief that the city was a place of opportunity, equality, and social mobility, created by successful capitalist enterprises. It served to entice some million plus southerners to relocate to northern industrial cities under the promise of good jobs at good wages accompanied by good clean housing.

But the reality was that for many of the black people that migrated to northern industrial cities in hopes of realizing the promise of opportunity was a situation that more closely mirrored resembled the tight and poor cramped quarters and underpaid jobs they were attempting to escape from. Richard Wright makes the claim that jobs were awarded to people based upon a racial hierarchy that privileged white urban dwellers. He writes in *12 Million Black Voices*:

The gigantic American companies will not employ our daughters in their offices as clerks, bookkeepers, or stenographers; huge department stores will not employ our young women, fresh from school, as saleswomen. The engineering, aviation, mechanical, and chemical schools close their doors to our sons, just as the great corporation which makes thousands of commodities refuse to employ them. The Bosses of the Building decree that we must be maids, porters, janitors, cooks, and general servants (102-103).

Not only was there employment discrimination facing southern out-migrants, many of them were also railroaded into living in tight cramped kitchenettes in small sections of the city. Perhaps the most famous of these neighborhoods was “The Black Belt” in

Chicago in the 1920s-1940s. Reporting on the population density of the Black Belt during a 1944 conference on race relations “the Chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority stated of the Black Belt that ‘In 1939 there was an excess population of 87,300 persons, measured by citywide standards of density. Since then an estimated 60,000 or more persons have moved into the area to accentuate an already bad condition’” (Drake and Clayton 201). Critical geographer and professor of Black Cultural Studies Rashad Shabazz likens the cramped living and kitchenettes to an “articulation of carceral power...expressed in the geography of the spaces themselves” (33). He examines the negative impact of this sort of entrapment on the identity formation of black masculinity that was “an assault on black dignity and a physical reminder of the containment...”(33).

Thus, Chapter One of this dissertation, “The Role of Work in Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and Ann Petry’s *The Street*: Urban Entrapment and the Ideology of Work,” focuses on two novels from the early 1940s, both of which provide an alternative narrative to the popular urban ideologies of opportunity, social mobility, and physical mobility, Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) and Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946). I suggest that in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s ideologies of hard work, perseverance, integrity, and dedication inform the popular belief in that capitalism provides the avenue to create upwardly mobile lifestyles regardless of mitigating factors such as race, education, or beginning financial status. Both of these novels provide an alternative narrative which suggests the urban capitalist system at work in Chicago and New York in the 1940s sets limits on the mobility of laboring black people. I read them as a black critique of socio-economic oppression, that demonstrates participation in the capitalist system serves to economically and spatially entrap black participants. I analyze both

novels in order to make the argument that ideologies of opportunity, hard work, and progress can actually serve to normalize a capitalist system that limits physical and economic mobility along racial lines. Both Bigger Thomas and Lutie Johnson are hailed to participate in a capitalist system that ultimately forces them into the entrapment of prison or exile. In this chapter I claim the very attempt by Bigger and Lutie attempt to participate in the work force brings them into irredeemable conflict with the very system supposedly designed to free them economically, socially, and physically, generating their entrapment rather than guaranteeing their freedom and mobility. By analyzing the representation of Bigger's and Lutie's downfall this chapter I argue that these novels work to demystify and unmask the narrative of opportunity and show it instead to be a method of entrapment.

If Chicago and New York were being sold as places of opportunity and social equality in the by black newspapers in the 1920s, something very different was taking place in New York in the 1960s and 1970s. Historian Vincent J. Cannato describes the situation quite simply as “the decline of the city and the crisis of liberalism” (ix). As the suburbs began “opening” in earnest in the 1950s, the New York, and other cities experienced what has now come to be known as both white and capital flight. These phenomena combined with the concomitant joblessness, defunding of city services due to a decreased tax base, and an ineffectual history of dealing with racism, social oppression, and white supremacy all helped foment what Historian Mark Newman calls the “pre-eminent social movement of the twentieth century, the civil rights movement” (1). Without going into too much detail about the history of the civil rights movement itself, it is important for this dissertation to remember that there are at least two competing narratives at

work when interpreting the collective actions used to fight for equal rights. One can either read the actions as righteous and just protests for long denied social equality, or one might read them as negatively as was often done by the press and by authorities sent to control the protests. Historian Steven M. Gillon reminds us that:

Television coverage of the Detroit riot frightened the nation. ‘Since Sunday morning, mobs of angry Negroes have paralyzed the city, spreading fire and destruction through large areas,’ reported David Brinkley, the popular anchor of NBC’s *Huntley Brinkley Report*. “The turmoil has forced business to a standstill. Chrysler and General Motors have suspended production of new cars.’ . . . Republican Governor George Romney spoke directly to the camera, complaining about ‘uncontrollable arson, looting, and the threat to human life by snipers’ in the city” (4).

This sort of reporting is important because it describes, in part, the contemporary narrative super-imposed on the fight for freedom and equality. Note the tone Brinkley takes in this quote; When he blames black people for the suspension automotive production, he puts the onus on black people themselves rather than companies with histories of employment discrimination. He ignores the systemic ways in which black people had been systemically oppressed and excluded from participating in the capital system which as noted earlier is supposed to lift all boats, and instead abandoned the city with government assistance to relocate jobs to the nearly all white suburbs.

And, even more important to this dissertation, is the way the narrative of New York changed at this moment in history. Rather than being a place of opportunity, the popular narrative became one of intense danger, drug use, crime, and rampant violence. Earlier in this introduction I quoted Geographer David Harvey to show the explicit connection he draws between capitalism and the narrative that helped to define the city as a space of dangerous criminality. Harvey notes that the rise of neoliberalism in the 1960s and 1970s that arose from a sustained effort to hollow out the city by reducing the

power of unions, rolling back welfare assistance, and that “the role of government was to create a good business climate rather than look to the needs and well-being of the population at large (48). The ultimate effect of this capital restructuring was that “working-class and ethnic-immigrant New York was thrust back into the shadows, to be ravaged by racism and a crack cocaine epidemic of epic proportions in the 1980s that left many young people either dead, incarcerated, or homeless...” (47). Harvey remediates an incomplete analysis of a narrative of crime in New York City that became popularly ingrained during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s and implicating the American capitalist system.

Chapter Two, *The City in Crisis: Race, Crime, and Mass Incarceration in John Carpenter’s *Escape From New York* and Richard Fleischer’s *Soylent Green*,*” of this dissertation, looks at two filmic narratives of the period that represent New York City as a deathtrap of crime and illicit behavior and analyzes the racial and gendered hierarchy they portray. By analyzing John Carpenter’s *Escape From New York* (1981), and Richard Fleischer’s *Soylent Green* (1973), this dissertation explores the ways in which a narrative of crime was super-imposed on the civil rights movement, marking out New York City as ground zero in the effort, concomitant with its increasing abandonment by capital, to rebrand urban space as an unrecoverable jungle and its black inhabitants as irredeemably reprobate. This chapter analyzes both films to make the argument that just as the popular narrative of New York came to resemble one of complete spatial immobility, embodied in both films by a hyper and an increasingly militarized police force, the residents of New York city were simultaneously experiencing severe

persecution as Governor Rockefeller instituted mandatory sentencing laws in 1973 which were disproportionately applied to black urban inhabitants.

Chapter Three, “Inside the Gates: Power, Order, and Dystopian Suburbs in Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*,” continues this trajectory, but rather than focus on analyzing the city left behind by the suburban movement, instead focuses on the how the suburb views the city in light of that urban abandonment, and how the suburb has been positioned both politically and economically as a bastion of defense against the urban blight by being walled off from that which it had a hand in creating. When Robert Frost wrote in 1914 in “Mending Wall,” that “good fences make good neighbors” (47), he was writing from the perspective of a character with the inability to recognize that community and neighborliness was of value. The speaker of the poem takes quite a different perspective, claiming understanding of one’s neighbors and empathy is the key to community, saying “Before I built a wall I’d ask to know/ what I was walling in or walling out,/ And to whom I was like to give offence” (48). The poem, powerful as it is, seems almost quaint one-hundred years later given the number of gated communities that have proliferated in the just the last forty years. Professors of city and regional planning Edward Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder note that in the years between 1970 (the advent of the urban crisis) and 1997, the number of gated communities in America rose from approximately 2,500 to approximately 20,000 (7), with the number still increasing.

And, maybe presciently Robert Frost understood that creating walls and the isolation it entails would come to be a societal problem. Anthropologist Setha Low reminds us that “Gated residential communities...intensify social segregation, racism,

and exclusionary land use practices already in place in most the United States...” (11). She notes further that living in gated communities “temporarily suppresses and masks, even denies and fuses, the inherent anxieties and conflicting social values of modern urban and suburban life... Thus, residents cite their ‘need’ for gated communities to provide a safe and secure home in the face of a lack of other societal alternatives” (11). Gated communities are characterized and organized around creating a sense of security for the residents, and therefore isolation from the supposed outside problems of urban areas. Blakely and Snyder describe the gated community as “residential areas with restricted access in which normally public spaces are privatized. They are security developments with designated parameters, usually walls or fences, and controlled entrances that are intended to prevent penetration by non-residents (2). They function because the housed population can afford to build and maintain the property, pay and arm the security forces that patrol them, and even invest in entertainment outlets within them. Thus, just as capitalism played a role in creating suburbia at the expense of the city in American in the 1950s and beyond, the gated community continues capitalism’s role in isolating the elite from the so-called dangerous urban elements, thereby perpetuating a narrative of urban crime.

Chapter Three analyzes Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* with an eye to explore the alternative narrative provided by these authors that the security of the gated community is either insufficient to ward off urban problems or more problematically forces a surrender of individual freedom and rights to the corporations that run the company towns depicted in both novels. Whereas Octavia Butler’s gated community Robledo is overrun by a starving and impoverished

population, Atwood's company town is undermined from within by its most important employee. In either case, defensive funding by capital in the form of a logic of fortress building is unable to protect the isolated suburb from the urban. Furthermore, I contend that capital flight, as depicted in Atwood's novel, depicts a new set of economic and physical restrictions for poor and abandoned urbanites as the city is figured as a space of wildness and the suburbs is figured as the metropole. I make the argument this representation helps reinforce an ideological imperative which rhetorically figures urban minorities as savages inhabiting the wilderness, a position which makes it impossible to access the capitalist system as an avenue for social mobility. This chapter also continues the work began in chapter two suggesting that the devalorization of some American cities beginning in the 1960's and continuing on is paving the way for a recolonization of the rhetorical wilderness (that is the city, in this case New York in chapter 4) by very capitalist structures that abandoned the city in the first place which now see it as a place of (re)investment.

The previous three chapters have begun the work of using literature to recognize that dominant urban narratives, ones of opportunity (the 1920s-1940s) and ones of crime (beginning largely in the 1960s and continuing to the present time) are used to disguise racial violence. Chapter four looks at two contemporary novels that deal with the reinvestment of the urban environment after the city has been hollowed out and devalorized following an extensive period of suburbanization and the decentralization of capital to the suburbs. This reinvestment process, commonly known as gentrification is partially defined by critical geographer Neil Smith as "private and public investment of capital in certain land uses, its devaluation through use and disinvestment, and the

resulting opportunity for profitable reinvestment that is thereby created” (Gentrification and the City 4). While Smith’s definition is an economic one that largely ignores the classed and racial implications of gentrification, American studies professor Gina M. Perez in her book on the transformation of Chicago’s Northwest side offers one that is much more critical:

Gentrification is one example of how the pursuit of greater exchange value disrupts life in poor communities. The term refers to an economic and social process whereby private capital (real estate firms, developers) and individual homeowners and renters reinvest in fiscally neglected neighborhoods through housing rehabilitation, loft conversions, and the construction of new housing stock...gentrification is a gradual process, occurring one building or block at a time, slowly reconfiguring the neighborhood landscape of consumption and residence by displacing poor and working-class residents unable to afford to live in the ‘revitalized’ neighborhoods with rising rents, property taxes, and new businesses catering to an upscale clientele” (139).

And, it is important to consider the displacement of poor and minorities from these newly “fixed” up neighborhoods, because the dominant ideologies connected with gentrification are ones of progress, intrepidity, and bravery, often times ignoring the displaced.

Ernesto Quiñonez and Mat Johnson, in their respective novels *Chango’s Fire* and *Hunting in Harlem* confront the ideologies of progress and pioneering by focusing their novels on the those violently displaced by the so-called economic progress that is transforming their neighborhoods. Chapter Four makes the claim that gentrification ideology in New York in the 21<sup>st</sup> century operates as an urban extension of frontier ideology, and that in the absence of any discernible western frontier available for economic exploitation, a new rhetorical wilderness has been created in urban centers in order to generate a devalued space that can be remade and revalued by the neoliberal capitalist class. Geographers Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin Wyly make the claim that “gentrification is the leading edge of neoliberal urbanism (xvii). What this means, is

that those displaced can be seen as disposable in the sense that their inability to participate in the capitalist system sufficiently enough to be able to live in a transformed neighborhood means they are not worthy of that neighborhood. The displacement, then, under neoliberal capitalism is the fault of the displaced, not the new “gentry.” This chapter argues that by providing alternative gentrification narratives to dominant one of progressive neighborhood renaissance we can better understand that gentrification can represent yet another wave of relocating poor people and minorities in accordance with neoliberal principles of individuality and property ownership, similar to what was described in Chapters Two and Three when the city was hollowed out and the suburbs were opened.

Collectively, these chapters offer a long view of New York and Chicago as type cases that serve to help understand the ways in which literary representations of alternative urban narratives can help us understand the ways in which official and popular urban narratives can change to benefit capital. The cyclical process of valuation and devaluation presented here employs literary interpretation to challenge the dominant narratives that capitalism uses to move bodies around in urban places in order to create opportunities, not for the population at large, but for capital itself to accumulate. The authors and filmmakers this project engages with all at specific moments contemporary to the dates of their publication offer alternative narratives to popular understandings of cities as either ones of opportunity or ones of crime and danger in an attempt to provide a glimpse behind the curtain, and the analysis offered here claims that American capitalism is sponsored by a socio-political system that enacts racial violence whether or not the narrative is designed to disguise racialized violence (narratives of opportunity and

gentrification) or to actively encourage racialized state violence (narratives of crime and the need for militarized policing). Thus, ultimately this dissertation makes the claim that reading 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century American Literature and film can help us understand the ways in which capitalist ideologies about American cities (New York in particular) have normalized racialized and classed violence since the great Migration and continuing to the present period.

## **The Role of Work in *Native Son* and *The Street*: Urban Entrapment and the Ideology of Work**

On July 5, 1935 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed The National Labor Relations Act into law. This marked an occasion, nearly unique in American congressional history, in which the rights and well-being of the working class took center stage politically. This landmark legislation passed during the middle of the Great Depression, an economic crisis generally understood to have been brought about the unequal distribution of industrial profits which did not afford workers enough money to buy goods from the market. The resultant overproduction and market overstock reduced profit and ultimately lead directly to the Great Depression which lasted more than a decade. Senator Robert Wagner when speaking of the intended bill commented that its purpose was nothing less than to “strive to liberate the common man from destitution, from insecurity, and from human exploitation (Silverberg 14). Thus we can read the passage of the National Labor Relations Act as a cultural moment when Senator Wagner and the majority of Congress who voted in its favor understood that given the current condition of labor exploitation workers could not achieve any real measure of social advancement. The exigency for the act was to try and accomplish a more equitable economic distribution through collective bargaining and union protection thereby increasing stability for the economy as a whole. Popular American authors of the time such as Richard Wright and Ann Petry wrote of the disjuncture between this promise and the material conditions for those unable to access protected work.

Aside from the artistic response, there was also, of course, institutional opposition to the National Labor Relations Act. The NLRA, in essence, “was to protect the rights of

the employees, support collective bargaining, and put an end to the abusive practices of anti-union employers. The NLRA applied to all employers participating in interstate commerce, with the exception of the government, agricultural employers, and the railroad and airline industries” (National Labor Relations Act, 2016). Senator Wagner and the members of congress who voted in favor of the act were addressing a system of labor exploitation in which the rights of the many blue-collar workers were eclipsed by the few who owned businesses or corporations. The answer, as Congress saw it was by “encouraging the practice and procedure of collective bargaining and by protecting the exercise by workers of full freedom of association, self-organization, and designation of representatives of their own choosing, for the purpose of negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment or other mutual aid or protection” (National Labor Relations Board, 2016). According to Leon Keyserling, secretary to Senator Wagner and later General Counsel to the National Housing Agency, “the high-minded and ‘non-partisan’ opposition to the bill, paced by the *New York Times*, claimed that he proposal was ‘one-sided’ because it protected certain rights of employees without imposing obligation on them and without defining any rights of employers” (Silverberg 23). But that, was, of course the purpose of the bill, “to protect the interest of only one group, to wit labor” (Silverberg 68). It was a progressive bill, designed not only to raise the life chances of the white working class, but it was also an attempt to be a racially sensitive bill. The NLRB “declared that it will not certify a union, or will revoke its certification, if it should discriminate in representing its constituency on grounds of race. Nor will it permit the discharge of a Negro under a union contract if the union bars Negroes from membership” (Silverberg 96).

Ten years later, reflecting on the efficacy of the bill and the good of full-time employment, Senator Wagner made clear his view on the ideology of work. He wrote: “It will bring, also, all the good things that jobs involve—expanding markets for the products of agriculture and industry; stable legitimate profits for those who invest; more leisure to contemplate the finer things of life; and more resources available for devotion to better education, better housing, better health and better social security” (Silverberg 1). Under this rubric the benefits of work are experienced by both the capitalist and the laborer alike, but while the benefits for the capitalist is described as profit, the benefits for the workers are described as improvements in the condition of every-day living. Louis Silverberg, Director of Information of the NLRB wrote in 1945 that the National Labor Relations Act guaranteed “that many thousands of workers enjoy[ed] a vastly wider opportunity for self-development and expression than ever before was open to them” (Silverberg 88). Senator Wagner’s idea here seems to be that the worker should be able to leverage their labor into a steady and stable program of social advancement. Work, in this way, is to be understood as liberating; a freeing of the worker to take advantage in an ever increasing way of societal amenities, and to have more free time.

It should be noted, however, that the NLRA specifically afforded protections for the rights of collective bargaining. In other words, workers, by banding together, workers were supposed to be able to stake out a position in battling their own exploitation. Those who worked in smaller industries, or for private people were, in large part, unable to take advantage of the protections offered by the NLRA. So, while the organized worker generally recognized an improvement in standard of living and life opportunities, the unorganized worker did not. Congress did not contemporaneously, for

unorganized workers, increase the minimum wage, regulate the amount of hours someone could be forced to work, guarantee overtime, or otherwise ensure any of those protections that unionized workers could bargain for. Furthermore, while the NLRB's official position was one of racial progressivism, there was little it could do if a union was not filing actions with it, and could do nothing whatsoever to employers who discriminated against minorities. Historians Robin E.G. Kelley and Earl Lewis remind us that discrimination persisted during this period. They maintain that in northern industrial cities "employers maintained their views that African Americans were fit only for dirty, unpleasant, low paying, and heavy work," and "twenty-four unions, ten of them affiliates of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), barred blacks completely and others practiced other forms of discrimination and exclusion" (412). Historian Sean Dennis Cashman is certainly right to note that there was a resurgent optimism in the labor movement and that it was generated by the political will embodied in New Deal legislation such as the NLRA (231), but it appears that these new working class ideologies of uplift contradict the lived experience of African Americans who either could not find employment or were unable to access the protection of unionized work. Richard Wright and Ann Petry were concerned with representing those workers left behind by new ideologies of work as social uplift.

This chapter sets out to analyze how ideologies of work associated primarily with unionized jobs (i.e. social uplift) contradict the material experience of those workers forced to sell their wages in unprotected labor situations, particularly black domestic laborers. I focus particularly on Chicago and New York during the high point of industrial labor, and particularly on the African American community who, in large part,

could not access unionized work. Whereas new ideologies of work arising from New Deal legislation translated into an uplifting optimism regarding white unionized labor, I argue that the material condition of Black people unable to gain unionized protection experienced a condition of entrapment in these American cities, a situation which is testified to by important African American authors such as Richard Wright and Anne Petry. Cities like Chicago and New York saw a massive influx of black people migrating from the rural South in the 1920s and 1930s in search of opportunities for work and the expectation that social uplift, greater freedom, and more equal rights would follow. Richard Wright and Ann Petry were concerned about work and the kinds of possibly generated by it. They also recognized that ironically, economic and social entrapment entails a certain amount of spatial movement self-interpellated as free, but which is, in reality, compulsory. Both created characters who were either migrants themselves or were forced by their situation to flee/migrate to another city in which they become trapped, oppressed, or controlled. Bigger Thomas was a migrant to Chicago, and Lutie Johnson was first a sort of migrant worker in that she traveled to Connecticut from New York City in order to be a house nanny and then again when she has to flee New York for Chicago, a place that “would swallow her up” (434). I argue that these authors recognize a disjuncture between the culturally recognized narrative of work associated with New Deal initiatives as a means of social uplift and greater freedom, and instead represent the unprotected work by Black people in New York and Chicago in the 1930s and 1940s as a means of oppression and physical and social entrapment.

***Richard Wright, Communism, and the Ideology of Urban Labor***

While it is perhaps true that the fundamental goals of the American Communist Party did not directly align perfectly with some of the challenges associated with racism in the 1930s and 1940s, they were nevertheless thinking about race and trying to recruit black members to their cause<sup>1</sup>. We are reminded by Cedric Robinson that “the absence of a...class consciousness among Blacks, and in its stead the presence of a racial consciousness, was seen by early American Communists as both an ideological backwardness and a potential threat to the integrity of the socialist movement itself” (301). The American Communist Party sought to increase its black membership by involving itself in causes important to black people, such as the defense of the Scottsboro Boys, a group of black teen-agers in Alabama who were falsely accused of raping two white women. But despite the party’s interest in black causes, they collapsed racial oppression into an argument which privileged class-consciousness as the most important group identity in challenging capitalism.

Richard Wright joined the American Communist Party in the early 1930s, fulfilling many roles for them including working directly within the Black community as an organizer, and he participated as a member of the John Reed Clubs (which sought to engage a black intelligentsia). But he primarily worked as a writer, where he developed the vocabulary that made him “the Party’s most illustrious proletarian author” (Robinson 421). But despite his dedication to the party, and the ability to publish his writing,

---

<sup>1</sup> For more on the American Communist Party’s formation see Robin E.G. Kelly and Earl Lewis eds., *To Make our World Anew: A History of African Americans* (421), Cedric Robinson’s *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (301), and Yoshinobu Hakutani’s *Richard Wright and Racial Discourse* (163). All indicate the primary reason for the American Communist Party’s interest was to fold them into a class struggle and largely ignore the larger problems of racial discrimination.

Wright began to recognize a disjuncture between the Communist Party's membership (i.e. the petit bourgeoisie), the workers they were advocating for, and the Black population whose needs were not necessarily synchronous. When writing for the Communist Party conflicted with his own ambitions as a novelist, he decided to resign his membership. Richard Wright reveals this story himself in *The God That Failed* (1949), noting that International Party leaders forbade him to write a sort of biography of a black communist comrade named Ross in an effort to "make known some of the difficulties inherent in the adjustment of a folk people to an urban environment" (Crossman 128). Rather than write either Ross' biography or continue working on what would eventually become *Uncle Tom's Children*, he was to organize a committee against the cost of high living, and then work as a youth delegate in Switzerland (Crossman 145-148). Clearly this was not the best use of the Wright's talents, and when he realized the toll these assignments would take on his writing, he formally announced his resignation from the Communist Party.

It would be wrong, however, to see Wright leaving the party as a total rejection of Marxism, as a rejection of his awareness for the plight of the racialized worker, or that he became a sudden advocate for capitalism. Wright in himself, in *Black Power: A Record of Reaction in a Land of Pathos* wrote about his break from the Communist Party:

Yet, as an American Negro whose life is governed by racial codes written into law, I state clearly that my abandonment of Communism does not automatically place me in a position of endorsing and supporting all the policies, political and economic, of the non-communist world. Indeed, it was the inhuman nature of many of those policies, racial and otherwise, that led them to take up the instrumentality of Communism in the first place... (*Black Power* xii).

Although *Black Power* was published fourteen years after *Native Son* we can safely assume that Wright's view on the injustice of capitalism informed, at least in part, the

writing of *Native Son*. But it is also informed by a racial consciousness on the part of Bigger Thomas, and to a lesser extent the minor characters. Bigger Thomas, I will argue, is a representation of an instance of creating the black body as a dutiful laborer by leveraging the ideology of work as a pathway to social uplift and greater freedom.

Several examples will demonstrate a pattern by which supposed moments of liberation for Black people were expressed either politically or culturally, but which really served to create the Black body as either surveilled, as a laborer, or as both. In his monograph *Freedom With Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State*, Chandon Reddy described a formulation of U.S. state power that simultaneously grants freedom but also delivers violence. Reddy analyzes the Shepard-Byrd Hate Crimes Prevention Act which was amended to the National Defense Authorization Act in 2010 to demonstrate the ways in which freedom, in this case for LGBT people, “dramatizes the inextricability of civil, political, and social rights from the martial obligations of citizenship” (7). The Emancipation Proclamation did something similar, but rather than codify a martial obligation of citizenship, it instead attempted to codify a labor relationship. President Lincoln wrote the following in the Emancipation Proclamation: “And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages” (Lincoln and Seward). Lincoln concomitantly grants freedom while creating and normalizing the black body as laborer. This supposed emancipation and freedom to work quickly became an edict which proscribed the social and geographic position appropriate for black people. Restrictions on the mobility and of black laborers were quickly codified into law.

Historian James Illingsworth discusses what he terms “Black Codes,” a series of laws passed in Louisiana in December 1865, less than six months after the end of the civil war, and only three short years after the Emancipation Proclamation, designed “to restrict the mobility and bargaining power of black agricultural workers” (Illingsworth 39). Illingsworth describes the “Black Codes” in this way:

*The first of these mandated binding, yearlong contracts for plantations hands, and insisted that employers had the right to demand service from the whole black family so contracted, including women and children. The second and third bills attempted to restrict the competition between employers by setting out punishments for anyone who attempted to ‘entice away’ a properly contracted laborer. The final four bills provided for the ‘apprenticing’ of young African Americans to white employers. Taken together, the four Black Code acts gave local courts and police juries enormous power to regulate the life and labors of Louisiana freedpeople (Illingsworth 39).*

The black laboring body, even after emancipation was not really free, but remained locked into specific locales, indebted to employers, and unable to bargain. In this way, the Emancipation Proclamation did not provide the freedom it rhetorically suggested, but rather substituted one kind of legalized restraint for another.

The “Black Codes” not only provided for the mobile restraint of black laborers, but because their positions were known, they are particularly visible, knowable, and therefore controllable. Surveillance of the black body as a means of control has been, and to some extent still is, a priority of the United States legal system. Simone Brown discusses how the law leveraged the technologies of print and the lantern as methods of tracing and making bodies hyper-visible in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. She claims in her discussion of the Book of Negroes and the lantern laws in New York that the technology of the lantern “made it possible for the black body to be constantly illuminated from dusk to dawn, made knowable, locatable and contained within the city” (553). In this way,

black people were logged so that their whereabouts could be maintained, they were tracked by newspaper reports describing bodily attributes, and finally they were made always visible to reduce the threat of their moving unseen. The cultural situation during this time period in New York suggested a performative sensibility of black freedom in order to be avoid appearing like an escaped slave, which was made necessary by the process of locating and returning escaped slaves encoded into law by the Fugitive Slave Act (Browne, Simone 553). By way of comparison, the cultural period of the 1930s and 1940s in both Chicago and in the South required a performative sensibility of meekness and subservience in order to stay below the radar. Richard Wright recognized the cultural imperative of this type of performance and we can find it in both *Native Son* and *12 Million Black Voices*. In the latter, Wright describes a typical chance encounter between white and black man:

Even when a white man asked us an innocent question, some unconscious part of us would listen closely, not only to the obvious words, but also to the intonation of voice that indicated what kind of answer he wanted; and, automatically, we could determine whether an affirmative or negative reply was expected, and we would answer, not in terms of objective truth, but in terms of what the white man wanted to hear.

If a white stopped a black on a southern road and asked: ‘Say, there, boy! It’s one o’clock, isn’t it?’ the black man would answer: ‘Yessuh.’

If the white man asked: ‘Say, it’s not one o’clock, is it boy?’ the black man would answer: ‘nawsuh.’ (*12 Million* 41).

Wright is arguing that black people offered an attitude of docility, telling white people what they wanted to hear, because being oppositional could lead to violent reactions, job loss, or other social or physical ramifications. Bigger Thomas, the protagonist of *Native Son*, as I will make clear shortly, has interpellated this type of meekness in his public interactions with white people.

The urban rhetoric of freedom and opportunity and the ideology of work interpreted as social uplift is often dangerously at odds with the material reality of lived experience. It creates the space under which oppressed peoples may be blamed for their material conditions under the assumption that they are somehow culturally inferior by erasing, as sociologists Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton point out, “the connection between culture and economic structure” (5). The story of the oppressed under this dangerous rubric may be expressed as simply as the unwillingness to take advantage of opportunities offered. If the Emancipation Proclamation is a moment of supposed, rhetorical, liberation, but in reality was another moment of violence and restraint. Professor of Literature Saidiya Hartman notices the “discontinuity between substantial freedom and legal emancipation” (12) and goes even further suggesting that the term emancipation “seems a double-edged and perhaps obfuscating label” (13). She describes the methods and technologies by which a newly “freed” people were suddenly physically restrained and incorporated almost to a person as a rational worker:

In the effort to implant a rational work ethic, eradicate pedestrian practices of freedom, assuage fears about the free labor system, and ensure the triumph of market relations, missionaries, schoolteachers, entrepreneurs, and other self-proclaimed ‘friends of the Negro’ took to the South. Through pedagogical manuals, freedmen’s schools, and religious instructions, teachers, missionaries, and plantation managers strived to inculcate an acquisitive and self-interested ethic that would motivate the formerly enslaved to be dutiful and productive laborers. The indecorous, proud, and seemingly reckless behavior through which the newly emancipated asserted their freedom was to be corrected with proper doses of humility, responsibility, and restraint (128).

It is always important to note that there can be a radical rhetorical discrepancy between what something is named, what is promised by it, and the kinds of material conditions it produces. The Emancipation Proclamation is an example of the named promise of

freedom, but instead ties the black body not only to an exploitive waged labor system, but to the very geography they were forced to inhabit during their enslavement.

Unlike the moment of emancipation, which was a legislative moment, The Great Migration was a cultural moment in which the narrative of opportunity for black workers dominated the popular imagination. There were, perhaps, as many reasons for migrating to northern industrial cities from the rural south as there were migrants. English Professor Farah Jasmine Griffin in *Who Set you Flowin'? The African American Migration Narrative* lists a number of primary reasons for northern migration. Griffin notes that while lynching, disenfranchisement, agricultural devastation, lack of educational opportunity, and Jim Crow regulations were primary causes, she also focuses on those impulses which grant agency to the migrants (17). In particular, she elucidates a relationship between art, blues music in particular, and a popular sentiment for heading north in search of opportunity unavailable in the south. Richard Wright expresses a similar agency for his own participation in The Great Migration writing that he “spent a third of [his] life traveling from the place of [his] birth to the North just talk freely, to escape the pressure of fear” (Crossman 137). There is little doubt that The Great Migration represented a freedom movement in which mobility was leveraged by many southern black people in order to achieve a greater measure of independence, opportunity, and freedom in northern industrial cities.

And yet, it must be acknowledged that despite the fact that movement from the rural south to northern urban industrial centers was actively encouraged by northern industrial employers via job agents and stories in black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, it is possible to read this mass migration, at least in part, as a moment of urban

formation and entrapment for what becomes a largely exploited and surplus urban workforce. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Clayton in their foundational racial history of Chicago detail the optimistic discourse that lured nearly 230, 000 African Americans from the rural south to Chicago in the years between 1910 and 1940 (8). They describe the influence the *Chicago Defender*, the most important and popular black newspaper in the city, in ramping up the efforts to encourage the outmigration of black rural farmworkers from the rural south to the industrial north. An editorial by Robert S. Abbot, editor of the *Chicago Defender*, reads in part:

You see they are not lifting their laws to help you. Are they? Have they stopped their Jim Crow cars? Can you buy a Pullman sleeper where you wish? Will they give you a square deal in court yet? Once upon a time we permitted other people to think for us—today we are acting and thinking for ourselves with the result that our ‘friends’ are getting alarmed at our progress. We’d like to oblige these unselfish (?) souls and remain slaves in the South, but to their section of the country we have said, as the song goes, ‘I hear you calling me,’ and have boarded the train singing, ‘Good-bye, Dixie Land’ (Drake 59).

The rhetoric of the *The Chicago Defender* operates here in two ways. 1. It speaks in the register of movement. Southern readers will recognize their inability to travel where they want by the fact that they are unable to buy Pullman sleepers to facilitate their travel, and then begin to realize that traveling to a northern industrial city is a plausible option. And, 2. If you couple this sort of freedom of movement rhetoric with the fact that there were job openings advertised for northern industries in the south, Black southerners began to visualize “the migrations as a step toward the economic emancipation of a people who had been tied to the southern soil and confined to common labor...” (Drake 60). In this way, it is easy to read The Great Migration as both a mobile and economic opportunity, but when we look ahead to the material situation for many southern migrants in Chicago, what we see is an economic system that comes far short of the imagined panacea. Rather

than good work at good wages, many industries used the surplus labor to depress wages, while landlords simultaneously leveraged the extra population to raise rents forcing more and more people into ever smaller apartments. So, instead of finding a system where social uplift and economic advance is possible, we find a situation that in many ways resembles the exploitive, sharecropping system from which so many were trying to escape; that, in fact, their escape from the rural south leads to a kind of entrapment for many in the urban north.

***The Perception of Work as Opportunity in Native Son***

In the midst of The Great Depression, concomitant with the pushback on the corporate exploitation of the waged worker was a political drive to reemploy those out of work in an effort to restore the economy by focusing on the needs of the worker. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued the President's Reemployment Agreement on July 27, 1933 which begins with the following statement: "This agreement is part of a nation-wide plan to raise wages, create employment, and thus increase purchasing power and restore business (Yoder 128). According to Dale Yoder and George Davies, Associate Professor of Social Economics and Professor of Business Statistics respectively, the agreement was designed to work by three intersecting measures:

It sought to achieve a reduction in unemployment by several means, including: (1) a general agreement among employers to reduce hours for individual workers in all employments, at the same time that regular hours for business as a whole were maintained, thus providing a wholesale program of spreading work; (2) elimination of child labor and the substitution of adults for child workers; and (3) increasing the purchasing power of workers through the reemployment and the requirement of minimum wages, thus expanding the demand for products of consumption industries (129).

Thus despite the fact that this agreement is designed to help the general economy by increasing demand for the products of consumption, it is liberally designed to do that in the same way the National Labor Relations Act does, by focusing on the social uplift of workers. Working fewer hours, increasing chance of employment, and a guaranteed minimum wage were all designed to, in the words of Senator Wagner again, “bring, also all the good things that jobs involve” (Silverberg 1). Senator Wagner is describing a cultural narrative of work as an avenue of social uplift, but the political will exercised on behalf of predominantly white union workers does not necessarily extend to the kind of domestic work we see Lutie take on in Ann Petry’s *The Street* or the kind of “workfare” Mr. Dalton extends to Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*. The representation of work in both of these novels belie Senator Wagner’s cultural narrative of work as uplifting.

The ideology of work as an avenue to social uplift is immediately confronted by Richard Wright in *Native Son*. Very early in the novel Bigger Thomas and his friend Gus are having a conversation in which they are partially satirizing white elite culture, partially discussing Bigger’s job prospect, and simultaneously recognizing a disjunction between the freedom of movement available to black people and the freedom of movement available to white people who live and work in Chicago. In the space of seven pages, or just a few short narrative minutes, Bigger and Gus are literally standing still observing the privileged movement of others. First they watch an airplane skywriting “Use Speed Gasoline” and then a “long sleek black car, it’s fenders glistening in the sun, shot past them at high speed and turned the corner a few blocks away (Native 16, 23). The juxtaposition of both the message regarding speed and the actual speed of the car is

symbolic of a cultural reality in which white workers have more free time, disposable income and freedom of movement than Bigger and Gus. The difference between the speed at which the car moves, the skywriting message about speed, and the sense of freedom of movement of both the plane and the car reinforce for the reader just how stuck in place the pair are.

Gus initially comments after seeing the airplane that “them white boys sure can fly,” and Bigger responds “wistfully. They [white people] get a chance to do everything” (Native 16). Wright makes it clear that Bigger understands the mental and physical ability to fly an airplane are not innate, but are instead, ones of opportunity and learning. Bigger says to Gus, “I *could* fly a plane if I had a chance” (Native 17). Ideally, at least according to the political and cultural narratives of the time, work should provide the opportunity to, if not actually fly an airplane, at least own a car and create the accompanying leisure time to explore the space he lives in. But just as there is a clear difference between the kinds of work the federal government is able or willing to protect, there is a clear difference between the kinds of opportunity those different class of jobs can provide. Bigger’s job with Mr. Dalton is meant to elucidate for the reader that certain kinds of work not provide opportunity or social uplift, but instead serve to entrap the worker binding them to the boss both spatially and economically.

The NLRA provides us a rubric by which we can recognize that certain types of work are unprotected and therefore racialized, or seen as appropriate for those people who are imagined to have lesser facilities for “good” and protected work. There is no better example in *Native Son* of the ways in work can reify the kinds of severe inequalities regarding spatial movement than the scene in which Mr. Dalton interviews

bigger as a candidate for chauffeur. The very act of chauffeuring encodes a positioning of who is free to move about and who is not. The movement of the driver is at the behest of the employer, and while the driver may be traveling about, he is clearly not free to make his own choices as regards destination. It is ironic, in this case that Bigger may be using “Speed Gasoline,” and driving a “sleek black car” not to facilitate his own personal exploration in any way, but in the service of facilitating the privileged movement of the Daltons, his white employers. What this demonstrates is that the reality of the kind of work Bigger is forced to accept is at odds with the cultural narrative of opportunity and instead serves to reproduce the very conditions of economic and physical entrapment which he presumably experienced in the South. Because Bigger recognizes the absolute need for this job, thinking to himself early in the book that “he could take the job at Dalton’s and be miserable, or he could refuse it and starve,” and that he was “maddened...to think he did not have a wider choice of action,” (Native 12) he demonstrates a near complete subservience to Mr. Dalton, and he evinces a near paralyzing fear during the interview. Therefore, despite the fact that Mr. Dalton’s description of the job requirements manifests itself as having nearly complete control of Bigger’s time, physical location, living arrangements, and distribution of his paycheck, Bigger has no choice to but to agree.

One effect of the NLRA was to guarantee unions the right to negotiate hours, overtime, working conditions, and of course pay, in an effort to regularize these facets of work to benefit workers, thus creating manageable schedules and good pay which would allow for more leisure time and the income to enjoy that time. Mr. Dalton’s description of Bigger’s hours, however, are tantamount to an almost complete control on Bigger’s

time. In “Truth and Juridical Forms” Michel Foucault claims “two things were necessary for industrial society to take shape. First, individual’s time must be put on the market, offered to those wishing to buy it, and buy it in exchange for wage; and second, their time must be transformed into labor time (Foucault Power 80). Aside from the idea that he needs to work not to starve, Wright makes clear to the reader that Bigger has developed a desire for saleable commodities and experiences. Prior to the job interview the reader encounters a bored Bigger wondering what to do with his time. “He tried to decide if he wanted to buy a ten cent magazine, or go to a movie, or go to the poolroom...,” and during this reverie he observes a politician’s billboard going up and comments out loud to himself, “I bet that sonofabitch rakes off a million bucks in graft a year. Boy, if I was in his shoes for just one day I’d *never* have to worry again” (Native 12). We learn at this point, that not only his immediate physical needs (i.e. not wanting to starve), but also his commercial needs have made him into someone who understands he must put his time on the market.

Bigger’s desire for things or experiences and the recognition of the need for, or power of, money does not grant him power. Rather, the contrary is evidenced. His recognition demonstrates his interpellation in the American capitalist system as a consumer, and Mr. Dalton’s job serves as the attachment point to a specific system of production. Bigger, in other words, is a subject of, and subject to an American capitalist system that slots him into the role of consumer in a commodity economy. Louis Althusser in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* makes the case that “ideology has a material existence” (258), and that “the individual in question behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such an attitude, and, ...participates in certain regular practices

which are those of the ideological apparatus on which ‘depend’ the ideas which he as in all consciousness freely chosen” (259). American capitalism manifests itself materially in Bigger’s every move and in nearly his every desire, he appears to choose it, to need it. After Bigger’s mom gives him twenty-five cents for carfare, but before his interview with Mr. Dalton he takes inventory of his “finances:”

He went along the sidewalk with his head down, fingering the quarter in his pocket. He stopped and searched all his pockets; in his vest pocket he found a lone copper cent. That made a total of twenty-six cents, fourteen cents of which would have to be saved for carfare to Mr. Dalton’s; that is, if he decided to take the job. In order to buy a magazine and go to the movies he would have to have at least twenty cents more. ‘Goddammit, I’m always broke!’ he mumbled (Native 13).

There are two important items of interest in this passage. First, Bigger’s realization of his desires are figured economically. He is aware of his marginal position in a capitalist system that requires currency in order to effect the achievement of his wants. Those consumerist desires speak to the fact that his behavior is, according to the capitalist consumer ideology he participates in, appropriate and normal. Not having those impulses would, in this case, be perceived as perverse. Bigger’s emphatic denunciation about being constantly “broke” leads to the right action of someone interpellated in an American capitalist ideology of consumerism, which is, of course, taking Mr. Dalton’s job offer.

The second item of interest in this passage is occurs when Bigger thinks to himself, “if he decided to take the job.” What are Bigger’s other options? Crime leads to societal erasure. Poverty will leave him and his family dead from exposure or starvation. The fact of the matter is, Bigger has already decided that he will take the job if Mr. Dalton offers it. In fact, he has little choice, being a subject of and interpellated by capitalist ideology. Furthermore, the state is very nearly in direct collusion with the

capitalist system, by influencing Bigger's choice by making the welfare his family needs dependent on his working status. Thus he is doubly hailed to participate in a capitalist system that does not protect his rights as a worker. The first section of the book is telling in this respect. All the bluster and bravado Bigger expresses during his pretending to want to rob Blum's Delicatessen and his cruel and abusive treatment of Gus (Native 38-45), really serves to demonstrate his subjectivity to the capitalist system he is already always a part of. Althusser's earlier reminder that one behaves in accordance with the ideologies they believe themselves to freely have chosen, is a lens to understand that Bigger really has no choice at all. Thus, when Bigger thinks to himself that he might not take Mr. Dalton's job, we as readers understand that as a subject of capitalist ideology Bigger most assuredly will accept the job, despite the foreknowledge that it will make him miserable. Ironically, as the reader will discover, Bigger's very survival depends on taking on work that will eventually destroy him.

In effect, when Bigger agrees to sell his labor to Mr. Dalton not only is he attached to a specific kind of production, but his is forced to grant him nearly complete control of both his spatial and temporal existence. I have already discussed Foucault's assertions regarding what must happen to an individual's time for the industrial age to be possible from a standpoint of production, but now we must look specifically at the interaction between Mr. Dalton and Bigger during the interview in order to understand just how completely his movement and time is controlled by the need to sell his labor. Mr. Dalton's job description reads as follows:

"Now Bigger," said Mr. Dalton, "since that's settled, let's see what you'll have to do *every* day. I leave every morning for my office at nine. It's a twenty-minute drive. You are to be back at ten and take Miss Dalton to school. At twelve you call for Miss Dalton at the University. From then until night you are *more or less*

*free*. If either Miss Dalton or I go out at night, of course, you do the driving. You work *every* day, but we don't get up till noon on Sundays. So you will have Sunday mornings to yourself, *unless something unexpected happens*. You get one full day off every two weeks" (Native 57 emphasis added).

This is more than simply a demanding work schedule: It demonstrates a near tyrannical control over Bigger's whereabouts, what services he can access, and how he might spend his "*more or less free*" time which is clearly less rather than more free seeing as literally any unexpected occurrence might press Bigger into working. Consider that Bigger has some Sunday mornings off until noon. Places of business generally open later on Sundays than other days of the week. Government operations are typically shut down. Bigger is not religious and so does not need the time to attend worship services. If he had personal business to conduct, Sundays are absolutely the worst time for doing so. Sunday mornings also do not facilitate the use of recreational businesses which typically operate during evening and night time hours. We know that Bigger likes to attend the movies and visit with friends at the pool hall, but neither is available on Sunday mornings. As opposed to any other day of the week, having Sunday morning's off limits bigger options for conducting private or public business. Working as a chauffeur for the Dalton's clearly will not provide Bigger with the leisure time to enjoy the finer things in life, rather it robs him of them.

Mr. Dalton also guarantees that Bigger will have one day off every two weeks., never mind that he does not bother to identify which day it is, so no future plans can be reasonably made. This accounts for Bigger having only roughly seven percent of time off of work; a forty-hour work week, which unions protected by the NLRA began to bargain for, leaves a worker with seventy-six percent of time away from work. Mr. Dalton also slips in the fact that during his "*more or less free*" time during weekday afternoons

Bigger will be responsible for various household duties. He learns from Peggy that his “free time” will involve taking care of the furnace, a dirty job, certainly too dirty for Mr. Dalton himself. So, really what Bigger has signed on for is a job that requires him to be at the Dalton residence or in direct proximity to a Dalton’s freedom of movement. If the cultural narrative of jobs in America is that they are supposed to be the avenue of social and spatial freedom, the reader is meant to immediately recognize that the Dalton’s will nearly always be deciding what space Bigger will occupy and act as a limiting influence on the possibility of his social life.

Bigger’s spatial restrictions are an important concern, but perhaps the planned distribution of his paycheck is of equal importance when discussing his lack of possible mobility. Mr. Dalton plainly thinks Bigger is unable to manage his own finances and so created a plan for how Bigger’s money is to be used. Mr. Dalton describes Bigger’s pay this way:

The pay calls for \$20 a week, but I’m going to give you \$25. The extra \$5 is for yourself, for you to spend as you like. You will get the clothes you need and your meals. You’re to sleep in the back room above the kitchen. You can give the \$20 to your mother to keep your brother and sister in school. How does that sound? (Native 57).

Mr. Dalton’s ending questions is entirely rhetorical. Bigger is in no position to disagree with Mr. Dalton on inconsequential matters let alone in matters as important as finances. Bigger’s meek reply, “It sounds alright. Yessuh,” followed by Mr. Dalton’s, “I think we’ll get along,” and Bigger’s “Yessuh” (Native 57) perfectly replicates the type of plantation, Jim Crow fear induced survival response that Richard Wright describes in the *12 Million Black Voices* passage quoted earlier. But while Yoshinobu Hakutani attributes these types of verbal exchanges as systematic of a “lack of individuality among black

people in the south [which] has taken a heavy toll on black character” (51), it is perhaps a rather savvy survival strategy, one which has been interpellated by Bigger as a result of always already having been subject to a racial caste system. Bigger is, in this instance a form of what Henry Louis Gates might call the “Signifying Monkey,” because “he dwells at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, every embodying the ambiguities of language” (686). Bigger’s “yessuh” is hardly a positive endorsement of Mr. Dalton’s plan regarding Bigger’s pay. Rather, the meaning of “yessuh” is subverted, given because it is expected, a parody of a sincere answer. Yessuh, in this case, comes to mean “I have no choice.” If we couple this kind of subversion of language with Althusser’s assertion that when one does not act according to one’s interpellated subject position he will be viewed as a deviant or perverse (260), it virtually guaranteed Bigger’s passive acceptant to Mr. Dalton’s proposed distribution of his pay. But, it in no way signifies pleasure or excitement about the plan.

### ***Family, Consumerism, and (R)entrapment***

Mr. Dalton’s job offer and financial plan also serves to further attach Bigger to his family; the family is an ideological state apparatus (ISA) in service to an American capitalist ideology. Louis Althusser in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” claims that all ISA’s operate in order to reproduce the conditions of productions, which in this case is a capitalist state (233-272). The process by which the family operates as an ISA must be explored more carefully in order to see just how entrapping it is for Mr. Dalton to tie Bigger so explicitly to his family’s living and educational situation. In his essay “Working-Class Geographies,” critical geographer Don Mitchell describes the use

of the family in a capitalist system which seeks to reproduce itself in part by making private space serve a public purpose:

The home was reconceptualized as a place of work, in which division of labor both structured and were structured by complex interactions with the market, with changing local and extralocal labor conditions, and so forth. The home was not so much a retreat from the realm of capitalist production and circulation as a part as a part of the web of social relations that gave shape and substance to patriarchal capitalism: the home was a site for the circulation of capital *and* a lived space” (86).

Given Mitchell’s description of the home as a site of capital circulation and consumption, we can begin to understand Mr. Dalton’s motivation for directing eighty percent of Mr. Dalton’s pay back to the home and out of Bigger’s personal control.

Mr. Dalton recognizes that he can recoup the wages he pays Bigger as profit from his tenement rental operations. Although Bigger only suspects that Mr. Dalton is his landlord, the reader is able to understand that by directing Bigger’s pay back to the home, he makes it possible for the family to continue to pay the rent owed to him. Mr. Dalton is using Bigger as a worker in order to keep his capital in circulation and therefore accumulating. While it’s true that he also tells Bigger that some of the money can be used to keep his siblings in school, it’s likely that in the era before *Brown vs. Board*, Bigger’s younger siblings, who are poor, attend a public segregated school, and most of his paycheck would not be needed for that. The bulk of the money will be spent on rent, food, clothes, and entertainment which will predominantly support white owned businesses, and perhaps white factory manufactures who can access the protections of unionized labor. This is important because Don Mitchell reminds us that “money must move into—and out of—the hands of workers, even as it must be frozen in the built landscape of houses, churches, shopping centers, bars, restaurants, parks, and all the other

things that make life, including working-class life possible” (84). By taking this job, and by being forced to agree to his wages being given to his family, Bigger, in spite of himself, is “hailed” in the Althusserian sense of the word and interpellated into the ideological state apparatus of the family as “breadwinner.” Bigger’s mother envisions him in this role, planning on using his earnings “to fix up a place for you [her] children,” and pressuring him to take the job through guilt by telling him “if you don’t take that job the relief’ll cut us off. We won’t have any food” (11). Bigger feels his entire family is using him for his wages, and he is justified in having this thought. He thinks to himself, “as he ate he felt that they were thinking of the job he was to get that evening and it made him angry; he felt that they had tricked him into a cheap surrender” (11). Bigger is not wrong, but he is hailed so powerfully, by such a dominant ideology of work, consumption, and family that he has no choice but to take Mr. Dalton’s job offer.

The Thomas family apartment is functionally a site of social reproduction which serves to remind us who owns property, who rents it, how money is circulated back to the capitalist class, and that economic power is structured in such a fashion as to root the Thomas family in place, because they owe Mr. Dalton the lion’s share of Bigger’s wages back. Such a structure makes them doubly reliant on Mr. Dalton. Thus, we can see Bigger’s role as a waged body and rent payer as opposed to Mr. Dalton’s ownership role and wage distributor in terms of the material condition of wealth legacy as it exists in a system of white supremacist capital development. Not only is the Thomas family stuck as they are in a high rent, low income situation, they are unable to acquire any assets which could possibly appreciate in value. And also telling of the racial difference between the capitalist class and the working class is Mr. Dalton’s assessment of Bigger’s

economic role. Mr. Dalton is unable to see Bigger as someone who could manage money in a productive way, and instead identifies Bigger only as a consumer, a subject that money can pass through on its way back to himself as profit. In other words, Bigger's pay is insufficient and therefore incapable to raise him to a different socioeconomic level.

Mr. Dalton's perception of Bigger as merely a consumer is evident, again, by his explained distribution of Bigger's pay. Mr. Dalton describes the extra five dollars in pay as a reward, and indicates that it is to be spent, not saved or invested. Having told Bigger that his clothes and food would be provided, Mr. Dalton's directive to spend the extra five dollars as Bigger sees fit indicates an attitude that suggests Bigger could not imagine spending the money on anything but entertainment, or wasting it in some other fashion. Mr. Dalton's directive assumes no social or professional ambition on Bigger's part. For all Mr. Dalton's supposed funding of education for minorities and Peggy's assertion that Mr. Dalton is really invested in the advancement of black people, we see precious little evidence or fiduciary responsibility in the way Mr. Dalton plans for Bigger to spend all his income. Instead we see Mr. Dalton funding his own business and the businesses of others by paying wages to Bigger, who is already constantly indebted to him and instructing Bigger to cycle the remainder of his wages through the consumer capitalist system.

This sequence, the interview, and the proposed distribution of Bigger's pay demonstrates the ways in which participating in the American capitalist system, a system that requires his participation as an act of good and proper obedience, actually serves to restrict both his physical mobility and his economic opportunity. Bigger has literally

been relocated from his family's apartment while still being forced to pay for it; he has been isolated from his community and his friends; his nearly every movement will be at the behest of a white family, and his nearly every movement will really be in an effort to facilitate the free movement of those to whom he is in service. An analysis of Bigger's first night as a chauffeur driving Mary Dalton and Jan Erlone will further serve to help us understand who has access to which parts of the Chicago, who does not, and how the perception of proper space is internalized in *Native Son*.

### ***The Perception of Proper Space***

Aside from the ethically indefensible and illegal practices involved in keeping urban spaces largely segregated, such as red-lining, the distribution of public transportation, the political financing of the suburbs, and outright violence I argue that racialized groups are hailed into understanding which geographical spaces in the city are proper spaces for living, working, moving through, and entertaining oneself. The geographical interpellation of racialized groups becomes a form of self-policing as regards their urban location. Bigger understands, for example, that Chicago's Black Belt, so called because Black people live there, is a defined space in which he is generally supposed to remain. Bigger describes his sense of geography to Gus in this way: "We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we ain't. They do things and we can't. It's just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I'm on the outside of the world peeping in through a knot-hole in the fence..." (Native 20). It is important to notice that Wright has Bigger speak using vocabulary associated with policing and penal entrapment. Bigger is right to feel crowded, penned in, and even jailed. We know that in the Black Belt in the 1930's that black people were living at an

outrageous “90,000 [people] to the square mile as compared with 20,000 to the square mile in adjacent white apartment-house areas” (Drake 204). And, although we will see in Chapters 2 and 3 a sense of urban fortification that creates a concrete condition of repression, surveillance, and policing, what we see here is the internal sense that there is a proper place for black people to exist in the city. Black people like Bigger and Gus all “live in one corner of the city,” but are able to see planes fly overhead, watch expensive cars drive past them, and imagine ships leaving port” (Native 21, 23). These observations and imaginings reinforce and help to cement an internalized static sense of immobility and entrapment in a specific neighborhood, because stepping outside that geography might be seen as deviant by both the black community and by the white community space he would be entering into.

Thus, Bigger is aware of the visibility of his body no matter whether he stays in the Black Belt or transgresses and enters a white neighborhood. Michel Foucault describes this sense of permanent visibility and its psychological and material effects in “Discipline and Punish” by way of analyzing the “Panopticon” the purpose of which is to produce an internalized sense of surveillance by making everyone always visible.

Foucault describe the structure itself and its possible use in this way:

...at the periphery, an annular building; at the center, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building’ they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other...All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in the central tower and to shut up in each a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker, or a schoolboy....The panopticon mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately...Visibility is a trap (Foucault 2004, 554).

But what is so insidious about the panopticon is not that you are always necessarily visible, but rather that you develop an ontological awareness of the epistemological possibility that you are always visible and thus behave accordingly. “Hence,” according to Foucault, “the major effect of the Panopticon; to induce in the inmate a *state* conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power... [the inmate] assumes responsibility for the constraints of power...he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (Discipline 554-556). This is a powerful social tool for making sure certain people remain in a specific geographic area, or in this case, a particular neighborhood in the city. Bigger’s awareness of his proper spatial placement within the city then, the ease at which he moves through “his” neighborhood, and even the use of his own voice when discussing even weighty matters with Gus transforms into a highly limiting, self-containing form of paralysis when he transgresses those spatial boundaries, or when white people transgress and enter “his” neighborhood.

In *Native Son* the reader is meant to encounter a representation of the city that suggests the spatial boundaries demarcating where black people can go, where they can live, and where they can entertain themselves are rigid and restrictive for them, but are permeable for whites. When Mary and Jan force Bigger to take him on a “tour” of the Black Belt, the effect on Bigger is such that his actions and speech are always at odds with his thoughts and desires. Because his role has changed from experienced, savvy, and confident street-wise native of the Black Belt to that of a subservient, costumed, tourist guide he suddenly becomes the other in his own neighborhood. We see Bigger trapped in his own body, unable to act or speak. We first encounter this disjunction when Jan drives into the Black Belt with Bigger between him and Mary squashed in the front

seat. Bigger's "arms and legs were aching from being cramped into so small a space, but he dared not move. He knows that they would not have cared if he had made himself more comfortable, but his moving would have called attention to himself and his black body...If he were white, if here were like them, it would have been different. But he was black. So he sat still, his arms and legs aching (Native 78). Thus we are able to understand that Bigger's paralysis relates directly to his proximity to whites which makes him decidedly visible; it relates to a white intrusion on his neighborhood, his role as tourist guide which make him uniquely visible to the people he knows, and also directly to the difference encoded by his blackness.

When the unlikely trio pull up to Ernie's Kitchen Shack, Bigger encounters a situation which enacts even more violence on him than being pinned in between Jan and Mary in the front seat of the car. When Bigger realizes that Mary and Jan want him to come into the diner with them he imagines the people he knows thinking "*who's them white folks Bigger's hanging around with?*" (Native 81, emphasis in original). Bigger understands the social and geographic transgression taking place, and furthermore, he understands that this situation will engender repercussion no matter what he does. If he joins Mary and Jan, he will become alienated from his community. If he does not join Mary and Jan, his job, and therefore both his survival and the survival of his family may very well be in jeopardy.

Despite the fact that his thoughts suggest an alarm indicating a flight response, he is only able to respond feebly, shrinking in on himself, stuttering, and unable to breathe. His "refusal" to enter the diner is a weak stammer: "I—I . . . I don't want to go in . . . he whispered breathlessly," and later his vocal response is even weaker, even softer and

shorter, “I . . . I . . . Bigger stammered” (Native 81). Bigger is under threat from a number of unusual situations which are disrupting his normal sense of social organization. He is being forced to violate relatively well-defined racial geographies, and act as the guide for such an intrusion. Mary and Jan imagine themselves to be treating him as an “equal,” claiming they want to know black people. Mary says to Bigger that she wants “to *know* these people.” She continues: “Never in my life have I been inside a Negro home. Yet they *must* live like we live. They’re *human*... There are twelve million of them... They live in our country... In the same city with us...” (Native 79, emphasis in original). Mary’s use of “othering” pronouns is telling. She speaks of black people as invaders, living in her country, in her city. She recognizes her inherited racial and economic privilege to all the spaces in the city and the country. Thus their treatment of Bigger, forcing him not to act as just tour guide, but more like some racial ambassador, a physical legitimization of their visit to the Black Belt, has the effect of making Bigger visible, not just to their white gaze, but also as a visible outsider in his own community. Bigger’s inability to function in this role manifests itself physically as a malfunction of both speech and bodily control.

Early in *Native Son*, whenever Bigger is scrutinized by the white gaze he is unable to resolve the differences between his desire and the limited range of actions possible to him given his status as a poor black man trying to operate in a white supremacist capitalist power structure. During his job interview with Mr. Dalton there are several instances in which Bigger cannot reconcile what he wants to do with what he thinks he is allowed to do while under the watchful gaze of a rich white man. One of the most unusual instances, and one of the most instructive about the limited range of

possible actions when under the white gaze occurs when Bigger drops his hat. Bigger is asked for a letter and when he reaches in to his vest pocket to find it, his hat falls on the ground. His response to what is really a small faux pas is instant panic: “For a moment his impulses were dead-locked; he did not know if he should pick up the cap and then find the paper, or find the paper and then pick up his cap (Native 53). Accomplishing both tasks would take less time than the thought that Bigger spends on which to do first. In the end, he picks up the cap, and completely forgets about the letter. Bigger is stupefied by Mr. Dalton’s gaze, and when he asks Bigger for the letter again, Bigger thinks to himself:

He hated himself at that moment. Why was he acting and feeling this way? He wanted to wave his hand and blot out the white man who was making him feel this. If not that, he wanted to blot himself out. He had not raised his eyes to Mr. Dalton’s face once since he had been in the house. He stood with his knees slightly bent, his lips partly open, his shoulders stooped; and his eyes held a look that went only to the surface of things. There was an organic conviction in him that this was the way white folks wanted him to be when in their presence; none had ever told him that in so many words, but their manner had made him feel that they did. He laid the cap down, noticing that Mr. Dalton was watching him closely. Maybe he was not acting right? Goddamn! Clumsily, he searched for the paper. He could not find it at first (Native 54).

The level at which Bigger is aware of his own body is astonishing, but what is even more astonishing is the way in which it is controlled by what Bigger has internalized as the expectations and demands of black bodies in white society. Mr. Dalton’s power reaches its maximum intensity not in being able to flex his economic wealth or social influence, but by the way in which he is able to lock Bigger in place merely by looking at him.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* Frantz Fanon describes a situation in which he is subjected to the white gaze and writes he is “overdetermined from the outside.” He continues: “I am a slave to the ‘idea’ other have of me, but to my appearance (95). A

little girl calls him a “negro” on a train, and Fanon becomes suddenly and acutely aware of himself as representative of the entire black race with all its gross attendant stereotypes including “cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism... (92). Seeing himself as “other” in the gaze of the white person, and recognizing that she has already defined him, that there is no way for him to define himself as an individual for there is no individuality. Fanon acknowledges being trapped in the white gaze and fixed by the prejudicial definitions applied to blackness, and while Bigger does not appear to participate in a representative position, the reader is meant to understand that where he can stand, what he can do, what he can say, whether in fact he is physically capable of speaking at all are all controlled by white gazes, be it Mr. Dalton, Mary, Jan, or someone else.

The key theoretical observation in Fanon’s story that describes the ways in which Bigger’s physical and vocal possibilities are limited when fixed by the white gaze is “the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man” (90). What this means for Bigger, is that because he is taking part in a white capitalist system, one in which he has had no historical context, tradition, or possible advantageous outcome, he can only understand himself as an inferior subject. That is the reason he believes all of his actions to be wrong, why he questions whether to first look for a letter or pick his hat up off the ground, and why he stammers uncontrollably, all behaviors uncharacteristic for him when in the comfort zone of the Black Belt.

Bigger’s sense of entrapment, and the reality of his limited physical mobility is so complete that the “Flight” section of the book is really ironically named. Yes, Bigger runs and hides from the police, but his “flight” is pitifully short and painfully bound by the neighborhood in which he already lives. What is ironic about the entire “Flight”

section is that in order to escape, Bigger must transgress the boundaries of the Black Belt, but the entire section merely serves to reinforce what he knows already, namely that he, and other black people are confined to the Black Belt. His observations about proper place are closely tied to the economic reality people live under, and thus tied to how work fails as an avenue to social mobility, or as Damon Marcel DeCoste writes, Bigger is a keen observer of the “American reality” that “the lessons young Bigger has learned well are ones of his own imprisonment, of American Blacks being yoked to the service of the white world” (131). It is also important to note how the police function in this section as a militaristic force employing the technology of the media to reinforce not just their authority, but to reinforce an ideology of obedience and self-policing.

In the middle of his flight from the police following the murders of Mary and Bessie, and near the end of the section Bigger is hungry and trying to find a place to hole up. He is looking for an empty apartment and begins to think on the rental situation in the Black Belt, which is worth quoting at some length:

And he had heard it said that black people, even though they could not get good jobs, paid twice as much as rent as whites for the same kind of flats. He walked five more blocks and saw no “For Rent” sign. Goddamn! Would he freeze trying to find a place to get warm? How easy it would be for him to hide if he had the whole city in which to move about! They keep us bottled up here like wild animals he thought. He knows that black people could not go outside the of the Black Belt to rent a flat; they had to live on their side of the “line.” No white real estate man would rent a flat to a black man other than in the sections where it had been decided that black people might live (288).

Bigger not only realizes that good, protected jobs are not available, but even if they were, the economics of being black are so systematically destructive that extra wages might not mean much materially. Not only is rent more expensive, but seemingly every commodity is. Bigger buys a loaf of bread, and notices that in the Black Belt the loaf sold “for five

cents a loaf, but across the line where white folks live it sold for four” (289). Regardless then, of the type of job a black person might find, the rent and commodity system is designed to prevent the creation of a wealth legacy. Just as Mr. Dalton used Bigger as an avenue for cycling money back to himself as profit, much of the entire black community was at this time imagined and exploited strictly as consumers.

Also interesting in Bigger’s observation is the formal and concrete way he describes the material, geographic, and environmental situation of black people as being always already decided and seemingly unchangeable. He leaves absolutely no room for the possibility that things have ever been different or could possibly be different. Bigger speaks in the conditional perfect tense, predicting a bleak, oppressive, same as the past, same in the future. When Bigger thinks to himself that “no white real estate man *would* rent to a black man other than in the sections where it *had been decided* that black people *might* live (emphasis added, 289), Richard Wright powerfully slips between the conditional perfect tense into the past perfect continuous, and back to the conditional. Wright’s formalism here structures the oppression Bigger is thinking about in such a way as to suggest it’s past permanence and its future continuation. Bigger’s sense of entrapment in the Black Belt is so ingrained that he cannot imagine transgressing the neighborhood boundaries even though doing so might mean his very survival and freedom.

Bigger’s inability to transgress the boundaries of the Black Belt means that he is captured by the police in short order, literally frozen in place by a fire hose during winter. His capture and imprisonment are more traditional than Lutie Johnson, the protagonist from Ann Petry’s *The Street* who is undergoes exile in order to avoid the police, but I will

argue that it is, in fact, no less entrapping. As such, it will be important to analyze the ending of these novels together rather than separately. But first, we must turn our attention to *The Street* and analyze its representation of how working class ideologies fail to live up to the cultural narrative of social uplift.

### ***Ann Petry***

Ann Petry and Richard Wright did not have similar childhoods. Richard Wright was born in Mississippi, one of the most repressive states for black people; he was the second generation born free of slavery and grew up in the concrete metropolis of Memphis. Ann Petry, on the other hand, was born in Saybrook, Connecticut, the daughter of a pharmacist who owned his own drugstore. Richard Wright went to school first at the age of thirteen and was only in the seventh grade at age fifteen, and only graduated junior high school. Ann Petry went to school as a young girl, skipped fourth grade and graduated with her Ph.D. at the age of twenty-three from the University of Connecticut, and began working in her father's pharmacy while writing short stories in her free time, until she was married. What they do have in common is that they both moved to the big city, where their experience helped to form the content of their writing (Ervin xiii and Petry, Elisabeth 23-38).

Yet, despite the fact that her father was relatively successful, Petry always understood that they were poor and therefore part of the lower class (Petry, Elisabeth 8). Perhaps the racism in Saybrook was not as overt as racism in Mississippi, but Petry eventually came to believe "that there was no such thing as class strata among black people. [They] were all subject to a caste system because of the racism in American society...The idea that there is a black middle class, or black upper middle class is a

creation of white sociologists who refuse to acknowledge the existence of a caste system based on skin color” (Petry, Elisabeth 52). Petry’s thought is an interesting one given Lutie Johnson’s (the protagonist of the Petry’s novel *The Street*) optimistic attitude regarding work as a means of social advancement, and the ultimate failure of that work to provide either social uplift or even maintain the status quo for Lutie and her son Bub. It is as if Petry created Lutie as a sort of straw character to demonstrate how a belief in the social uplift ideology of work is constantly undercut by both a caste status generated by her black racial and female gender formation.

The gritty realism of *The Street* which Larry R. Andrews describes as a “sensory assault” can be traced to Petry’s nine years living in both the Bronx and Harlem (198). Ann Petry’s daughter, who wrote her biography reveals that Petry “acknowledged that she mined her experiences in New York for *The Street*,” also describes her mother’s observations of single mothers, latchkey kids, the proliferation of bars and grilles in her neighborhood, and the accompanying late night drunks yelling and fighting (Petry, Elisabeth 76). Anyone familiar with the street will find Lutie, Bub, and Junto’s grille in these observations. In this way, the environment of *The Street* is very much like the environment in the *Native Son*’s Black Belt. Both books portray black neighborhoods as having small, cramped, overcrowded apartments; Junto’s grille is described as a seedy place of entertainment, much the same as Bigger’s pool hall, and both protagonists have to leave their neighborhoods in order to work, leaving behind family to do so. In this way, despite their different upbringings, Richard Wright and Ann Petry are very much literary kindred spirits, in that they represent northern cities as physical spaces which entrap black people. Both books deal with the ways in which black people are contained

in specific neighborhoods, the false ideology of work as a means of social advancement, and the ways in which people are interpellated to believe they belong in a specific part of the city.

### ***The Perception of Work as Opportunity in The Street***

One of the most interesting differences between Lutie Johnson and Bigger Thomas as protagonists is the amount of faith each character maintains in the value of work as a means of social uplift. Whereas Bigger is a reluctant, one might say disgruntled employee who recognizes that work may be his only way to survive in a world in which he has to consume or be consumed, Lutie is fully invested in what one might consider the ideology of the American Dream. She tries to embody the “work hard and you can succeed attitude” that still exists today as a core ideology of American capitalism. As Lutie walks out one evening she sees what appears to be beaten down women carrying heavy bags after working what she imagines to be dead end, unprotected domestic jobs, and thinks to herself about having a “better” life. “It could happen. Only she was going to stake out a piece of life for herself. She had come this far, poor and black and shut out as though a door had been slammed in her face. Well, she would shove it open; she would beat and bang on it and push against it and use a chisel in order to get it open” (186). There are two interesting revelations in this quotation: 1. Lutie consistently uses violent imagery working harder will yield positive results, and 2. Lutie recognizes her blackness as an impediment to finding the type of job that will improve her and Bub’s life.

The mythology of the American Dream has taken hold of Lutie, but manifested itself in quite an unusual way. Rather than just working hard, Lutie always employs the

imagery of fighting and escaping when imagining the ways in which she will achieve her economic and social goals. As she imagines being stuck in her cramped, and either freezing or sweltering, apartment with Bub she thinks to herself that “they’d never catch her in their dirty trap. She’d fight her way out. She and Bub would fight their way out together” (74). Keith Clark suggests that Lutie is “patterning her life after Benjamin Franklin” and that she “embarks on an expedition that will bestow the trappings of success upon herself and her eight-year-old son. However, Lutie’s odyssey from Jamaica, New York, to Lyme, Connecticut, to Harlem bestows upon her little more than disillusionment” (167). But for all Franklin’s hard work, late nights, and ingenuity, his rise is never depicted in terms of violence, struggling against an oppressive system. Lutie is, figuratively beating her fists against doors she will never be able to open, and in that constant pounding we see the frustration of those born without privilege. And, incidentally, for Clark to describe Lutie’s journey as an odyssey is a something of a false analogy. Odysseus’ travels lead to fame, kingdom, and family, while Lutie’s limited travels lead to a permanent and lonely exile.

Lutie recognizes her blackness, not her femininity as the primary impediment to her inability to advance socially. Petry writes an interesting scene in which Bub is trying to raise extra money for the family by shining shoes. He imagines himself to be acting in accordance with his mother’s wishes, imagines that she will be proud of his “entrepreneurship,” but Lutie quickly progresses from shock to anger, even slapping Bub across the face when he jokingly asks her if she would like her shoes shined. Lutie’s reaction is founded on her belief that accepting and working as a menial laborer will

inure a person to thinking that is the best they can do. Feeling guilty for her violent reaction she attempts to explain her feelings to Bub:

She started choosing her words carefully. ‘It’s the way you were trying to earn money that made me mad,’ she began. Then she leaned down until her face was on a level with his, still talking slowly, still picking her words thoughtfully. You see, colored people have been shining shoes and washing clothes and scrubbing floors for years and years. White people seem to think that’s the only kind of work they’re fit to do. The hard work. The dirty work. The work that pays the least.’ She thought about this small dark apartment they were living in, about 116<sup>th</sup> Street which was overflowing with people who lived in just such apartments as this, about the white people on the downtown streets who stared at her with open hostility in their eyes... ‘I’m not going to let you begin at eight doing what white folks figure all eight-year-old colored boys ought to do. For if you’re shining shoes at eight, you’ll probably be doing the same thing when you’re eighty (70-71).

What is interesting about this passage is not Lutie’s abusive and violent reaction, but the inescapable material reality which informs it. She has seen her father, and her ex-husband become reconciled first to low-paying jobs then to either unemployment or bootlegging. She recognizes the life chances are different for Bub than the white children who she nannied for, because she has seen first-hand the privilege afforded to those who inherit money and education like the Chandlers. Lutie thinks of the Chandler’s, and those who are born white and rich in this way:

But these people were different. Apparently a college education was all right, and seemed to have become a necessity even in the business world they talked about all the time. But not important. Mr. Chandler and his friends had gone through Yale and Harvard and Princeton, casually, matter-of-factly, and because they had to. But once these men went into business they didn’t read anything but trade magazines and newspapers (42).

Lutie understands that a college education, for the male children of wealthy parents, is a rite of passage, a traditional formality undergone to legitimize the transfer of their parents, wealth, property, and power. Lutie is identifying a pattern of how work is racialized, how wealth is accumulated and transferred in a racialized way, and yet

remains convinced that work is still a possible path to social advancement. Lutie is either interpellated by the cultural narrative that work is the only means of social advancement, or so desperate to improve her and Bub's material situation, that she cannot reconcile her own observations regarding the Chandler's life chances, and the lesson she tries to teach Bub about work. Lutie is unwilling to admit that her and Bub's options for work and education are limited, and that the social advancement she dreams about is largely predetermined by birthplace and race.

***Family, Consumerism, and (R)entrapment in The Street***

Unlike Bigger Thomas whose rent was controlled by his employer and whose paycheck was to be divided in order to take care of this family's rent while still "affording" him some spending money, rent is the central economic concern of Lutie's life. The book begins as she is evaluating a new apartment she might wish to rent. It's dilapidated, on the third floor, which means it will be too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. There is only one bedroom, which means Bub will have to sleep in the living room. It is not rendered by Ann Petry as being infested with vermin as in *Native Son*, and Lutie is a single mother to Bub, so there are not as many people to inhabit the space as the Thomas family in *Native Son*, but it always represented as equally dreary and oppressive, and from Bub's perspective monstrous as he has to spend evenings there alone. But despite the fact that the apartment is so dreadful, after signing her rental agreement she views it as a sign of triumph. She thinks to herself "now that she had this apartment, she was just one step farther up on the ladder of success" (26). It is interesting, and indicative of Lutie's interpellation in an American capitalist system that she uses the phrase "ladder of success," a capitalistic dog-eat-dog metaphor, not because

a one room, over-priced, cramped apartment is not exactly a tell-tale sign of material success, but more interestingly because her use of capitalist vocabulary normalizes capitalism as the only avenue possible for success.

It is also important to remember that Lutie is not just a worker attempting to find a place to live, but that she is a woman, and a single mother as well. While women workers in the 1930s and 1940s were common, they were competing against a cultural narrative that suggested, as communications professor Mary Triece reminds us that during this time a “woman’s place [was] in the home” (75). And while Bigger understands that his very survival depends on working, Lutie has the double responsibility of caring for her young son. Her need to work and raise Bub at the same time puts her in a very different situation than the Thomas family. Bigger’s mother is able to be at home, to take care of the children, and Mr. Dalton has guaranteed at least that Bigger’s wage will cover the rent. Lutie has no such economic certainty, which was the case for many other women at the time. Triece argues that “despite their long hours, many women did not make enough to cover their expenses during the Depression. As a dress maker in Milwaukee put the matter, ‘If I eat I can’t pay my room rent. If I pay my room rent I’ll have nothing left to buy food with’” (76). Lutie responsibility to herself and her son is a near impossible economic dynamic to negotiate.

Even as Lutie feels successful upon renting the apartment on 116<sup>th</sup> street, she immediately hates it and longs for something better, but also quickly comes to realize that a nicer apartment is financially out of reach. After she catches Bub shining shoes, she imagines that moving to a nicer street would be beneficial for Bub. But Lutie immediately recognizes that “there wasn’t any point in getting a more expensive

apartment, for the rent on this one was all she could manage. She wondered if landlords knew what it was like to be haunted by fear of not being able to pay the rent. After a while the word 'rent' grew so big it loomed up in all your thinking" (79). The apartment on 116<sup>th</sup> Street, is at the zenith of her so called "ladder of success." Her current job, a low-level civil servant, has advanced her only to this spot: an apartment in which she feels trapped, living on a street she feels is dangerous for her son, unable to be home with him and keep him from trouble, and really unable to do anything to change the situation.

If Lutie Johnson has been living under a Horatio Alger, rags to riches mythology, and I argue she has been interpellated in this way, she imagines herself being able to fight her way to material success. What Ann Petry does next, further perverts that mythology. Aside from the more obvious trope of "hard work breeds success" Alger also employed the unlooked for benefactor as a way of jumpstarting his down and out characters on the road to respectability. Lutie visits Junto's bar for a beer and while singing along to a song she is approached by Boots, a band leader working for Junto who owns the bar. While Junto and Boots recognize that Lutie is a terrific singer and offer her a tryout, they hide their true intentions for her. Lutie imagines singing as a way of earning extra money that her low paying job cannot provide, and is excited at the chance to improve her and Bub's living situation. But, Professor of African American Literature Nellie Y. McKay correctly notes that "when [Lutie] seeks the kind of work that would permit her to take advantage of her beautiful singing voice, the men in control of such businesses see her as only a sexual object. They will advance her ambitions only at the cost of her sexual integrity" (160). Junto even goes so far as to order Boots not to pay her for singing, but

give her “presents” in order to keep her dependent on them and, as he imagines, increase his chances to have sex with her:

‘Don’t pay her for singing with the band. Give her presents from time to time.’ He took his wallet out, extracted a handful of bills, gave them to Boots. ‘All women like presents. This will make it easier for you to arrange for me to see her. And please remember’—his voice was precise, careful, almost as though her were discussing the details of a not too important business deal—‘leave her alone. I want her myself’ (274).

Junto, then is decidedly not in the tradition of the Algerian benefactor, but instead is a malefactor. He not only intends to exploit the labor of her singing, but also exploit her sexually. Boot’s, of course, had the same idea. Thus, we begin to see that Lutie’s exploitation goes beyond her paid job, and the precariousness of her situation is begins to become one of physical safety as well.

So, Lutie’s struggle is not just a racial one, but is also a gendered one as she seeks to improve her and Bub’s material circumstances. Not only do Boots and Junto have sexual designs on her, her superintendent violates her bedroom, stealing her lipstick and clothes, and later tries to rape her. A neighbor, Mis. Hedges tries to convince Lutie that prostitution is a viable way of making extra money. McKay also notes that is nothing “new to her:”

As early as the days when she worked for the Chandlers, she learned that he white women who visited with Mrs. Chandler for luncheons and bridge parties assumed without knowing anything about her, that her presence threatened their marriage, since they believed that what she wanted most was to entrap their husbands in sexual liaisons. White women and all men saw her only as a sexual object (160-161).

American studies professor Nicole R. Fleetwood theorizes that “excess flesh,” which she partly defines as the commodification and fetishizing of black women’s idealized bodies through “dominant marketing strategies,” is a “conceptual framework for understanding

the black body as a figuration of hypervisibility (112). Lutie is certainly fetishized by nearly every major, and some minor characters in *The Street*, and in from a certain perspective, and we might consider that Boots and Junto using her as a singer is a particular form of commodification (certainly they are planning on profiting from her). Lutie, then, is hyper-visible in a gendered way, and the reader is meant to understand that Lutie's constant visibility and her perception as a sexual object is a serious impediment to her continued material success through the path of work. And, as will be discussed at the conclusion of this chapter, it is not something she can punch her way out of.

### ***The Perception of Proper Space in The Street***

Unlike Bigger Thomas, who is paralyzed by fear and indecision when he crosses the not so imaginary line into a white neighborhood, Lutie is forced by dint of her employment to behave normally in white neighborhoods, and because of her consistently being in them, she is able to better realize the differences in material conditions between 116<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City, and Lynne, CT, and envy them. Bigger is looking for experiences; he wants to fly an airplane, or drive a fast car, he wants to do anything and so complains, "they don't let us do nothing" (20). Lutie on the other hand is after a more materially comfortable life for her and Bub, and believes work is the path by which she can achieve it. It is her faith in the Algerian myth of hard work that enables her to more easily move about different neighborhoods even though Lutie ultimately recognizes that there are specific places where white and black people were allowed to live. As she walks to the children's center she passes through a white neighborhood and thinks to herself, "This was, by comparison, a safe, secure, clean world. And looking at it, she thought it must be rather pleasant to be able to live anywhere you wanted to, just so you

could pay the rent, instead of having to find out first whether it was a place where colored people were permitted to live” (408). In this way, *The Street* like *Native Son* reinforces the idea that there was (and still perhaps is, as will be discussed in chapters 3 and 4), in actuality, culturally accepted notions about which people should and can live in which places.

The readers first encounters Lutie’s perception of how wealthier, cleaner, safer, less crowded neighborhoods are designated for white people to live in and how poorer, dirtier, dangerous, and crowded neighborhoods are meant for black people very early in the book as she rides the train to her civil service job. Initially, one must grant the possibility that her very train ride is a form of mobile freedom, until we consider that trains run on tracks, carrying someone to specific destination. In this case, Lutie only boards the train as she rides to and from work, meaning her ability to leave 116<sup>th</sup> Street, the neighborhood to which she is tied, is only permitted to so that she can earn enough money to continue her meager unhappy existence on 116<sup>th</sup> Street. While on the train she notices an advertisement that reminds her, not of her apartment, but of the Chandler’s kitchen, the rich white people she used to nanny for. The advertisement is described in this way:

For the advertisement she was looking at pictured a girl with incredible blond hair. The girl leaned close to a dark-haired, smiling man in a navy uniform. They were standing in front of a kitchen sink—a sink whose white porcelain surface gleamed under the train lights. The faucets looked like silver. The linoleum floor of the kitchen was a crisp black-and-white pattern that pointed up in the sparkle of the room. Casement windows. Red geraniums in yellow pots.

It was, she thought, a miracle of a kitchen. Completely different from the kitchen of the 116<sup>th</sup> Street apartment she had moved into just two weeks ago. But almost exactly like the one she had worked in in Connecticut (28).

It is important to note that Petry never tells the reader what the advertisement is actually meant to sell. Lutie does not, therefore, focus on a product, but rather on the idea that certain types of kitchens (clean, spacious, and beautiful) can only exist in neighborhoods where white people can live. Just as spaces are racialized, so are the various amenities which can exist there. It is a reminder to both Lutie and the reader that the difference in their neighborhoods is both a spatial and a material one. Critical geographer John Powell argues not only that neighborhoods in cities can be segregated, but also that “The concentrated poverty that these kinds of policies create is usually ruinous to people’s life chances. High levels of crime, drug use, and other social pathologies emerge and become self-perpetuating. In addition to this poor quality of life, residents experience severely limited social and economic opportunities” (22). The train trip, combined with the advertisement serves to remind us that Lutie is only a visitor in these richer neighborhoods, only a worker with no way to accumulate the money she needs to live the life she is trying to work for.

Ann Petry does not only articulate the differences economics at work in neighborhoods inhabited by black and white people, but also their environmental differences. Although Larry R. Andrews is right that there are a few passages that describe Lutie’s neighborhood as “aglow with life,” he also notes the “picture is largely negative” (195). The very first image of 116<sup>th</sup> Street is:

It [the wind] found every scrap of paper along the street—theater throwaways, announcements of dances and lodge meetings, the heavy waxed paper that loaves of bread had been wrapped in, the thinner waxed paper that had enclosed sandwiches, old envelopes, newspapers...It did everything it could to discourage people walking along the street. It found all the dirt and dust and grime on the sidewalk and lifted it up so that the dirt got into their noses, making it difficult to breathe; the dust got into their eyes and blinded them; and the grit stung their skin” (1-2).

Compare that to Lutie's primary memory of Lynne, CT where she worked for the Chandlers.

On her first trip to the post office, she realized she had never seen a street like that main street in Lynne. A wide street lined with old elm trees whose branches met high overhead in the center of the street. In summer the sun could just filter through the leaves, so that by the time its rays reached the street, it made a pattern like the lace on expensive nightgowns" (29).

The descriptions of 116<sup>th</sup> Street are not just old and dirty, but cheap too, whereas the shadows of the trees in Connecticut look expensive. Lynne is spacious, beautiful, and natural, and 116<sup>th</sup> Street is diseased and dangerous. And Lutie realizes at the same time that she always has to go home, that her visit to this beautiful white world is only temporary, and only serves to finance her entrapment on 116<sup>th</sup> Street.

Passages like these are interesting for two reasons: 1. 116<sup>th</sup> Street, in particular is almost always described as dirty, crowded, crime-ridden, and dangerous. The reader is constantly reminded of these qualities as a juxtaposition and threat to Lutie's beauty, earnestness, and penchant for working hard, and also as a juxtaposition of Bub's childlike innocence. And, 2. As a book length metaphor, "the street" both as phrase, space, and title are meant to be understood as an abstraction, that Lutie's 116<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem is akin to Bigger's Thomas's Black Belt in Chicago, and that in urban spaces all throughout American there is a version of this street where the life chances of black people are severely limited.

***Policing Ideology and Death or Exile: Entrapment by Any Other Name***

In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Louis Althusser draws a difference between Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses.

Althusser writes that “what distinguishes the ISAs from the (Repressive) State Apparatuses is the following basic difference: the Repressive State Apparatus functions ‘by violence’, whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses’ *function by ideology*” (244, emphasis Althusser). Althusser goes on to make several clarifications of this statement, but the two most important of these are: 1. “I shall say rather that every state apparatus, whether repressive or ideological, ‘functions; both by violence and ideology...’”, and 2. “...the (Repressive State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly *by repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology” (244, emphasis Althusser). He specifically cites the police as an example as apparatuses which function mostly by violence and repression, but who also “function by ideology both to ensure their own cohesion and reproduction, and the ‘values’ they propound externally” (244). The public ideological values of the police in America is that they are in the service of all the population equally, protecting them from threats internal and external, and they are impartial arbiters of the law. It is under this ideological narrative that the public is hailed to understand the mission of the police as beneficial to them, to respect their authority, and to normalize their behavior so as not to run afoul of them.

Foucault challenges this ideological representation of the disciplinary institution of the police by assigning them both an economic role in their creation and by suggesting that their enforcement power is in service to capitalism writ large. He notes that if their original purpose was to “neutralize dangers, to fix useless or disturbed populations...; they were now being asked to play a positive role, for they were becoming able to so, to increase the possible utility of individuals (Foucault 2004, 557). Foucault speaks of the inverted discipline of the workshop (by which he means any employer, from Mr. Dalton

in Bigger's case, to the Chalmer's or the civil service in Lutie's case) from "Discipline and Punish" in this way:

The discipline of the workshop, while remaining a way of enforcing respect for the regulations and authorities, of preventing thefts or losses, tend to increase aptitudes, speeds, output, and therefore profits: it still exerts a moral influence over behavior, but more and more it treats actions in terms of their results, introduces bodies into a machinery, forces them into an economy...the disciplines function increasing as techniques for making useful individuals (Foucault 2004, 558).

Just as work was designed for the process of making useful, moral individuals that would support and reproduce the economic condition of their very production, the police were designed, according to Foucault, to protect the very same economic interests:

The great companies and great commercial firms organized police societies, private police forces, to defend their property, their stock, their wares, their ships anchored in the port of London, against riot, banditry, everyday pillage and petty thievery...they were also a response...to a major economic transformation, a new form of accumulation of wealth, for when wealth began to accumulate in the form of stocks, of warehoused goods, of machines, it became necessary to have it guarded and protected" (Foucault Power 62).

I argue then, that capitalism reifies itself by producing behavior in individuals such that when they are acting morally they are acting in the interest of capitalism. And the police were created as Western capitalism ascended in order to enforce the normalization of that "moral" behavior.

The ideology of work is not the only entrapping mechanism at work in *Native Son*. Given Bigger's experience with the justice system, it is necessary to discuss by what technologies and apparatus the police enforce conditions of self-policing and entrapment. Not only do the police count on Bigger to self-police, but they employ the media in an effort to make sure the community polices him as well, even as the police search the black belt militaristically inside and out. Media itself is not an ideology, but it

serves, in this case, as a technology by which ideological ideas of self-policing, right behavior, and police authority are transmitted. The second time Bigger looks at a newspaper in the “Flight” section of the book, the reader is meant to understand several important features of the story, the reader is meant to understand how the lies in the story are meant to serve as a violent tactic attempting to ensure the conformity of the black belt residents, and reinforce the authority of the police.

The police use the media to reinforce their authority by making Bigger appear more monstrous than he really is, and in doing so, create a solidarity among white characters in the book and a more interestingly generate a debate about proper behavior amongst two local black belt black characters. The police use the media to claim that Bigger is not just a murderer, but a rapist as well. Bigger realizes immediately just how monstrous this makes him appear, and also recognizes immediately the consequences of such a claim regardless of the fact he is innocent of that charge. The last part of the headline reads “AUTHORITIES HINT SEX CRIME” and Bigger intuitively understands “those words excluded him utterly from the world. To hint that he committed a sex crime was to pronounce a death sentence; it meant a wiping out of his life even before he was captured; it meant death before death came, for the white men who read those words would at once kill him in their hearts” (281). Bigger understands the solidarity created by the media in service of the police in order to generate a consensus on what is right and normal behavior. And, indeed, the material effects of hinting at a sex crime operates as intended. The article continues by saying that “immediately a cordon of five thousand police, augmented by more than three thousand volunteers, was thrown around the black belt” (282). That’s approximately one thousand people per square mile of neighborhood,

which seems overkill for a manhunt to begin with, but the magnitude of the crime evidently mandates the suspension of civil rights for the rest of those living in the black belt.

As the thousands of police and vigilantes search the black belt, they are granted massive leeway in the suspension of civil rights as they search in solidarity for Bigger Thomas. Again, from the newspaper Bigger is reading:

Every street care, bus, el train and auto leaving the South Side is being stopped and searched. Police and vigilantes, armed with rifles, tear gas, flashlights, and photos of the killer, began at 18<sup>th</sup> Street this morning and are searching every Negro home under a blanket warrant from the mayor... Reports were current that several Negro men were beaten in various North and West Side neighborhoods... Several hundred Negroes resembling Bigger Thomas were rounded up from the South Side 'hot spots; they are being held for investigation... It was reported that several hundred Negro employees throughout the city had been dismissed from jobs...' (282-283)."

Perhaps what is most important about these various passages is the representation that they are sanctioned by the mayor, and that it reaffirms right action by the police and the vigilantes, thusly granting the police more righteous authority as they leverage their power in their search for Bigger.

While the representation of the solidarity generated to trap Bigger is, in this section, perfectly unified among white characters, it is less so among black characters, but it does still appear. Hiding in a back flat, Bigger eavesdrops on two black characters, Jack and Jim arguing about whether or not they would hand Bigger over to the police. The debate focuses on the fact that Jack lost his job, and both agree that white people, because of Bigger or not, think of black people as perverse, but while Jack would hand Bigger over Jim would not. While the sample size is small, it does suggest that there are some who have been hailed by the ideology of normalized behavior with regards the

police and would follow aid them without knowing all the facts, but merely because they are imbued with authority.

The police also use the paper to mark the search for Bigger Thomas, where they've been and what they have left to search of the black belt. The newspaper prints out a gridded map for the police, in order that the majority of Chicago's population has faith they are accomplishing their mission. The final article Bigger reads in the newspaper has a very small section of the black belt left unsearched. Bigger reads the following: "This time the shaded area had deepened from both the north and the south, leaving a small square of white in the middle of that oblong. He stood looking at that tiny square of white as though gazing down the barrel of a gun. He was there on that map, in that white spot, standing in a room waiting for them to come" (296). Bigger's sense of his own visibility is about to come true. His options for running are practically gone, the hunters are closing in on him like a noose in a highly organized, highly effective, highly military operation, supported by most of the population and the media. Bigger, just as he is frozen looking at the paper is about to literally be frozen in place as he is soaked in the middle of a very cold winter with a fire hose (311). Just as Bigger was paralyzed when he dropped his hat during the interview with Mr. Dalton, and at Mr. Dalton's mercy for a job, he finds himself frozen in place at the hands of a very angry police force and lynch mob. Bigger is completely immobilized in a way that Lutie Johnson does not exactly experience in Ann Petry's *The Street*.

Whereas it can be argued that when Bigger killed Mary Dalton he was acting from a sort of psychological self-defense in that he feared the consequences of occupying a space in her bedroom even though he had really done nothing wrong, there can be no

doubt that Lutie fully acted out of self-defense in fright for her very survival. Max argues this in his defense of Bigger, commenting that racialized social customs and practices are at least partly responsible for Bigger's actions asking:

What would a boy, free from the warping influences which have played so hard upon Bigger Thomas, have done that night when he found himself alone with that drunk girl? He would have gone to Mr. and Mrs. Dalton and told them that their daughter was drunk. And the thing would have been over. There would have been no murder. But the way we have treated this boy made him do the *very* thing we did not want (460).

Lutie on the other hand had been threatened with physical and sexual violence, and had already been struck several times by Boots (425-428). One might reasonably argue that as she repeatedly bludgeons him Boots with the candlestick she went too far, but no one could reasonably deny that the first blow she struck was entirely in self-defense. And yet, she has internalized that the police will prosecute her in just the same way they prosecuted Bigger.

What then are Bigger Thomas and Lutie Johnson guilty of? Of course they both killed someone, and of course there are mitigating circumstances in each case which need not be discussed here; this chapter is not meant to serve as legal treatise on various versions of self-defense each character might have tried to argue. This chapter is meant to demonstrate that work is not a means to social advancement, and I am claiming that Bigger's and Lutie's unstated crime was demonstrating themselves unfit to act as productive laborers and consumers. Both Bigger and Lutie killed someone who were of a demonstrably greater value as producers and consumers. Consider Mary Dalton's first description in the book which Bigger hears at the movies: "Here are the daughters of the rich taking sunbaths in the sands of Florida! This little collection of debutantes represents over four billion dollars of America's wealth and over fifty of America's

leading families...” (34). Clearly her life is of more value to the economic system than an unemployed Bigger Thomas who needs a quarter from his mom in order to catch the bus to a job interview at the Dalton estate. And, consider Boots, the man who Lutie killed in self-defense. Boots drives a new car, has enough money to buy gas, and has a reliable job as an entertainer; in short, both Boots and Mary Dalton participate in the economy in ways Bigger and Lutie cannot. They have value Lutie and Bigger do not.

Thus, the police are acting not only in the service of what they consider to be justice, but in the best economic interests of capitalist system they serve. They protect valuable economic contributors the same way they would protect machinery in a shop and punish those who (Bigger and Lutie) are disposable. They are disposable in that the value of their labor is so small that it can easily be replaced, and also because the value of their position as consumers is so marginal it is just as replaceable. In short, they can be used as an example of what happens when people do not self-police their actions in accordance with an American capitalist ideology.

But what is most interesting about the end of these two novels is that despite the apparent differences in the outcomes of the murder, Bigger’s incarceration and death sentence vs. Lutie’s exile, and Bigger’s self-awakening vs. Lutie’s self-withdrawal, the material consequences, jail and exile, are really very much the same. We should perhaps agree with those scholars who, like Paul Siegel when he writes that “Bigger does not go to death hating all white men. He accepts the comradeship of Jan, for the first time in his life, dropping the ‘mister’ in front of a white man’s name,” (522) recognize a real and positive change of consciousness in Bigger. And we should perhaps reject the older and more traditional readings of Bigger from critics like Harold Bloom who claimed that “his

[Bigger] inarticulateness, rage, fear have compelled him to find dignity and identity only by killing” (2). And yet perhaps, neither really approach the most important issue; Bigger is about to die, unable to impart the lesson he learned, the consciousness he becomes aware of, to anyone. Max recoils from Bigger at the moment he expresses his revelation, his “eyes were full of terror” (501). For all his defense of Bigger, and the expression of an apocalyptic outcome of racist oppression, he still cannot cope with the way Bigger becomes self-aware. There is no one then, who can transmit Bigger’s lessons to others who must be experiencing something similar. With his death, his life, his experience, his change of consciousness will be erased just as surely as his body and his life will be.

Lutie Johnson, on the other hand appears to avoid punishment for killing Boots, but I argue that even in her mobility, that is her exile to Chicago, she is just as trapped and erased as Bigger. In her article “Beyond Protest: The Street as Humanitarian Narrative, Clare Virginia Eby details the way in which Lutie’s humanism dissolves under the weight of her economic burdens, Bub’s arrest, and the constant sensory battering of 116<sup>th</sup> St. Eby writes that “ironically, as Lutie comes to feel that her life is a dead end, she projects onto others her sense of the street’s crushing uniformity...Lutie increasingly sees the street as a homogenized threat, identical from block to block” (46). Throughout the novel Ann Petry abstracts 116<sup>th</sup> street to represent identical streets in different cities:

Yes, she thought, she and Bub had to get out of 116th Street. It was a bad street. And then she thought about other streets. It wasn’t just this street that she was afraid of or was bad. It was any street where people were packed together like sardines in a can.

And it wasn’t just this city. It was any city where they set up a line and say black folks stay on this side and white folks stay on this side, so that black folks were crammed on top of each other—jammed and packed and forced into the smallest space until they were completely cut off from light and air (206).

As she chooses Chicago as her place to “run” to, she realizes that there is no hope and she is already trapped, as she thinks to herself “Chicago was not too far away and it was big. It would swallow her up. She would go there” (434). Lutie recognizes that Chicago is the same as New York City insofar as she imagines the material lived experience of black people. She wants to be swallowed, to be erased. She no longer has the will to fight against the system which she thought would raise her up but instead dehumanized her through so much of the novel. The real tragedy of *The Street* is, as Eby notes, is Lutie’s dehumanization and more than that, the total destruction of her spirit.

This is why it would be a misreading to look at Lutie’s mobility here (she is ostensibly making a choice to flee to Chicago), as anything more than just another kind of trap. Lutie herself recognizes that she has little choice, and whatever choice she has is just really an illusion. As she boards the train, she realizes her ticket is one way, and thinks she’s had a one-way ticket “since the day she was born. Lutie traces a design on the frosted window of the train that symbolizes both her entrapment and the idea that the streets in New York City will be the same as the streets in Chicago: “As the train started to move, she began to trace a design on the window. It was a series of circles that flowed into each other” (435). There is no getting out of the circles; there is no getting out of the city; there is no getting off the street. Lutie then, I argue, is just as trapped as Bigger. Perhaps, from a certain perspective she is worse off, as she will presumably live a reasonably long life reliving the pain of “failing” her son, “failing” herself and going through the motions of living on the Chicago version of 116<sup>th</sup> street. Her flight to Chicago, really only takes her as far as Bigger’s several block flight from the police.

**The City in Crisis: Race, Crime, and Mass Incarceration in John Carpenter's *Escape From New York* and Richard Fleischer's *Soylent Green***

In 1975 New York City found itself in a fiscal crisis brought on by what David Harvey, in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, characterizes as an “iconic case [of] Capitalist restructuring and deindustrialization [which] had for several years been eroding the base of the city, and [that] rapid suburbanization had left much of the central city impoverished (44-45). The response to the possibility that New York City might default on its commitments by both the federal government and important financial institution in the city itself might be best described as one of collusion in favor of pursuing a shift in both politics and economic ideology. Historian Joshua B. Freeman describes the situation in this way.

In the recession and the budget crisis, financial leaders saw an opportunity to undo the past, to restructure New York along lines more to their liking than those drawn by decades of liberalism and labor action. They wanted less and less costly government, fiscal probity, and the desocialization of services and protections for the working class and the poor. They also wanted humbled municipal unions that no longer would enable government workers to have superior benefits and a less intense pace of work than private-sector workers (258).

New York City financial elites, in what Harvey calls a “coup” (45), were able to enforce these austerity measures on the city government by refusing to buy city bonds to cover the cost of New York City's expenses unless their economic demands for restructuring New York City were met. They also were able to ensure there would be no federal bailout by working closely with President Gerald Ford who scolded New York City in a speech before the National Press Club and swore that he was “prepared to veto any bill that has as its purpose a Federal bailout of New York City to prevent a default (Ferretti 354). New York City became the crucible for the first major neoliberal economic

experiment on American soil, to be used in an effort, according to Harvey, “as a vehicle to restore class power” (31).

The effects of the austerity measures on New York City were immediate and devastating. Historian Max Page describes it “as much an assassination as it was a suicide” (153). New York City municipal workers were forced to agree to wage freezes, four-week unpaid furloughs, and rewritten work rules, (Freeman 263 and Harvey 45). City services were cut dramatically. There was a “drastic reduction” of firefighters, and “nearly three thousand” sanitation and “five hundred” police officers were laid off contributing to an alarming total of 13,500 employees laid off (Freeman 261-267). Tuition was introduced at CUNY for the first time, and “the final indignity was the requirement that municipal unions should invest their pension funds in city bonds (Harvey 45).

While this was happening, the working class and the poor, the victims of these policies, were left largely to fend for themselves. Meanwhile, “the creation of a ‘good business climate’ was a priority. This meant using public resources to build appropriate infrastructures for business (particularly in telecommunications) coupled with subsidies and tax incentives for capitalist enterprises. Corporate welfare substituted for people’s welfare (Harvey 47). So, when managing editor William Bring of the New York newspaper *The Daily News* characterized President Ford’s speech to the National Press Board with the October 29, 1975 headline “Ford to the City: Drop Dead” (Ferretti 358), the feeling captured what many victims of the austerity measures were feeling: That both the elected officials in New York City, and most federally elected officials had

abandoned them to fend for themselves in a city whose economic and political shifting ideology was increasing leaving them behind.

Though there are many films that depict a dystopian New York City, the two films discussed in this chapter allow for an examination of how a narrative of crime is used to disguise the economic and political abandonment of New York City's poorest neighborhoods and their residents in the 1970s. John Carpenter's 1981 *Escape From New York* depicts a form of urban population control that suggests crime is the prime motivating factor for abandoning New York City. In this film, because crime is so ubiquitous and intractable, the entirety of Manhattan Island is transformed into the one maximum security prison for all the criminals in the United States. This extreme dystopian version of New York also parodies mandatory sentencing laws which were just coming into popularity and which were billed as a method of dealing with rampant, mostly urban crime. Every sentence is a death sentence in this film in that there is no process for release from the New York prison. New York, in this film, is so terrifying that incoming prisoners are offered an option of voluntary suicide rather than be interred. And, just as mass incarceration today is an economically viable method of controlling viable populations, so is the New York Maximum Security Prison, because there are no resources, food, building materials, clothes, fuel, and etc...supplied to the prison. The film appears to suggest that no one profits from prisons, but as will demonstrated later in this chapter, that is demonstrably untrue.

Richard Fleischer's *Soylent Green* suggests a method of controlling an urban population in a different way than *Escape From New York*, but in an even more macabre fashion, while still maintaining the idea that crime is the central problem facing cities. It

does this in two ways. 1. By criminalizing the poor and minority groups who are disenfranchised by the corporate destruction of the environment and then punishing the so-called criminality of the masses by literally transforming them into food to be dispensed as welfare to the rest of the disenfranchised. And, 2. By legitimizing prostitution and making domesticated sexual house slaves out of young women of every minority group who fit normative standards of beauty. Thus, the population is either controlled by being forced to serve the elite, or by being forced into a self-cannibalization which serves as a viable Malthusian economic solution for the capitalist class.

### ***The Perception of Crime in New York City***

*Escape From New York* works upon the assumption that the audience is so obsessed with and paranoid about crime that it begins with an interesting fictionalized statistic intended to alarm and simultaneously leverage those fears. “1988: The Crime Rate in the United States Rises Four Hundred Percent” (Castle). To some extent this invented statistic captures the sort of paranoid zeitgeist that pervaded (and still pervades) American culture that cities are already dangerous and always becoming more so. Just as recently as February 7, 2017, President Donald Trump “revived his thoroughly debunked lie about U.S. crime...claiming that the national murder rate is nearing a 50-year high,” despite the fact that “recent FBI data shows the U.S. murder rate near its lowest in decades...(Miller). Cultural anthropologist Setha M. Low in her work on the increasing prevalence of gated communities reminds us that “between 1965 and 1992, the percentage of Americans expressing fear of crime increased most in the early 1970s and then remained constant. And even with a 27 percent decline in violent crime rates between 1993 and 1998, there was only a modest reduction in fear and worry” (116).

What we have then, in *Escape From New York*, is a film that depicts New York City reduced to complete savagery, in total crisis, as it is remade into a prison island to contain the precipitously rising urban crime rate, and as it becomes an expatriate exile home for seemingly every other violent criminal in the United States.

It is interesting to note that the rise in fear of urban crime began, by and large according to Setha Low, in 1965 (116). The 1960s was an interesting time for many major American cities as post World War II prosperity began to fly from urban spaces to the suburbs in the form of both industry and middle and upper-middle class citizens. This occurred just as many cities became the locus for the civil rights movements and the anti-Vietnam war movements, which included both protests and riots. In order to manage both the perception of increasing crime rates, and the civil unrest associated with these various political movements, police increasingly turned to militaristic methods to control the population. One such instance in New York City in 1964 provides a cultural moment through which we can understand some of the many variables associated with a city in crisis, which include, but are not limited to, overpopulation of certain neighborhoods, a sense of who belongs in specific neighborhoods, the lack of freedom of movement, increasing militaristic police brutality, and an uneven distribution of resources.

While many people are passingly familiar with the riots associated with the 1960s and the Civil Rights Era, they tend to remember the riots in Newark, Detroit, and especially Watts as the ones that most characterize the era. To some extent, they may be right, each of these riots are of importance, but they do lack the distinction of being first. That unfortunate distinction belongs to Harlem Riot of 1964, and in many ways it disturbingly resembles some of the police shootings which have been protested by the

current Black Lives Matter movement. In the Summer of 1964, the summer school program in New York City bussed a large number of Latino and African-American students into rich white neighborhoods which, of course, angered a certain portion of the population who felt their neighborhoods were being invaded. One such resident resented this and approached a small group of students who were hanging around outside of the apartment building where he was the superintendent (Johnson, Marilyn 234-235).

Historian Marilyn Johnson describes the superintendent's actions and the immediate aftermath in this way:

In an attempt to disperse the youths that persistently hung out on the side-walk, he reportedly used racial epithets and sprayed them with a garden hose. Perhaps unaware of the potent symbolism of spraying school children with a water hose when images of Birmingham were still painfully fresh, the superintendent was soon pelted with soda bottles and garbage can lids. As he fled into the apartment building fifteen year-old James Powell pursued him. At this point an off-duty police lieutenant, Thomas Gilligan, emerged from an adjacent store, drew his gun, and called for Powell to halt.

What happened next, is less clear. Some witnesses (mainly white adults) said Powell had a knife and lunged repeatedly at Gilligan. Others (mainly black teenagers) said they saw no knife and that Powell had not advanced on the officer. In any event, Gilligan fired three shots that killed Powell. Before long, an angry crowd of three hundred black teenagers began throwing bottles and cans at Gilligan and other police who arrived on the scene, yelling "This is worse than Mississippi" and "Come on, shoot another nigger." As the disorder spread, seventy-five police officers were sent in and had restored calm in about two hours" (235).

This "restored calm" was only short lived, though as more riots broke out and spread from Harlem to Bedford Stuyvesant, Manhattan, and Brooklyn.

While the testimony regarding Powell brandishing a knife is disputed, what cannot be disputed are the original actions of the superintendent who initiated the confrontation that led to Powell's death. His overtly racist behavior is also clearly related to a sense of who belongs in which neighborhoods. His sense that his neighborhood was

a good “white” one which was being invaded and threatened by these young Black and Latino teenagers betrays an innate belief that specific neighborhoods ought to be hermetically sealed off from other neighborhoods based on race, and that imaginary boundaries between racially segregated neighborhoods are to be respected as codified law or enforced by vigilante action. What the superintendent fails to recognize, or more likely pretends not to understand, is the fact that those students are there because summer school service was not offered in their neighborhood. This type of municipal service distribution is a clear situational precursor to the famous Kerner Commission report of 1968 which stated that “the United States was ‘moving towards two societies, one black, one white, separate and unequal’” (Kennedy 90). De facto segregation of neighborhoods is a reality of many American cities, and as will shortly be discussed often comes with a concomitant inequality in infrastructure, services, and economic opportunities.

The 1964 Harlem riot lasted nearly a week, “resulted in 465 arrests and left one person dead and more than a hundred injured, most of which were African Americans (Johnson, Marilyn 236). It set off nearly five years’ worth of protests and riots, accounting for “329 major riots” in “257 cities” which accounted for “220 people dead, 8,371 injured, and 52,629 under arrest” (Newman 110). In truth, and to their credit, the New York City Police Department apparently did a reasonable job of quieting down the riot, or at least letting it run its course without the use of paramilitary equipment. But despite their “restraint” the riots and the police response to them were at least partly responsible for the perception that American cities were inherently dangerous and that white people were subject to criminal victimization by the black and Latino populations. The riots also changed not just the way the population viewed police and police brutality,

but also changed the police's perception of their own authority and the possible responses to urban disorder.

The New York Police Department's response to the riots were as one might expect; They responded quickly with violence, with punitive intent, increasing militaristic tactics, and a containment strategy. Historian Joanne Reitano describes the police reaction this way:

The police dispatched four hundred men and the Tactical Police Force. They repeatedly charged the crowd, beating people with their fists and nightsticks. Police fired their guns through tenement windows or at the rooftops, causing yet more panic and one death...Cops used their clubs freely and shot bullets into the air; mounted police charged the crowds. The chaos lasted two more days, during which police shot five people, none fatally" (165).

As frightening as the police response was (and it was far less violent than the responses of some other cities to the riots of the 1960s) what is even more frightening is that the NYPD reserved the right to react even more violently in the future. Responding to the call for an independent civilian review board to investigate acts of police brutality in the wake of the Harlem Riot, Patrick Murphy the Commissioner of the New York City Police claimed that "forceful police action, like that of the NYPD in the recent riot, was essential for restoring law and order" (Johnson, Marilyn 238). He also indicated that civilian review would inhibit the ability for police to act, falsely citing Philadelphia and Rochester as cities who were "virtually paralyzed" by civilian review. The fact is that, despite fully functioning civilian review boards, both of those police departments "had pioneered new more restrained riot control tactics" (Johnson, Marilyn 238). What is important about New York rejecting the idea of a civilian control board is that the authority of the police seems to transcend the will of the people who are supposed to grant the police their authority in the first place. Without a process of accountability, the

power of the police department has the appearance of being unlimited, and without knowing what the police can and cannot do, the populations at large may be deprived of their sense of trust in their supposed protectors. Indeed, right after the Harlem Riots in 1964, “43 percent of Harlem respondents affirmed that police brutality was a serious problem” (Johnson, Marilyn 236).

During these years and concomitant with the spike in protests and the arrests associated with them came the rise in the perception that the city was populated with criminals and therefore inherently dangerous. This popular paranoia was even espoused by the New York Times in 1969:

The fear is visible: It can be seen in clusters of stores that close early because the streets are sinister and customers no longer stroll after supper for newspapers and pints of ice cream. It can be seen in the faces of women opening elevator doors, in the hurried step of the man walking home late at night from the subway. The fear manifests itself in elaborate gates and locks, in the growing number of key rings, in the formation of tenant’s squads to patrol corridors, in shop buzzers pressed to admit only recognizable customers. And finally it becomes habit (Cannato 526-527).

This fear of certain neighborhoods in cities almost always breaks down along racial and capital lines, in which both the poor and minorities are feared as the criminal element which must be either contained, avoided, or more likely both. Just as the Black Belt in Chicago was comprised of almost entirely Black people, certain neighborhoods in New York City were almost totally racially homogenized as well, and more than that, could transform into racially homogenized zones in a shockingly short amount of time.

East New York City is one such neighborhood that saw a sudden transformation from one that was predominantly inhabited by white people to a predominantly minority neighborhood. Historian Vincent J. Cannato comments on this transformation writing that “in 1960, East New York was 85 percent white. Seven years later, it was 80 percent

black and Puerto Rican...By 1980, East New York was almost completely black and Puerto Rican, with only a few elderly whites remaining” (127). Along with the transformed demographic came accompanying changes in both perception and reality. The reality was that retail shops closed, banks stopped lending mortgages, landlords increasing saw property prices falling and got as much rent as they could before allowing the properties to run down due to what were suddenly unwise investments. Real-estate agents encouraged selling properties as a loss, and as there was less value in the neighborhood (and less money) upkeep of those properties was made more difficult (Cannato 128). Cannato puts it succinctly: “New York City had always seen its share of poverty. But this kind of destruction was entirely new. From the South Bronx to Harlem to Central Brooklyn, parts of New York began to resemble the bombed-out cities of postwar Germany” (128). It is essential here, that we understand the hollowing out of certain neighborhoods in American cities is not simply just based upon race, but is also a function of a racialized capitalism that privileges predominantly white neighborhoods as good investments worthy of job creation and distribution of resources.

With the changes in population, infrastructure, and economics came a changing perception of New York City. Historically the story of New York City was, generally speaking, one of optimism. The Harlem Renaissance was an optimistic time in literary history, one that spoke to an emerging black consciousness, a new cultural identity, one that demanded a new form of self-determination. The “Big Apple” a phrase now synonymous with New York City was created alongside the Jazz movement of the 1920s and 1930s because they “considered New York City the best place to create, to succeed, and said the poet Langston Hughes, to have fun” (Reitano 131). But by the time the

1960s and 1970s came around the feeling of glitz and glamour, the feeling of optimism, had been largely replaced by a sense of realistic despair. David Yergin of New York Magazine wrote this about East New York in 1971:

The vacant houses in East New York, many in the Model Cities tract, are now burned out, vandalized, shattered, filled with old shoes, smashed furniture, forgotten dogs and a sour effluvia of neglect and despair. Professional ‘strippers’ often brazenly drive up in trucks in broad daylight and remove the copper, brass and lead plumbing, the sinks and radiators for sale to scrap-metal dealers. Windows and doors are sealed with tin or cinderblocks or left open and broken (Cannato 127-128).

It is important to note here that the dilapidated condition of East New York is represented as being in large part due to the “strippers” a derogatory term with an ugly imputation of sexual depravity for the now mostly black residents who can’t find work who were reclaiming what has been abandoned by the capitalists who once built these properties. Of course, when a large-scale demolition project licensed by the government and paid for by corporations reclaim these resources it is an action lauded as “recycling.” But Yergin was clearly more interested in creating a public perception that the people living in East New York are solely responsible for the condition of the neighborhood, rather than explore the social and economic decisions that left this neighborhood impoverished. This explanation became the norm rather than the exception and is characterized in stark terms by “a former Italian resident of East New York” who when interviewed commented that “the neighborhood was totally destroyed as soon as the blacks moved in. Buildings started burning down, and we had more crime” (Cannato 129).

The idea of the city as a dangerous place has a long history, but the racialization of the city as dangerous is a relatively new development, and while journalism as detailed above has had a role in creating this perception of the urban jungle which must be

contained, both literary works and feature films have had a hand in representing the city as dangerous. It must be remembered that both literary works and feature films are capitalist products in themselves. They are designed, pitched, “green lighted,” and presented with the bottom line in mind. But as literary scholar Richard Godden argues in *Fictions of Capital* “consumption cannot be divorced from production” (6), so I argue in agreement with bell hooks that consuming these works generates a perception of cultural identity (5). Thus, having created works which represent the idea that urban centers are in crisis and the people living there are responsible for that crisis, and having consumed that idea, the conditions are created under which more creative works will further the position that cities are full of crime, therefore dangerous, and that urban residents are responsible for making the city a dangerous place.

This chapter explores the idea that literary and visual representations of race are instrumental in how many American urban centers (New York City in this case) are understood to be dangerous, racialized zones of criminal activity, which must be policed in ever increasing militaristic ways. The barrage of works that position the city as an unredeemptive urban jungle, a carceral space to be either exploited or avoided or both, or a space that has been exploited and abandoned are too numerous to treat in this chapter, but a sample will demonstrate a persistent effort to represent the city this way. To this end, this chapter looks at two works that build upon the racialized fear of American urban centers that arose during and from the civil unrest associated with not just black people in cities, but also the amount of black people in cities in the 1960s including John Carpenter’s *Escape From New York* (1981) and Richard Fleischer’s *Soylent Green* (1973). By looking at these films in conjunction I will argue that while these films

disrupt the American capitalist ideologies of capital mobility and social advancement, they do so at the cost of marginalizing racialized populations as dangerous ones which must be contained and controlled by a militaristic and corrupt police authority which really serves the interest of capitalism instead of their ideologically assigned purpose of justice.

### ***No Escape From New York***

Shortly after the introductory credits roll over an Alan Parsons Project inspired portentous instrumental the audience learns by voice over about the transformation of New York from a residential urban center into a maximum-security prison:

The once great city of New York becomes the one maximum security prison for the entire country. A fifty-foot containment wall is erected along the New Jersey shore line, across the Harlem River, and down along the Brooklyn shoreline. It surrounds Manhattan Island. All bridges and waterways are mined. The United States Police force, like an army, is encamped around the Island. There are no guards inside the prison, only the prisoners and the worlds they have made. The rules are simple: Once you go in, you don't come out (Castle).

The voice over is delivered almost robotically while the audience is watching a graphic of Manhattan as it is surrounded by the "Containment Wall," and as Liberty Island is renamed as the "Statue of Liberty Island Security Control," while the word prison in "Manhattan Island Prison" occasionally flashes reminding us of Manhattan's now sinister purpose. The bridges which once afforded movement to and from Manhattan are colored red on this graphic to remind us of the deadly mines which are hidden on them. The entire mood here is one, from the voice-over to the electronic music is designed to impart a sense of danger or foreboding. The audience is meant to be immediately intimidated by the very idea of New York.

But what is most intimidating about the introduction of the movie are the rules for New York. “Once you go in, you don’t come out” (Castle). *Escape From New York* presents us with a stark ideological shift for the role of prisons in this authoritarian, right-wing, dystopian future. First, we should remember that, according to Law Professor Norval Morris prior to prisons “felons were dealt with by exile, banishment, transportation, and a diversity of demeaning and painful corporal punishments ...Prisons for felons arose as a reaction to the excesses and barbarisms of earlier punishments; imprisonment was one of the early ‘diversions from traditional criminal sanctions (4). Prisons, then, were originally intended as a sort of reform from traditionally cruel punishments that left people maimed, branded, exiled, or dead.

Critical geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore identifies four ideological purposes for the contemporary prison system, all of which are supported and criticized for various reasons by various groups. These four theories include:

Retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation or incapacitation... The shock of retribution—loss of liberty—supposedly keeps convicted persons from doing again, upon release, what sent them to prison. Retribution’s specter, deterrence, allegedly dissuades people who can project themselves into a convicted person’s jumpsuit from doing what might result in lost liberty. Rehabilitation proposes that the unfreedom of prisons provide an occasion for the acquisition of sobriety and skills, so that, on release, formerly incarcerated people can live lives away from the criminal dragnet. And, finally, incapacitation, the least ambitious, simply calculates that those locked up cannot make trouble outside of prisons” (Introduction).

Given the “simple rules” regarding the Manhattan Island Prison, that “once you go in, you don’t come out,” it is incapacitation the movie is most interested in representing, because retribution and rehabilitation are not possible, and deterrence has already failed for those about to be incarcerated. The idea of incapacitation is not just important because of the way it removes people from society, entrapping them, but because the

trend of the United States Justice system is moving away from retribution and rehabilitation to a greater focus on ineffective deterrence and a more permanent incarceration.

According to Dominique Moran, a Reader in Carceral Geography, the United States has moved away from discourses and practices of rehabilitation and deterrence to a form of what she terms “new punitiveness.” This new punitiveness is comprised by “increased criminal sanctions, longer sentences, [a] sense of ‘shaming’ and humiliating punishment;” She further claims that this trend “reaches beyond the bounds of normal policy ebb and flow” (105-106). *Escape From New York* is a representational precursor to this “new punitiveness” in two ways: 1. By offering every incoming inmate, no matter the crime the option of volunteering to end their lives by cremation (both a cruel and unusual option), but an available one because the prospect of entering New York City is so terrifying and 2. By depicting a serious felony, robbing a federal institution, a crime normally punished by a finite amount of time in prison, but in the film is punishable by certain death. Bob Hauk, the Commissioner of the American Police Force is reviewing Snake Plissken’s (the erstwhile anti-hero), and the following exchange occurs.

Bob Hauk: S.D. Plissken... American, Lieutenant: Special Forces Unit "Black Light." Two Purple Hearts, Leningrad and Siberia. Youngest man to be decorated by the President. Then you robbed the Federal Reserve Depository... life sentence, New York Maximum Security Penitentiary. I'm about to kick your ass out of the world, war hero...

Snake Plissken: Who're you?

Bob Hauk: Bob Hauk. Police Commissioner.

Snake Plissken: Bob Hauk (Castle).

Bob Hauk: Special Forces Unit “Texas Thunder.” We’ve heard of you too Plissken.

It is important to note that Hauk never indicates Plissken murdered anyone during the robbery of the Federal Reserve Depository, and that the crime Plissken has been

convicted of is simply robbery. According the group Families Against Mandatory Minimums, as of August 12, 2012 the federal mandatory minimum sentence for bank robbery (not a perfect corollary, but “robbed” is the vernacular described by Carpenter and Castle) is ten years (Federal Mandatory Minimums). Yet we see Bab Hauk, in a clear example of the “new punitive” about to enforce a what he calls a life sentence but is really a death sentence as he plans “to kick [Plissken’s] ass out the world.” It would be difficult to suggest that Plissken be rehabilitated, he seems permanently disaffected, but it is also clear that the system is not interested in the possibilities of a future, or the reasons for the criminality of someone who formerly served his country with distinction. The courts, the political system, and the police are only interested in permanently sequestering him from the population at large.

Thus, we see in *Escape From New York* a representation of the ideological shift of the American prison system as it began to it began to transform from a place of supposed rehabilitation to a place of “new punitiveness.” In the space of just over two hundred years, beginning with the Pennsylvania Quakers who saw prison as a positive alternative to capital punishment (Morris 5), we see a shift in the purpose of prisons from one that historically protected a person from excessive and barbaric punishments by temporary removal to one that now reenacts a form of excessive punishment by imprisoning people for longer and longer periods of time, by imposing those sentences earlier in their life, by imposing those sentences for increasingly minor crimes, and by imposing those sentences racially. The next section analyzes the ways in which crime, entrapment, and incapacitation are played out and used against urban minority neighborhoods.

***The Racial Hierarchy of the New York Maximum Security Prison***

*Escape From New York* is dominated by an almost entirely white cast. The police force, when you can see their faces beneath their riot helmets are white, and so is the police commissioner. The anti-hero, Snake Plissken (played by Kurt Russel) is white. The President of the United States and his cabinet aboard Air Force 1 is entirely white, and even most of the prisoners are white, certainly all the ones with speaking roles are. It is conspicuous then, and more than a little telling that the crime boss of the New York Maximum Security Prison is played by Isaac Hayes, a soul singer turned actor made famous by singing, in part, about the black American experience.

Part of Isaac Hayes' early musical project, after writing, producing, and playing piano sessions for Stax records was to rewrite white mainstream pop and folk music, transforming them into soulful epics. For example, Glen Campbell's "By the Time I Get To Phoenix" clocked in at two minutes and forty-one seconds, but when Isaac Hayes recorded it on his debut album *Hot Buttered Soul* he reinvented it, transforming it from a desperately boring solo guitar track into a fully orchestrated tour-de-force of soul music. In many ways Isaac Hayes and *Hot Buttered Soul* are the *sui generis* of American soul music. Because of the popularity of *Hot Buttered Soul*, whose album cover was only a picture of the top of Isaac Hayes' shaved head, and because of the way Isaac Hayes laid claim to soul music, he became associated with a particular kind of blackness in the popular imagination.

In 1971 Isaac Hayes became forever associated with the black imaginary when he wrote, sang, and produced the soundtrack for the movie *Shaft* (the king of Blaxploitation films), for which he won the Academy Award for Best Original Song, moving soul music into the mainstream. Track number ten "Soulsville" is perhaps the most socially

conscious song on the album, detailing the unemployment, overcrowded living situation in the ghetto and attributing the rising crime rates to hunger rather than the moral deficiencies of the residents. Hayes sings in “Soulsville:” “Black man, born free/ At least that’s the way it’s supposed to be/ The chains that bind him are hard to see,/ unless you take this walk with me....Any kind of job is hard to find/ That means an increase in the welfare line/ The crime rate is rising too,/ But if you were hungry, what would you do?” (Hayes). Hayes invites the listener on a guided tour of Harlem, and from that vantage point the listener is meant to sympathize with rather than pathologize the systematically oppressed.

The most enduring, most controversial, and most popular image of Isaac Hayes appeared on the cover of his 6<sup>th</sup> release (all within a five-year span), the 1973 *Black Moses* record. The cover of the LP unfolded to a poster revealing Hayes standing hooded on a river bank in long robe, with his arms outstretched, enveloped by the shape of the cross, some three feet wide by four feet tall. The “Black Moses” appellation bespoke of a symbolic deliverance, although at first Isaac Hayes himself shied away from the name, until he understood it’s power:

I had nothing to do with it. I was kicking and screaming all the way. But when I saw the relevance and effect that it had on people, it wasn’t a negative thing. It was a healing thing, it was an inspiring thing. It raised the level of black consciousness in the States. People were proud to be black. Black men could finally stand up and be men because here’s Black Moses, he’s the epitome of black masculinity. Chains that once represented bondage and slavery now can be a sign of power and strength and sexuality and virility (Bowman 238).

Black Moses, then, was a cultural sign promising freedom via a transformed white narrative. Just as he reinvented Glen Campbell, Isaac Hayes appropriated a figure of deliverance most often represented as white-washed. The Christian religious figure

Moses was recently depicted by Christian Bale in Ridley Scott's 2014 *Exodus: Gods and Kings* and perhaps most famously by none other than Charlton Heston (who stars in *Soylent Green* as well) in Cecil B. DeMille's 1956 *The Ten Commandments*. That Isaac Hayes purposefully embodied a black figure of deliverance makes his character's failure to deliver on his promise to lead his people out of prison as the Duke of New York in *Escape From New York* even more troubling.

The first time the audience sees the Duke of New York, (after having heard threatening rumors about his power, reclusiveness, and cruelty) he is being chauffeured in a fully restored (it must be restored because nothing in the New York City Prison is pristine any more), perfectly clean 1977 Cadillac Fleetwood. The Fleetwood is fully tricked out, complete with two sets of chandeliers decorating both the hood and the rear window panels, an ostentatiously large disco ball hangs from the rear-view mirror, and a full set of hydraulics which raise and lower the car for show. It is the lead car in a parade of smoking, dented wrecks, marking it even more ostentatiously as a sign of power, prestige, and excess. The Duke himself, the audience sees as he steps out of the car is dressed as some strange combination of a pimp and a warlord, with gold chains and medallions, large gold hoop earrings, a cowboy hat and boots, a gold pocket watch, and he's also wearing a military jacket reminiscent of the style worn in the 19<sup>th</sup> century complete with gold epaulets and studded leather vambraces which would look more at home in the post-apocalyptic landscape of a *Mad Max* film than an urban landscape, even one as decimated as this one. Thus, Isaac Hayes in his presentation as The Duke of New York embodies two distinct types of criminality that are both associated with urban spaces; the pimp and the gang leader, two stereotypically black criminal subjectivities.

Part of the problem with Isaac Hayes being represented as the Duke of New York is that it depicts a transformation of Black Moses as a character of deliverance and his soul music career as having created a narrative of black experience out of white experience into a character fixed by the already dominant cultural narrative of black as inferior, criminal, and morally deficient. Professor of film studies Priscilla Peña Ovalle argues that “Hollywood power structures reify whiteness by continuing to pose it as the central screen identity,” and because of that “white subjects in film have been historically positioned as the default identity for protagonists” (165). In the absence of official cultural narratives to explain the mythology of dangerous cities populated by inferior, dangerous, and morally deficient minorities, the persistence of artistic narratives that reify that mythology take on greater importance and provide the image of a lasting simulacra. Ovalle continues by arguing:

Through reiterated performance, the hierarchal systems for race and gender work to support and reify each other.

Thus, whiteness may be endlessly nuanced through characterization while blackness/nonwhiteness *is* characterization. Whiteness remains a blank slate: the white actor can simply be the character. Instead, the nonwhite (particularly black) body is so marked by cultural signifiers that the performance becomes complicated; the nonwhite performer’s actions must be explained or understood as possible for some of his/her race to perform. Hence, Hollywood has simplified complex categories of identity (race, gender, etc.) into polarized and formulaic narrative canvases for more convenient storytelling” (165-166).

Ovalle’s argument about race in film is reminiscent of Franz Fanon’s tale of identity making through the gaze of others. When a young girl on a train looks at Fanon and believes he’s a savage, there is nothing he can do to alter her perception of his identity. Fanon writes of that incident that “the black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man” (Fanon 82). In other words, because a black man lacks power, he can only inhabit the roles assigned to him by the gaze of others. The camera lens works

similarly to create problematic identities for minorities. Thus, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to view the Duke of New York as anything more than a one-dimensional uninspired criminal representation of black urban America.

Not only is the character, the Duke of New York, unable to accommodate the Black Moses persona cultivated by Isaac Hayes, it actively works to undermine it. The Duke of New York has a plan to deliver all of his “gang” to freedom, according to various characters in the film, including Cabbie, Brain, Maggie, and the Duke himself. Before having a wounded Snake Plissken fight in gladiator style match the Duke makes a speech standing above the crowd in both his pimp and warlord outfit, arms spread very much in the style of Black Moses, a cultural narrative that John Carpenter is actively working to recall and then abandon. The Duke says: “They sent in their best man [Snake Plissken], and when we roll down the 69<sup>th</sup> St. Bridge tomorrow on our way to freedom, we gonna have their best man leading the way...from the neck up!, On the hood of my car!” (Castle). Because he seeks to possess a diagram of the landmine positions on the bridge, he plans to lead a parade out of town and presumably overwhelm any resistance. But the Duke’s plan is as one dimensional as his character. He has no weapons, or a plan to scale the fifty-foot walls topped with barbed wire at the end of the bridge, and as we see during the climactic fight scene between Duke and Snake he does not possess the weaponry to overcome the military police that are guarding those walls. In fact, as Snake watches, the President of the United States commits the final tyrannical act of a fascist government by murdering the Duke, who is certainly guilty of all sorts of assault and torture crimes against the President, but who has most definitively not undergone any due process. From the safety of the fifty-foot wall, the President gleefully uses a machine

gun to riddle the Duke with bullets while mocking his status as the leader of the New York Maximum Security Prison, thereby literally entrapping him in the city forever.

If the Duke of New York is a character incapable of transcending both his blackness and his imprisonment, his counterpart, the protagonist of the film, Snake Plissken represents a version of the American dream in that he is able to transcend the urban degradation of New York city in a way that is unavailable to the Duke of New York despite the fact that they are both criminals. What we have here is a clear-cut case of what Ovalle describes as the black actor being a character, and the white actor being able to be nuanced through characterization. Snake is a disagreeable, violent, disaffected criminal who appears not to care for anyone or anything but himself. He is a former military hero who has earned the rank of Lieutenant, received two purple hearts, and is a specialist in military aircraft. While being briefed on the mission to rescue the President Police Commissioner refers to Snake as Plissken and the response is a sneer “Call me Snake” (Castle). After rescuing the President when Hawk offers Snake “another deal,” he says “I wanna give you a job. We’d make one hell of a team Snake.” And Snake replies, “The name’s Plissken” (Castle). This is the intended moment of redemption for Snake Plissken, the figurative transformation from a Snake into someone who can be respected. Snake achieves this by making a fool of the authority of the President of the United States. After rescuing him, he asks if the lives of those who died during the rescue meant anything to him. When the President responds with a canned political response, “The nation appreciates their sacrifice” (Castle). Once again disillusioned by authority, Snake gives the President a substitute audio tape for the one containing a message to other world leaders about nuclear fission. The President pushes play on live television and

Barry Manilow's "Bandstand Boogie" plays, Snake destroys the real audio tape, and the audience is meant to appreciate Snake's chutzpah. But sadly, this moment of redemption is unavailable for the Duke of New York, and there is no mention at the end of the movie of everyone still imprisoned in New York.

***The New York State Maximum Security Penitentiary: A Capital Solution***

It is important to remember Law Professor Norval Morris' idea discussed that prisons began as a kinder, gentler form discipline meant to curb the excesses of earlier forms of punishment, because in the short space of two hundred years the prison system has transformed itself into a complex form of social control. Michel Foucault writes about this in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*: "But, perhaps, the most important effect of the carceral system and its extension well beyond legal imprisonment is that it succeeds in making the power to punish natural and legitimate, in lowering at least the threshold of tolerance to penalty (Foucault 1977, 301.) Punishment, in other words, becomes normalized the more it is enacted. As minimum mandatory sentences were imposed they too became normalized under Foucault's rubric, especially when it is coupled with a popular fear of urban criminal behavior. These mandatory minimum sentencing began under the moderate Republican Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York in response to the perceived crime wave and out of control drug problem in New York City.

In 1973 New York Governor Rockefeller reversed his long-standing rehabilitation and education policy regarding drug addiction to one of punishment. In a speech to the full state legislature, Rockefeller defined his new proposal this way: "I, therefore, will ask for legislation making the penalty for all illegal trafficking in hard drugs a life sentence in

prison. To close all avenues for escaping the full force of this sentence, the law would forbid acceptance of a plea to a lesser charge, forbid parole and forbid suspension of the sentence” (Kohler-Hausmann 71). Historian Julilly Kohler-Hausmann notes that Rockefeller made the consequence of dealing drugs or drug addiction out to be harsher than murder, rape, and kidnapping. (71). It is worthwhile to note that as Rockefeller rhetorically cast societal expulsion as a viable replacement to a philosophy of rehabilitation there began a precipitous rise in incarceration rates. According to Political Scientist Phillip J. Wood:

For most of the period between 1925 and 1972, the prison population was between 100,000 and 200,000 inmates. From 1972-2000, with only a brief hesitation in the late 1970s, the total number of state and federal prisoners increased about six and a half times, from less than 200,000 to over 1.3 million, and the incarceration rate increased from 93 to 478 [per 100,000 citizens]. On a decade-by-decade basis, the prison population grew by 53 percent in the 1970s, more than doubled (+115 percent) in the 1980s and increased a further 77 percent in the 1990s (17-18).

This trend has continued into the present time; the number of people incarcerated in the United States as of 2015 is 6,741,400. Just as the “threshold to the tolerance of penalty” has been lowered, so has the expectation that rehabilitation is possible. Leveraging the fear of crime to drastically inflate the prison population as a way of managing marginalized populations is a way of deflecting the fact that prison represents a capitalist solution to crime rather than addressing crime as a societal problem.

*Escape From New York* ironically represents the capitalist value of expelling a marginalized population to prison for life. In the film everyone who is sentenced to the New York Maximum Security Prison is sentenced for life, (or death depending on your point of view), no matter the severity of the crime. Snake himself has only been convicted of robbery which hardly seems worthy of a life sentence, and Commissioner

Hawk speaks in the language of social expulsion. When coercing Snake to save the President he threatens Snake by saying “I’m about to kick your ass out of the world.” This language echoes the ominous voice over that begins the film which states that inside the prison are only “the prisoners and the worlds they make,” (Castle). This line, easily missed is central to understanding the economics of this prison in this dystopian version of America.

The inmates of the New York Maximum Security Prison are given no supplies. Once interred, they are literally on their own. The audience learns during Snake’s briefing that the nationalized police force knows that “some of them have cars, they took old junkers that were left behind and converted them to steam. We think they may also have a gasoline source in there and power, greenhouses, rigged up generators. Some areas have streetlights” (Castle). The upshot of this is that if the inmates have had to rig up generators, develop their own greenhouses, develop a source of gasoline, not only are they in some ways proto-capitalists themselves, complete with an elite hierarchy led by the Duke, whose achievements are dismissed, but more importantly, the audience is to understand that the inmates of New York are in no way provided for. The film is clearly set in the summertime, given the types of clothing people are wearing, but no oil or electricity means no heat during the winter, and there is only so much food that can be produced in a closed urban ecosystem. In short, not only are the inmates of New York City sentenced to death, but they are also denied the basic human needs that all people, even criminals, deserve. The America of *Escape From New York* is a gross human rights violator, perhaps attempting to mirror some of the violations inherent in the social expulsion of mandatory sentencing laws.

*Escape From New York* also ironically depicts the prison system as not being a capitalist enterprise by blatantly ignoring the fact that prisoners in America are, and always have been, as a matter of routine and law, exploited as a surplus labor population. The film seems to suggest, by way of ignoring the issue completely that there is no profit to be made from prisons, and that prisoners are left to “build their own worlds” (Castle) rather than work for the state, the private prison that houses them, or be contracted to work for a private enterprise. The fact is, that the American prison system has a long history of exploiting prisoners for their labor, perhaps most egregiously beginning with the “Black Codes” which disproportionately imprisoned black people in the South during reconstruction. Employment rights activist Jaron Browne reminds us that “a system of leasing was developed to allow white slave plantation owners in the South to literally purchase prisoners to live on their property and work under their control” (43). The contemporary reality is that “dozens of Fortune 500 companies—including McDonald’s, Microsoft, Dell, and Victoria’s Secret—have moved at least part of their operations into prisons. This transition to prison labor allows corporations to significantly cut their labor costs and thus presumably increases their profits...” (Smith and Hattery 88). As of 2007 “there [were] currently over 70 factories in California’s 33 prisons alone” (Browne, Jaron 42). This accounts for a total population of, according to Princeton Professor of Law, Noah D. Zatz, “well over 600,000 and probably close to a million inmates [who] are working full time in jails and prison across the Unites States,” and as of “2002, the average statewide rates ranged from \$0.17 to \$5.35 per hour. Thus, these rates almost always fall below the federal minimum wage set by the Fair Labor Standards Act” (868-870).

But *Escape From New York* would appear to advance a different narrative regarding prison, profit, and exploited labor. According to the Federal Bureau of Prisons, African Americans make up 13.3 percent of the total United States population, but 37.7 percent of the prison population, whereas 62.5 percent of the people who staff prisons are white (Federal Bureau of Prisons). The percentages suggest that as cities were deindustrialized and abandoned, as the economic priorities of urban governments were reprioritized from a Keynesian to a neoliberal system as evidenced by New York City in the 1970s, and as the adoption of mandatory sentencing laws that disproportionately targeted Black people, that it would be reasonable to suggest a situation in which white workers become prison guards and black people become fodder for an expanding prison population. *Escape From New York* seems to suggest that there is no profit to be made from prisons, even as it unsuccessfully attempts to replicate prison and prison guard demographics by both picturing Isaac Hayes as the alpha-prisoner and depicting the prison guards as all white. But by depicting the Manhattan Island Prison as a sort of unpoliced open arena, run by the inmates, we are instead offered a narrative that reinforces the idea of the city as a dangerous criminalized space which flies in the face of declining crime rates.

Similarly, any indication of spending, profit, or redistribution of dollars must be inferred by what is left out of the film's narrative. It is clear that New York has been abandoned, all of the infrastructure is either in disarray or crumbling, "there are no services, no government, no work" (Page 157). And, although the audience is not given any dollar figures whatsoever, we can imagine how money must have been redistributed from city services to make New York into a fortress guarded by a police state. The city is

represented as such a place of irredeemable chaos that money is diverted in order to build giant walls with ocean pilings. It is used to buy military equipment; helicopters to patrol the sky and missiles to destroy two people using a homemade raft to approach the wall, without sufficient warning. Bridges that were built with tax payer dollars to facilitate movement are now mined, transforming them into literal deathtraps for two of the major characters attempting to leave Manhattan Island. The guards are all dressed in expensive looking riot gear and well-armed with both clubs and machine guns, although the chance of direct contact with a prisoner is very slim. In short, funds were clearly diverted from a form of city welfare and redistributed as defense spending benefiting corporations, investors, and those who work directly as guards and administrators. Thus, *Escape From New York*, perhaps without intending, positions New York City as a victim of a new political economy that privileges those living outside the city by disguising the profit made from the prison industry, and instead advocating the cultural narrative of the city as a place where the inhabitants are responsible for the absolute violence they must live with.

### ***Soylent Green***

*Soylent Green* begins with a montage of photos meant to represent the rapid evolution of the Earth's population and increasing urbanization. The montage runs for just under three minutes and begins with slow, peaceful music accompanied by bucolic images of people who appear to have plenty of space to roam around in. There are images of a group of men on top of a mountain, and one particularly striking image of a young boy sitting alone on a fence fishing, reminiscent perhaps, of Huckleberry Finn. As the montage continues, however, and as we start seeing photos of urban locales, both the

music and the images increases to a near frantic pace. As the images move from the pastoral to the urban they are meant to become increasingly terrifying, and the screen is divided so that multiple images impact the audience at the same time. Replacing the pastoral are now images of war, blasted landscapes, crowded city spaces with people wearing surgical masks, or gas masks, and urban garbage dumps. And yet there is also a subtext to these images that imply a causal factor in turning the city into an overpopulated deathtrap: capitalism. Many of the images are intimately bound up with capitalism, including factories, smoke stacks, shopping malls, and parking lots filled with cars parked bumper-to-bumper. The final image is of New York city, a long shot that pans out slowly, hazy with smoke, looking dirty and dangerous.

The central problem that drives *Soylent Green* is a Malthusian one. The world population, encapsulated, in this case by New York City, has grown so prodigiously, and coupled with the fact of catastrophic environmental damage, now faces a massive famine. Malthus described his concern of overpopulation as early as 1798, writing that there is a “constant tendency in all animated life to increase beyond the nourishment prepared for it” (Malthus 2). New York in the year 2020 is a city of 40 million people, the large majority of which are unemployed and poor, on state welfare, and starving. This mass of people, all waiting in welfare lines for food and water are depicted as milling about tightly packed in the streets, are multi-ethnic, wearing the same drab clothing, many wearing surgical masks, and all are dirty. There is a kind of intersectional unity that cuts across race in this grouping due to their reliance on the government for the basic necessities of life. When the supply chain of food is disrupted, the people riot, and are treated as criminals, thereby displacing the cause of the problem onto them, representing

the city as a dangerous place, rather than properly assigning urban problems as failures of either capitalism or the government.

It is important to note that in *Soylent Green* the prime mode of repression is assigned to people based upon their ability to contribute economically. Race, in other words, has given way, in this dystopic version of New York City to a more class-based type of oppression, one that relies on the radical neoliberal tenet that assigns value to people based on their market impact, and the premise that individual effort is the guarantor of one's economic standing. *Soylent Green* depicts a sort of Ayn Randian Objectivist theory taken to the extreme. There are three types of people in her Magnum Opus: 1. The Looters who are mostly politicians that take the produces and profits of capitalism by force. 2. The moochers who are generally poor people who need help (and who make up the entire mass of starving people in *Soylent Green*. And, 3. The producers who are the men who use their mind to create products and make money. This belief is perhaps best summed up by her billionaire playboy character Francisco d'Anconia who says:

So you think that money is the root of all evil?" said Francisco d'Anconia. "Have you ever asked what is the root of money? Money is a tool of exchange, which can't exist unless there are goods produced and men able to produce them. Money is the material shape of the principle that men who wish to deal with one another must deal by trade and give value for value. Money is not the tool of the moochers, who claim your product by tears, or of the looters, who take it from you by force. Money is made possible only by the men who produce. Is this what you consider evil? (Rand 380).

But as we shall see, this type of economic ideology simply makes victims of the poor masses in *Soylent Green* disguising the crimes of the capitalist class and redirecting the burden of criminality for a hunger riot onto the starving masses which encapsulate all racial and ethnic groups.

This riot is one of the central moments of the film for two reasons. 1. Because of the way it sanctions police violence as an appropriate and necessary way of controlling the underclass, and 2. Because the audience later learns it is the methodology by which the government and corporations in the film work together to solve the Malthusian food resource problem and the problem of overpopulation with an equally Malthusian economic solution. Given that police act as an arm of the state, their judgement, actions, and behavior towards certain groups becomes part of the popularly understood narrative of that group of people. For example, when law enforcement disproportionately targeted black people in “The War on Drugs” despite the fact that “people of all races use and sell drugs at remarkably similar rates (Alexander 13), the idea that drugs were a problem in the black community became popularly engrained. Once that perception became normalized, it made possible to argue that the black community needed a heavy police presence.

But, *Soylent Green* works to undermine this process of normalizing the underclass as criminals. There are two scenes in which depict the mass of people collecting the welfare they need to live. In the first scene, the food and water allotments are handed out peacefully, if not plentifully, and there is no hint of a riot to come. To be sure, the people do not appear happy, but they certainly are not violent, and there is no representation of them as criminals. The DVD cover of the film also ignores the peaceful scene, and focuses on selling the movie by trading in on the rising fear of crime in 1970s American cities and the need to control it. It pictures a mass of people being violently detained, along with a caption that reads: “It’s the year 2022...People are still the same. They’ll do anything to get what they need. And they need Soylent Green” (Greenberg). But this is a

profoundly misleading representation of the crowd in the welfare line. The key here, is that the second crowd scene also begins peacefully. Prior to the riot, Thorn (the anti-hero police officer protagonist of the film) is assigned to riot duty. It appears that the police have been tipped off that the Soy lent Green ration will run out that day, and they anticipate trouble, which already amounts to collusion between government law enforcement and the capitalist manufacturers of Soy lent Green regarding the need to control the population and the narrative. But, the riot does not begin until the police commit an act of violence. After a woman waits all day in line for her allotment of Soy lent Green, she is only given a quarter of what she expects, and begins complaining about it very loudly to the crowd. She hollers: “They gave me a quarter of a kilo. I stood in line the whole lousy day and they gave me a quarter of a kilo. Can you believe that? (Greenberg). At this point, two police men, violently grab her and begin to drag her away as she still complains to the crowd. They never talk to her, ask her to quiet down, she hasn’t broken any conventional law, but she is treated as a violent criminal. In the very next minute of the scene, the police announce that there is no more Soy lent Green, to disperse, and that the “scoops” are on their way. At this point, the riot commences.

The police, in this case, and in the same manner of the 1964 Harlem Riot, and also perhaps in the same manner as the more contemporary protests associated with the Black Lives Matter movement are the progenitors of the very violence they are meant to forestall. The deployment of the scoops (a sort of combination front-end loader attached to a garbage truck which literally “scoops” people up) represent not only the increasing militarization of the police which as Commissioner Patrick Murphy said of the 1964 Harlem Riot “was essential for restoring law and order, but also represents the

Malthusian economic solution to both a starving populace and over-population. The victims of the scoops are transported without due process to a waste processing station and turned into Soylent Green which is then used to feed the poor.

From a capital perspective, the solution is a brilliant one, because as Michel Foucault might note, it turns the unproductive body into both a “productive and subjected” one which makes it into a “useful force” (Foucault 2004, 549). Not unlike in *Escape From New York* which also economically controlled population by assigning criminality to a position so marginalized that no basic resources were provided, the manufacturers of Soylent Green, in conjunction with law enforcement also control the surplus population but hide their illegal actions behind the narrative veneer of assigning criminality to the starving population. They solve two problems with one police action and manage to hide the fact the solution is also an economic way of controlling the population. The act of imprisonment in *Escape From New York*, in which every sentence is a death sentence, or the immediate death sentence of criminality in *Soylent Green* are kinds of carceral punishment which Michel Foucault would have understood as excessive, but natural and legitimate to these SF urban settings because of their repetitive pattern. Earlier in this chapter there was a brief discussion of how the very exercise of punishment can lend it authority and legitimation, and Foucault continues that thought in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* describing the process more completely:

It tends to efface what may be exorbitant in the exercise of punishment. It does this by playing the two registers in which it is deployed—the legal register of justice and the extra-legal register of discipline—against one another. In effect, the great continuity of the carceral system throughout the law and its sentences gives a sort of legal sanction to the disciplinary mechanisms, to the decisions and judgements that they enforce (Foucault 1977, 301-302).

Thus, we see the twofold effect of the exercise of police power over the crowd in *Soylent Green* waiting for welfare. Because the police are vested with the authority to define criminality, and exercise punishment, even one as dire as death without due process has been normalized by these fictional populations. This type of excessive representation of the normalization of punishment is the same process by which mandatory prison sentence became the norm in the 1980's despite the fact they targeted the black community.

The control of the massive population here is intersectionally oppressive (race, age, gender, etc...), and conflates them all by class, which fits with the long tradition of how debates regarding overpopulation were almost always racially inflected in that only certain races and classes of people needed to be controlled. As early as Margaret Sanger in 1914, the underclass and especially the black underclass were targeted as needing to be educated so that they might stop having so many children (Sanger 140). Charles A. Clark, M.D. expanded Sanger's concern to many other problems, but consistently applied racialized markers to define problem populations and what he considered their profligate reproduction. He wrote in 1920:

We are rapidly approaching the day of preventive medicine and physicians must take the initiative in disseminating knowledge on the subject of racial deterioration and degeneracy, otherwise they will be rightfully accused of moral cowardice

Degeneracy is a relative term only, and it would be presumptuous on my part to attempt the definition of it. However, I would include under the classification of degeneracy certain forms of insanity, imbecility, feeble-mindedness, idiocy, epilepsy, chronic inebriates, habitual criminals, congenital deaf and dumb, and the sexual perverts (36).

Aldous Huxley similarly participated in this debate lamenting the doubling in the population of halfwits in just twenty-years, and cautioning us about a catastrophe.

Conversations like this continued into the 1970s, were being debated, and were well

known while *Soylent Green* was being written and produced. In 1971, Larry Bumpass and Charles F. Westoff, identified unwanted births as a major problem of overpopulation, and they contended that unwanted births were drastically higher among “Negroes” because of both their lack of education, and lack of income (269). This last entry in the racist population debate is especially interesting given that like the police and the capitalists in *Soylent Green* it displaces the cause of the problem onto the victim, and only by controlling or, in the case of *Soylent Green*, killing them can the problem of population or starvation be managed.

### ***Soylent Green’s Women: A Slave by Any Other Name***

The 1970s are generally perceived as a decade of progress for women’s rights in America. Although the Equal Rights Amendment was never ratified, there were concrete instances of an advancing belief in gender equality. English professor Sherrie Inness reminds us that the “National Organization for Women...was highly visible in the 1970s,” “in politics, Shirley Chisolm, a black U.S. representative from New York, was nominated for the presidency in 1972,” also “in 1972, President Richard Nixon signed Title IX of the Education Act,” and that “the Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973” (4-5). Perhaps counterintuitively given the state of urban deindustrialization and rising unemployment, more women were entering the work force as well. Historian Thomas Borstelmann in his synthesis of the 1970s claims:

Structural changes in the U.S. economy in the 1970s also encouraged women’s growing participation in paid employment. Average real incomes peaked for men in 1973 and drifted steadily downward for the next two decades, as deindustrialization and the loss of manufacturing jobs mostly affected men... With men bringing home fewer dollars at the same time that rapid inflation (11 percent in 1974) was hollowing out families’ purchasing power, millions of women went out to work simply to preserve their household’s standard of living. In 1970, 43

percent of American age sixteen or over were in the paid workforce; in 1980, this number increased to 53 percent (81).

But despite this fact, *Soylent Green* depicts the women who are differentiated from the crowded overpopulated mass of people as another population to be controlled, and one that is much more severely oppressed than the males in the film.

The particular dystopia of *Soylent Green* is one where catastrophic environmental degradation has destroyed most of the Earth's natural resources, and as a result there is only a need for very few jobs, which, of course, are held by *Soylent Green's* male characters. The only "job" left for females in this dystopian future is perhaps best defined as a form of domestic slave/prostitute. Those women in the film who might be considered to fit normative standards of beauty are "employed" (not for a wage, but for room and board), and their responsibilities include, shopping for the owner of the apartment, cooking meals, sexually satisfying the owner of the apartment and any guests that might visit, and likely anything else at the whim of their master. These women are ubiquitously referred to as "furniture," which is reminiscent of Chief Justice Roger B. Taney's decision in the Dred Scott case in which he referred to slaves as "merchandise." And, in a sense they really are furniture, as they are assigned to an expensive apartment for the use of whomever is renting it.

Shirl, the only named female character in *Soylent Green* is one of perhaps a dozen shown domesticized female slaves in the film who, like the mass, are depicted as being of various races and ethnicities. She is so desensitized to her position as a sexualized slave, or so afraid of being cast out to become a part of the masses, that she has internalized the misconception that she is actually employed rather than enslaved. Upon meeting her, Detective Thorn immediately asks if she's "furniture," and she admits that she belongs to

the building rather than the apartment owner. Then, while questioning Shirl about murder, Thorn expresses surprise when he discovers she isn't physically abused commenting to her that she has "no fresh bruises. He didn't knock you around. You're a lucky girl" (Greenberg). The implication that the "furniture" is physically abused as a matter of routine only serves to further demonstrate just how desensitized Shirl is to her position as a slave.

What is interesting about the business of enslaving women as furniture is that it also rewrites normally understood ideas about what is criminal and what is not. The idea that women can be used this way is so inimical to this society that Detective Thorn sees hers as just another possession of the apartment to be stolen or used at his discretion. Thorn regularly steals items such as food, alcohol, and other luxury items during his investigations. He uses his power as the arbiter of law and order to disguise his transgressions or legitimate them, and he does the same thing with Shirl, sleeping with her several times. Although she apparently comes to have some affection for Thorn, the audience is never quite sure if it is real, or if she is acting under auspices of her job. Either way, one would imagine that a Detective investigating a murder and sleeping with a principal party involved would generate an ethical dilemma, but in *Soylent Green* the police are above the law, and the women, like the masses are subject to those in authority. The objectification of the females in *Soylent Green* is shocking, but nothing new to dystopic futures. As we shall see in the next chapter, when we look at Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* that the sex trade is another way of positioning the city as dangerous, dirty, and diseased. Indeed, the depiction of the city as it is further

abandoned, this time in favor of suburbia, is perhaps even more disturbing than the cannibalism of *Soylent Green* or the prison of *Escape From New York*.

**Inside the Gates: Power, Order, and Dystopian Suburbs in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake***

The white flight, capital flight, and exodus of manufacturing jobs beginning in large part in the 1960s were due in part to the ever-increasing popular perception that American cities were becoming more and more dangerous and populated with criminals despite a drop in actual crime rates (Low 116 and Cannato 527-530). The American city was, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, perceived to be in a crisis caused by crime and violence, and according to American Studies professor Carlo Rotella:

The language of crisis achieved even greater compression in its foregrounding of criminal violence. In addition to commanding attention in its own right, explicitly racial violence (like the 'race riot') and racially coded violence (in common usage after about 1960, the figure of 'the mugger' is implicitly assumed to be black or Hispanic) became rubrics under which to reduce the complexity of urban transformation to sharply representable and narratable form (215).

And, if the easy narrative is one of crime, violence, and danger, it makes a certain amount of sense that many urban residents (ones with the economic means to do so) wanted to leave the city in an effort to live somewhere they considered safer, somewhere where the schools might be better, and somewhere where their assets could appreciate.

The suburbs, given their relative distance from the city, their subsidization by the federal government, and the site of relocated city jobs, provided the desired refuge. As Sociologist George Lipsitz points out, "whites benefited tremendously from the privileged access they enjoyed to the expressly discriminatory government-supported mortgages that enabled them to move to the suburbs" (27). Access to the suburbs was also largely subsidized by United States Federal Government financed in large part by the Highway Act of 1956, which increased total highway miles by nearly 20,000 in just 13

short years (Stanback 25). But, the very act of opening the suburbs and moving to them helped to create a false imaginary about both new suburban residents and those urban residents left behind. Lipsitz describes this dangerous and false perception this way:

Yet instead of recognizing themselves accurately as recipients of collective public largesse, whites came to see themselves as individuals whose wealth grew out of their personal and individual success in acquiring property on the ‘free market.’ At the same time, whites viewed inner-city residents not as fellow citizens denied the subsidies freely offered to whites, but as people whose alleged failures to save, invest, and take care of their homes forced the government to intervene on their behalf, to build housing projects that were then ruined by alleged Black neglect (27).

Thus, the creation and inhabitation of the suburbs are at least partly responsible for the negative rhetoric and perception of cities as dangerous, criminalized, and poverty stricken, despite the fact that their very formation drew upon city resources and siphoned off city jobs.

The effect of redistribution of public funds that led to the creation of the suburbs had a devastating impact on the city, even as it led to greater funds and services provided to the expanding suburban tax base. Robert Beauregard an urban planning professor who specializes in industrial urban decline in the post WWII era describes the impact this way:

This disinvestment had a detrimental impact on the fiscal condition of local governments, particularly since it meant a change in both the composition of city taxpayers and the users of public services. The flight of middle-class white households additionally meant the loss of consumer disposable income and tax revenues for the city government’s coffers. The new migrants ‘deliver[ed] about \$3 in tax revenues but require[d] about \$8 in public services’...The expanding population of ‘deficit citizens’...and the decentralization of middle class household and industry left city governments without sufficient resources to meet their obligations. By implication, those who resided in the suburbs were ‘surplus citizens’ who needed little public assistance and were able to afford the taxes that made for fiscally sound government (155).

The upshot of this is that the suburbs were able to capture an increasing percentage of the tax base from the city and use it in an effort to finance services exclusive to suburban residents.

Fear of the city and increasing dislike and disrespect for urban inhabitants increasingly led suburbs to adopt an isolationist policy with regards to the city, either in the form of eliminating public transportation to the suburb, or by gating communities making them private. There has been, beginning in the 1980s, a marked increase in the amount of both gated communities and residents living within them. According to Setha Low, “in areas such as Tampa, Florida, gated communities account for four out of five home sales of \$300,000 or more...The number of people estimated to be living in gated communities in the United States increased from four million in 1995, to eight million in 1997 and to sixteen million in 1998 (15). It is telling that this ubiquitous expansion of gated communities occurred after the suburbs were built to flee what was perceived crime-ridden cities. This chapter analyzes the uneasy relationship between the city and suburb with particular regard to the walls which are built in an effort to increase a sense of security and separation from urban spaces. Walls are part of the social text, able to be read as, what historian Mike Davis, in *City of Quartz*, refers to as archisemiotics, which comprises “an unprecedented tendency to merge urban [or in this case suburban] design, architecture and the police apparatus into a single comprehensive security effort (224). Both Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, and Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* present us with a representation of the company town which forces the inhabitant to sell their freedom for security. Also, both novels, although in different ways (*Parable of the Sower* by depicting a failure of capitalism because of ecological catastrophe, and *Oryx*

*and Crake* by depicting a dystopian version of Late Capitalism whose success leads to apocalyptic destruction), reanimate the idea that gated communities are ultimately ineffective at providing the security they promise.

It was just such a gated community that Trayvon Martin found himself walking through on Sunday, February 26, 2012. The Retreat at Twin Lakes is a gated community in Sanford, Florida, built only eighteen miles from downtown Orlando, and is approximately a thirty-minute drive away. Despite the fact that it was gated, and surrounded by brick walls, this community had, prior to the day Trayvon Martin was murdered, experienced a recent spate of criminal activity which set the community on edge. In order to further increase their sense of security, the community developed a neighborhood watch system, headed by George Zimmerman, the man who would later confront and kill Trayvon Martin.

There are many interesting and important aspects to this case, but the one most relevant to this chapter is the idea that the gated community did not seem to serve its purpose, namely to secure and provide both physical protection and mental security for the people who live there. Anthropologist Setha Low in her analysis of the social consequences of gated communities describes this as a “fortress mentality,” and further notes that:

Living in a gated community represents a new version of the middle-class American dream precisely because it temporarily suppresses and masks, even denies and fuses, the inherent anxieties and conflicting social values of modern urban and suburban life. It transforms American’s dilemma of how to protect themselves and their children from danger, crime, and unknown others while still perpetuating open, friendly neighborhoods and comfortable, safe homes. It reinforces the norms of a middle-class lifestyle in a historical period in which every day events and news media exacerbate fears of violence and terrorism...Gated communities, however, intensify social segregation, racism, and

exclusionary land use practices already in place in most the United States...” (10-11).

There is little doubt that the fortress mentality broke down, that the composition of walls and entrenched security of the gated community failed to provide the promised security in the Retreat at Twin Lakes. Ian Tuttle, a reporter for the National Review (a notably right-wing magazine), seems to attempt to justify the George Zimmerman’s unjustifiable decision to approach Trayvon Martin in two ways. 1. By suggesting that the recession drove down home values in the Retreat at Twin Lakes which changed the demographics of the community by allowing more black and Latino people to move in, many as renters rather than homeowners, and 2. Suggesting that recent criminal activity was the logical result of this. He writes:

As the type of resident changed, so did the type of visitor. Eight robberies were reported from the start of 2011 to the time of the Martin shooting, and dozens more burglaries were attempted. Neighbors frequently reported suspicious persons lurking about, possibly casing residences. Many of the suspects were black. In July of 2011 a black teenager stole a bicycle from Zimmerman’s front porch (Tuttle).

To assume that Trayvon Martin must be up to no good because a different black teen stole a bicycle is, of course, a case of transferring blame and overtly racist, and yet this article uses it as justification for Zimmerman beginning a violent confrontation with a perfect stranger. This is the same type of journalistic fear-mongering that we saw from The New York Times in the last chapter that encouraged people to be afraid of crime in New York City, and, broadly speaking, encouraged the white flight New York City experienced (Cannato 526-527). But rather than leave Retreat at Twin Lakes, Zimmerman decided to make the safety of the gated community his personal responsibility.

As Zimmerman's perception of his gated community as more vulnerable to criminal activity increased, he became hyper vigilant and increasingly apt to be suspicious of people he did not recognize. Between the years of 2004, and leading up to this incident, Zimmerman contacted the police 46 times to report behavior or persons he thought suspicious (Tuttle). George Lipsitz refers to this sort of behavior as "defensive localism" and is predominantly used to defend "a white spatial imaginary based on exclusivity and augmented exchange values [which] forms the foundational logic behind prevailing spatial and social policies in cities and suburbs today" (28). Although Trayvon Martin had been in the neighborhood before, and had every right to be there, (he was on his way to visit his father) Zimmerman decided he had not right to be there based solely on his racial profile and his fear of black crime. This case raises questions about anxieties of suburban residents who appear to fear an invasion of sorts. We see this fear represented and critiqued in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*.

This chapter sets to out to analyze just how these two authors reanimate the anxieties of the gated community as insecure. Because both books were written near the turn of the century, at a time when the suburban landscape is fully formed, and these books are largely written for a literate suburban, predominantly white readership, we can read them as speaking to the suburbs, depicting what sort of dystopian fears come out of the suburbs, and how those fears relate to either the complete failure or total success of capitalism in the suburbs. This chapter also looks at the ways these authors represent the police as implicated in the horrors of the corporation and in paid service to the company town which represents the only viable successful form of capitalism in both Butler's and

Atwood's novels. This chapter also begins to analyze the rhetoric used by suburban residents to describe the city and city residents, which metaphorically transforms those outside of the suburban gated communities into savage animals responsible for turning urban spaces into jungles, devaluing both and preparing them for the recolonization of gentrification.

### **Parable of the Sower *and the Dystopian Suburb***

By the end of the first third of Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren Olamina (the protagonist) comes to the eerie realization that the gated and walled-in neighborhood she lives in will one day be invaded and destroyed by those who live a less privileged existence outside the walls. Appreciating the fact that she is living under the protection of her parents but realizing that protection will ultimately fail, she writes the following poem and the questions it raises for her: "*A tree/ cannot grow/ In its parent's shadows ...* What does this one mean if you live in a cul-de-sac with a wall around it? What does it mean if you're damned lucky to live in a cul-de-sac with a wall around it?" (Butler, *Sower* 76). The wall which protects Lauren's neighborhood is formidable. After an invasion which resulted in a robbery, Lauren describes the wall in her diary in this way:

Our wall is three meters high and topped off with pieces of broken glass as well as the usual barbed wire and the all but invisible Lazor wire, (Lazor wire is terrible stuff. It's so fine and sharp (21). All the wire had been cut in spite of our efforts. What a pity we couldn't afford to electrify it or set other traps. But at least the glass—the oldest, simplest of our tricks—had gotten one of them. We found a broad stream of dried blood down the inside of the wall this morning" (Butler, *Sower* 68).

The neighborhood residents are able to enter and leave the neighborhood through an opaque metal gate which remains locked at all times, but for which the adult residents

have keys. But as formidable as the wall is, Lauren wishes it were even more dangerous to those outside, which seems to mirror the thought process George Zimmerman had about the lack of security the walls provided at The Retreat at Twin Lakes. The inability to enact Lauren's wish to electrify the wall or set other traps appears to be one of economics rather than legality or ethics.

The point here is that the failure of the wall to protect Lauren's cul-de-sac is not really one of more traps, more Lazor wire, more glass, or even more bricks and mortar, but rather is one of the failure capitalism to deal with environmental problems and social inequality. Frederic Jameson began *The Seeds of Time* with a discussion about the relationship between capitalism, postmodernism, and utopia and made the now famous claim that "it seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism..." (xii). Butler is attempting to reconcile the ways in which the breakdown of late capitalism and the deterioration of the Earth and subsequently American society are one and the same. In other words, the built infrastructure of the gated community is unable to protect the successful from the ramifications of participation in an economic system which thrives on the divisive and predatory relations inherent in neoliberalism, a system under which success is to be independently achieved and ferociously guarded. Gerry Canavan, Professor of Twentieth and Twenty-First century American literature describes, *Parable of the Sower* in this way: "The situation of the novels is a slow-motion apocalypse: global warming, economic depression, and neoliberalism's accelerative hollowing-out of the public sphere have conspired to leave America in a near-state of total collapse" (132). The bedrock of neoliberalism is one of individualism, private property, and personal

responsibility (Harvey 23), and thus failure to succeed engenders blame on the poor rather than the systemic victimhood associated with a long-term capitalist project. As the walls of her neighborhood fail and the protection they provide continue to erode, Lauren displaces that same type of responsibility on those outside despite the fact there are clearly uneven life chances for those within and those without.

The idea of victimhood is an important one here and so requires some elaboration. Sociologists Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton in *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* develop a theory about the ways in which inner city residents are blamed in spite of their actual victimization for their lack of spatial and social mobility, and for the condition of their dilapidated neighborhoods. They write:

By building physical decay, crime, and social disorder into the residential structure of black communities, segregation creates a harsh and extremely disadvantaged environment to which ghetto blacks must adapt. In concentrating poverty, moreover, segregation also concentrates conditions such as drug use, joblessness, welfare dependency, teenage childbearing, and unwed parenthood, producing a social context where these conditions are not only common but the norm (13).

The theory of Racial capitalism helps to develop this argument economically. Professor of English and Africana Studies Jodi Melamed, in an essay about racial capitalism, can help us understand how victims are blamed for their own oppression:

Capital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups—capitalists with the means of production/workers without the means of subsistence, creditors/debtors, conquerors of land made property/the dispossessed and removed. These antinomies of accumulation require loss, disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value, and racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires. Most obviously, it does this by displacing the uneven life chances that are inescapably part of capitalist social relations onto fictions of differing human capacities, historically race (77).

In the case of *Parable of the Sower*, the fictions of differing human capacities are not designated by race, but simply by relative levels of success or failure. Aside from the multi-ethnic demographics which make up Robledo, race is, in fact, almost scrupulously disregarded in the novel. Lauren herself is black, and a number of people who end up traveling with her are, but her value system is really very post-racial, in a strangely neoliberal way. The savages who destroy Robledo have painted faces, disguising any racial markers, and at any rate, Lauren never makes any distinction between those who exist outside Robledo. Everyone outside are, in her opinion equally dangerous. Lauren is only interested in those who can fight to achieve their own survival, anyone of any race, noting in her Earthseed philosophy that “drowning people sometimes die fighting their rescuers” (Butler, *Sower* 57).

Because the hallmark of the neoliberal economic system is based on what David Harvey claims is “the cultivation of a middle class that relished the joys of home ownership, private property, individualism, and the liberation of entrepreneurial opportunities” coupled with “personal responsibility (60-61), the fictions of differing capacity can be assigned not solely on race, but also displaced onto results. In other words, if someone manages to find success, own a home, maintain a viable income, add to the economy by participating in it in a way that reproduce the conditions of a neoliberal system, then they have value. Under this rubric it does not matter how success is obtained; it could be through hard work, inheritance, nepotism, cronyism, or any number of other methods, but no matter the method by which one obtains success, it always exists under the neoliberal mythological narrative that one is personally responsible for their own success (or failure). In this way, a neoliberal economy and

narrative masks historical processes of oppression, (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia, etc...) that generate unequal life chances. Thus, those who do not own homes, have jobs, and participate in the economy are not victims of a rigged system, but are instead personally responsible for their own poverty and homelessness.

The *Parable of the Sower* depicts what American Studies professor Elisabeth Schäfer-Wunsche would call a “rigid dichotomy of an uncontainable/wild outside, vs. an ordered/domesticated inside...” (410). The problem with this, as Mike Davis notes in *Ecology of Fear*, is that Robledo and the people inside it “are slowly engulfed by chaos as the street poor—now gaunt, famished shadows of human beings—wait like jackals to devour the neighborhood” (362). Mike Davis’ characterization about the people living outside the walls of Robledo is accurate, but the book, and even this type of criticism reinforces the neoliberal idea that a person’s value is directly tied to their relative economic success; it does not take into account different life chances. It also does not take into account that the neoliberal economy of *Parable* has completely failed leaving, as Lauren Olamina says “some kind of insane burn-the-rich movement... We’ve never been rich, but to the desperate, we looked rich. We were surviving and we had our wall. Did our community have to die so that addicts could make a help-the-poor political statement?” (150-151). Lauren’s comments here recognize a class disparity, but despite her “hyper-empathy,” she is unable to reconcile the plight of those outside Robledo’s walls with the systematic failure that caused their condition, in some respects, Lauren is what Gerry Canavan calls a “*radically* neoliberal subject” (emphasis in original 134).

***The Irony of Hyper-Empathy and the Rhetoric of Value***

If Octavia Butler is, as I claimed earlier, attempting to reconcile the ways in which the breakdown of late capitalism, the deterioration of the Earth and subsequently American society are one and the same, she has created an interesting and sometimes problematic character with which to do it. Lauren Olamina has, at least in part, adopted a right-wing neoliberal attitude with respect to those outside the suburban walls of Robledo, her gated community. Lauren Olamina suffers from, (or has been blessed with depending on your point of view) from a curious psychosomatic disorder (which manifests itself physically) called hyper-empathy. This condition, caused by her mother's illicit drug use, forces her to share either the pleasure, or much more detrimentally to herself, the pain of others. In a sense, this condition, which opens her up to the feelings of others might be read as the breaking down of personal barriers. But, rather it causes Lauren to erect a series of protective mechanisms (walls) to deal with the danger of too much exposure. One might think that a condition that allows Lauren to share pain might make it an imperative for her to make people feel good, but her world does not permit that. The slow, but complete, collapse of the economy, the relative levels of drug addiction in the general population, and the constant threat of criminal danger to herself and those in her community have caused the exact opposite of an empathetic response in Lauren. There are two important considerations that result from this: 1. Lauren is physically vulnerable and therefore concomitantly dangerous to others, and 2. She had developed a dangerously heartless rhetoric for those who live outside her suburb.

We can read Lauren's danger to others as a particular instance analogous with how some contemporary American suburbs see themselves as vulnerable to the urban

community. One effect of Lauren's hyper-empathy is that she feels the pain of others, which is particularly dangerous for her if she is in a fight. She describes it this way:

I didn't fight much when I was little because it hurt me so. I felt every blow that I struck, just as though I'd hit myself. So, when I did decide that I had to fight, I set out to hurt the other kid more than kids usually hurt one another. I broke Michael Talcott's arm and Rubin Quintanilla's nose. I knocked out four of Silvia Dunn's teeth. They all earned what I did to them two or three times over (Butler, Sower 11).

Gerry Canavan notes that her hyper-empathy "makes Lauren extremely dangerous and drives her to be an efficient and effective killer," and that "Lauren has to aim to kill, and sometimes to shoot first" (134). Translated as a suburban protective impulse, (i.e. Lauren lives in a suburb and needs to protect herself) we can read this consequence of hyper-empathy in the sort of fear that results in "castle doctrine laws," in which people "get what they earn."

Castle doctrine laws get their name from the Revolutionary War. According to Grieve Law, a prominent Wisconsin criminal defense law firm:

The term "Castle Doctrine" was originally coined by the English during the Battle of Lexington and Concord in 1775. The British redcoats were on a mission, pillaging and destroying Bostonian homes. Jason Russell, a near 60-year-old man got word of the troops coming his way. When they arrived, he refused to leave his home and proclaimed, "An Englishman's house is his castle." He was shot twice and bayoneted 11 times, dying on his doorstep" (Wisconsin Castle).

Castle Doctrine laws allow people to defend themselves using deadly force if they feel there is an imminent threat to lives, but as with most laws that make violence more easily justifiable, castle doctrine, or "stand your ground laws" have generated an increase in the homicide rate. Political scientist Robert J. Spitzer notes that "from 2000 to 2010, [justifiable homicides] they nearly doubled even though the homicide rate declined in this period," and also that "the enactment of 'stand your ground' laws was associated with an

increase in homicides, averaging from 336 to 396 additional deaths per year, or a 6.8 percent increase in the homicide rate” (87-88). Perhaps even more alarming than the increase in homicides is the fact that castle doctrine laws disproportionately affect minorities. Dallas County District Attorney Craig Watkins claims that “it is minorities who find themselves on the wrong end of a bullet” when shooters cite stand-your-ground laws to justify their actions. If you don't understand the unfairness, he said, “maybe you need to give up your bar card” (Weiss), and finally Spitzer notes that:

...an Urban Institute study found wide racial disparities in the handling of ‘stand-your-ground’ cases during the 2005 to 2010 period. In non- ‘stand your ground’ states, African Americans who killed whites were ruled to have justifiable self-defense claims in 1 percent of cases, whereas when the killer was white, and the person killed was African American 9.5 percent of claims were judged justifiable. In ‘stand-your-ground’ states African Americans who claimed self-defense in killing a white were judged justifiable in 1.4 percent of cases. When the killer was white and the person killed was African American, however, the justifiable rate was 16.8 percent (88).

Robledo is represented by Butler as an extreme version of the American suburb where castle doctrine laws are taken for granted, and where the police force is (as will be discussed later in this chapter) unreliable, absent, and really more of a mercenary outfit, instead of being out to serve the public. Butler has created a suburban community so insulated and afraid, that anyone who apparently does not belong inside the walls of Robledo is such a threat that the castle doctrine immediately and universally applies; As Lauren Olamina writes in her journal, “there are at least two guns in every household,” (Butler, Sower 38), and Robledo’s neighborhood watch will use them at will.

The suburban walls of Lauren Olamina’s gated community of Robledo never instilled a sense of safety or security for her, though they did provide a sort of temporary refuge from the increasingly deleterious effects of a failing capitalist system, which has

created a famine and destroyed urban infrastructure among other things. Under the constant threat of danger from outside the walls, Lauren developed a particularly unempathetic rhetoric for the plight of those who live outside the walls and whom she considers dangerous. In *Parable of the Sower*, she refers to L.A. as “lethal” (10), that there is “nothing left but ruins, rats, and squatters” (52), that listening “while nearby, people try to kill each other” is normal (247). She refers to the people who live outside of the suburbs as “outsiders” (47), “crazy” (52), “thieves” (67), that they have nothing else to do but “burn the rich” (150), and that they are “beggars...and murderers” (161). Those who harassed and eventually invaded Robledo had painted faces, and she wonders repeatedly if other catastrophes are the work of the painted faces. What is interesting about the callous way Lauren describes those who live outside the relative safety of her suburb is that she always refers to them as a collective monolith, that for her, each and every individual is just as dangerous as the next. The fear of those in the disordered outside has generated a crescendo of normalized fear and prejudice. Until Robledo is destroyed, and Lauren is forced to head north, she is unable to imagine value in anyone who does not have even the moderate belongings and success that her and her community have managed to hold on to.

Ironically, Lauren does not seem to realize that she collectively judges everyone who lives in urban Los Angeles. After traveling north some 300 miles, Lauren and her group finds themselves in the vicinity of Salinas, and she talks to some locals in a park in order to find out if there are any nearby jobs. The conversation quickly focuses on the danger of Los Angeles and the “painted savages” that the locals think originated there. According to the Salinas townies, Los Angeles is where most “stupid and wicked things

began,” but interestingly Lauren chalks up this characterization to “local prejudice” (Butler, Sower 198). Lauren cannot achieve enough critical distance from her own prejudicial attitude and deployment of dangerous rhetoric which works to normalize the marginalization of those who have been failed by American neoliberal economics.

The deployment of language and the creation of stereotypical images has long been an American technology for creating otherness and managing populations considered troublesome. Law professors Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic remind us that “the depiction of ethnic groups of color is littered with negative images...In some periods, society needed to suppress a group, as with blacks during Reconstruction. Society coined an image to suit that purpose—that of primitive, powerful, larger-than-life blacks, terrifying and barely under control” (219). In this way, narratives of race (and of who has value to American society) are socially, economically and politically constructed. UC Berkeley Law professor Ian F. Haney Lopez in his essay “The Social Construction of Race” argues that:

...race must be understood as a sui generis social phenomenon in which contested systems of meaning serve as the connections between physical features, faces and personal characteristics. In other words, social meanings connect our faces to our souls. Race is neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing, plastic process subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decision. As used here, the referents of terms like Black and White are social groups, not genetically distinct branches of humankind (966).

Because the process of defining which races and which individuals are valuable is so malleable, Lauren is able to reassign positive value to her diverse gated community and reassign negative value to the what she sees as a monolithic group outside in accordance with neoliberal economic principles, thereby rendering them as less valuable, less redemptive, and therefore more disposable.

*Acorn the Gated Commune or Robledo Redux*

Lauren is able to realize part of her dream of building a community based on Earthseed, which is a belief system characterized by acceptance of the malleability of everything, and the attempt to harness that malleability to human ends. The first step of this project manifests itself as a commune built in the hills of northern California which Lauren names Acorn, recognizing both the oak tree as an everchanging growing object and long-lasting species, the acorn bread they frequently eat, and as a way of remembering the people who have died or have been left behind. Lauren writes in her journal that “we spoke our individual memories and quoted Bible passages, Earthseed verses, and bits of songs and poems that were favorites of the living or the dead. Then we buried our dead and we planted oak trees. Afterward, we sat together and talked and ate a meal and decided to call this place Acorn” (Butler, Sower 298-299). Acorn is an appealing place in the dystopian United States created by Butler. It is far enough removed from the failing major metropolises of California to remain mostly hidden. It is ecumenical in the sense that people can live there not believing in Earthseed, but then cannot vote in the community democracy (although, nearly everyone there comes to believe in Earthseed as a working philosophy for living well).

Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* ends on an optimistic note. The final page quotes a reading from Luke chapter 8 verses 5-8 that reads in part “A sower went out to sow his seed...and other [seed] fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare [sic] fruit an hundredfold” (Butler, Sower 299). The reader has a sense that these people, the ones who have traveled together, withstood the horrors of the road and the danger of bandits, are the good seeds that landed in the good isolated ground of northern California. And,

for a certain amount of time, the community is very successful. Acorn has a good and reliable educational system that mirrors the Montessori system in that children can largely choose their path of study. Asha (Lauren's daughter) first describes the importance of education in Acorn writing that "every member of Earthseed learned to read and to write, and most know at least two languages" (Butler Talents 28). Lauren writes in her journal that "each kid does at least one group project and one individual project per year. Most kids find the two unrelated projects influencing one another in unexpected ways. This helps the kids begin to learn how the world works, how all sorts of things interact and influence one another" (Butler Talents 136). The school system teaches kids the Earthseed system organically; the children growing up understanding connections, influence, and the importance of adaptation.

Acorn also has what we might consider a significantly socialist system of food distribution and labor. We learn early in the novel that "anyone who joined the group, child or adult, had to begin at once to learn these basics [reading and writing] and to acquire a trade. Anyone who had a trade was always in the process of teaching it to someone else (Butler Talents 28). They grow their own food, or harvest it, or use their pooled labor to trade with neighboring communities. Thus, at the heart of Acorn is a fully functioning economic system designed for community sustainability and growth.

Perhaps most importantly, Lauren and her Earthseed philosophy have generated, in Acorn, a remarkably democratic system of governance for the community. Anyone in the community who wants to can attend the weekly gatherings which are described by in this way:

Our Gatherings, aside from weddings, funerals, welcomings, or holiday celebrations, are discussions. They're problem-solving sessions, they're times of

planning, healing, learning, creating, times of focusing, and reshaping ourselves. They can cover anything at all to do with Earthseed or Acorn, past, present, or future, and anyone can speak.

During the first Gathering of the month, I lead a looking-back-looking-forward discussion to keep us aware of what we've done and what we must do, taking in any necessary changes, and taking advantage of any opportunities. And I encourage people to think about how things we do help us to sustain a purposeful religious community" (Butler Talents 67).

So, while Lauren is the leader of the group, because she is the progenitor of Earthseed, she takes the title Shaper, rather than President, Mayor, or any other traditional title of political power. The name is meant to suggest one who puts the collective wishes of the community into action.

But as utopian as these facets of Acorn sound, the community is still built upon the same bulwarking logic that Robledo was. Acorn is in reality an attempt at a more democratic and ecumenical Robledo, but it still takes the appearance and defensive posture of the sort of suburban enclosure that assumes everyone outside is a dangerous threat to Acorn's existence. For example, while Robledo was protected by Lazorwire atop a wall, it was not enough to keep out intruders. At Acorn, Lauren tries something as similar as she can find in nature. She discovers a variety of agave which she plans to use as natural fence. She writes:

It was one of the large, vicious varieties of agave, each individual plant an upturned rosette of stiff, fibrous, fleshy leaves, some of them over a meter long in the big parent plants. Each leaf was tipped with a long, hard, dagger-sharp spike, and for good measure, each leaf was edged in jagged thorns that were tough enough to saw through human flesh. We intended to use them to do just that...

Cactus by cactus, thornbush by thornbush, we've planted a living wall in the hills around Acorn. Our wall won't keep determined people out, of course. No wall will do that. Cars and trucks will get in if their owners are willing to absorb some damage to their vehicles...

Even intruders on foot can get in if they're willing to work at it. But the fence will hamper and annoy them. It will make them angry, and perhaps noisy. It will, when it's working well, encourage people to approach us by the easiest routes, and those we guard 24 hours a day (Butler Talents 32).

Thus, while Earthseed has the ability to change the social arrangement of a community for the better, it is unable to adapt to a new form of geography in order to secure that community. Lauren replicates Robledo's defensive structure, reimplements the patrols, and in the end, Acorn is to suffer a similar fate to Robledo. But more than that the fact that the defenses are inadequate or not reimagined enough, Earthseed itself makes Acorn a target.

Acorn is attacked by a self-styled Christian group similar to the Ku Klux Klan. There is some question as to whether they are ordered to attack by the fascist, neo-conservative president who is trying to restore virtue to America by regulating which belief systems are appropriate and by cleansing and purging the rest. The group attacks with superior firepower taking Acorn easily, separating children from their families, and making slaves of all the adults. The youngest children are to be educated with good Christian families and the adults are punished with pain-inducing collars, whippings, mental abuse, and sexual abuse at the hands of the pseudo-state attack force who rename Acorn to Camp Christian. What is at stake here, is that Acorn, for all the good it had the possibility of doing, instead fell into the old logic of resisting the outside by erecting walls and security in the exact style of the contemporary gated community. If policies of exclusion create resentment, jealousy, and invite intruders, Lauren, even in her perfect intentions created a target as much as she created a community. The lesson, unfortunately, to be learned from Acorn, is that ultimately the government more than anything else will decide which suburbs and which urban spaces are allowed to thrive and flourish.

### **Oryx and Crake and the Dystopian Suburb**

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* presents a very different, but no less critical view of the suburbs than *Parable of the Sower*. If *Parable* is representing the dystopian slow decline of suburban life under a failing neoliberal economic system, *Oryx and Crake* depicts a dystopian, fully finished suburban landscape, where each individual suburb is in a symbiotic relationship with a successful corporate entity (that is, each individual suburb is owned, managed, protected, and controlled by a specific corporation). These company towns are made out by Atwood to be necessary because the type of capitalism being represented here is a "hegemonic corporatism" which Professor of Social Ecology, Luis Suarez-Villa, defines as "the power of business corporations over society (1). Each of the corporate compounds keep and maintain their own corporate police force (the CorpSeCorps) and are in total control of the population, in part because they jealousy guard their employees, and in part because corporate competition and industrial espionage tends toward destructive biological attacks aimed at both the citizenry of the compound and the corporation'

All of the major corporations mentioned in *Oryx and Crake* are in the health or beautification, or sexual gratification business. When Jimmy ("Snowman" is his post-apocalyptic name) was a boy his father worked for two different corporations. OrganInc Farms (*Organ Incorporated*) which produced the "pigoon," the purpose of which was "to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host—organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses, of which there were more and more strains every year" (22). Later he was promoted and went to work for NooSkins (*New*

*Skins*), a subsidiary also owned by HelthWyzer (*Wiser Health*), whose main goal was to “find a method of replacing the older epidermis with a fresh one...” and sell it to a “well-to-do and once-young, once-beautiful woman or man, cranked up on hormonal supplements and shot full of vitamins but hampered by the unforgiving mirror [who would sell their house, their gated retirement villa, their kids, and their soul to get a second kick a the sexual can (55).

But RejoovenEsense (Rejuvenate Essence), the place where Jimmy and Crake (Jimmy’s friend and the book’s antagonist) work is “the biggest of them all” (225), the richest and most important corporation in the book. Crake tells Jimmy that they are “working on immortality (292),” and that one way of accomplishing that is the BlyssPluss project.”

The aim was to produce a single pill that, at one and the same time:

- a) would protect the user against all known sexually transmitted diseases, fatal, inconvenient, or merely unsightly;
- b) would provide an unlimited supply of libido and sexual prowess, coupled with a generalized sense of energy and well-being, thus reducing the frustration and blocked testosterone that led to jealousy and violence, and eliminating feelings of low self-worth;
- c) would prolong youth,

These three capabilities would be the selling points, said Crake; but there would be a fourth, which would not be advertised (294).

What Crake does not tell Jimmy is that the fourth “selling point” is that the BlyssPluss pill was “encysted” (346) with a “Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary” (341) which is meant to kill the entire human population.

The capitalist system here has gone post-Fordian (there is no manufacturing), post-Keynesian (there is no government to provide welfare or services to “plebs” who live in the city), and unlike the *Parable of the Sower* in which Octavia Butler attempted a critical rebuke of Reagan’s neoliberal policies, in *Oryx and Crake*, interestingly, it is post

explicitly post neoliberal. Margaret Atwood explicitly creates a post neoliberal economic setting in the novel by taking a former successful neoliberal entrepreneur and making him undertake a second career as a high school teacher after failing in business. She writes:

The Life Skills class, in junior high. The teacher had been a shambling neo-con reject from the heady days of the legendary dot.com bubble, back in prehistory. He'd had a stringy ponytail stuck to the back of his balding head, and a faux-leather jacket; he'd worn a gold stud in his bumpy, porous old nose, and had pushed self-reliance and individualism and risk-taking in a hopeless tone, as if even he no longer believed in them. Once in a while he'd come out with some hoary maxim, served up with a wry irony that did nothing to reduce the boredom quotient; or else he'd say, 'I coulda been a contender,' then glare meaningfully at the class as if there was some deeper-than-deep point they were all supposed to get (41-42).

By making this “neo-con” a dinosaur, a failed example of the “dot-com” neo-liberal boom (an economic period romanticized as one of great individual risk taking), Atwood points out neoliberalism's unsustainability in the face of the growing American corporate company town, or what English professor Michael Spiegel calls corporate “post-national neomedievalism” (120).

Under neoliberal thought, the individual is responsible for their own success or failure, which is a way of undermining the societal collective and limiting the role of government. Margaret Thatcher famously said “there is no such thing as society, only individual men and women”—and, she subsequently added, their families. All forms of social solidarity were to be dissolved in favour of individualism, private property, personal responsibility, and family values (Harvey 23). The neomedieval economic system undermines society in quite a different way. Spiegel defines it as a “world of simultaneous globalization and fragmentation where the nation state persists, though weakened (120). The outcome of this is, according to Spiegel, the fact that “nationality would no longer represent one's primary means of identification. Instead, loyalty would

disperse among various local groups or transnational organizations...(120-121). Such is the case in *Oryx and Crake*; Each corporation, set up as a company town in America commands the loyalty of everybody who lives and works for and inside the town, creating a post-national system under which all loyalty is afforded to one's employer.

An early conversation between Jimmy and his father demonstrate not just the neomedieval loyalty to the corporation and the geography of the company town they live in, but also demonstrates the way urban inhabitants are considered lower class, much the same way peasants or plebeians were considered below the ruling and merchant classes. After a biological attack, and a fear of spreading disease was introduced to their compound, Jimmy's father tries to reassure him that the compound is secure, but also inculcates an idea about class and geography. Atwood writes:

Long ago in days of knights and dragons, the kings and dukes had lived in castles, with high walls and drawbridges and slots on the ramparts so you could pour hot pitch on your enemies, said Jimmy's father, and the Compounds were the same idea. Castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside.

So are we the kings and dukes? asked jimmy.  
Oh , absolutely, said his father, laughing (28).

Jimmy's father's metaphor could not be more explicit and given the descriptions of the suburbs and the city, it is also relatively accurate. The relationship between the city and the suburb in *Oryx and Crake* is, very much in the style of *Parable of the Sower*, a representation of a rigid ordered inside vs. an out of control criminal outside world. The primary difference is that while in *Parable of the Sower* the suburbs are suffering privation, in *Oryx and Crake* the suburbs are luxurious and sort of read like an all-inclusive resort.

The corporate owned and sponsored suburbs represent a neomedieval capitalist dystopia, complete with all the excesses money and privilege can afford. The houses are described as “laid out like a garden suburb with large houses in the fake Georgian and fake Tudor and fake French provincial” (227). The employees who live there can follow the “meandering streets leading to the employees’ golf course and their restaurants and nightclubs and medical clinics and shopping malls and indoor tennis courts, and their hospitals” (227). In this perfect capitalist suburb, technology provides perfectly seamless comfort and environmental sustainability. “Everything was sparkling clean, landscaped, ecologically pristine, and very expensive. The air was particulate-free, due to the many solar whirlpool purifying towers, discreetly placed and disguised as modern art. Rockulators took care of the microclimate, butterflies as big as plates drifted among the vividly coloured shrubs” (291). The suburban corporate compounds are a representation of a capitalist utopia forged by perfected corporate capitalism and geography, but this “corporate paradise” is countered by what is left behind in unfunded urban spaces.

By way of comparison, the city is presented as a dystopia, devoid of the pristine beauty that can only be offered through corporate control. The city is dark and terrifying, full of disease, and to be avoided at all costs. Cities are referred to as Pleeblands, a reference to the Latin “plebian” which designated one of lower class, and the designation further reinforces the neomedieval relationship between the city and the suburb. Atwood writes of the pleeblands:

There, it was rumored, the kids ran in packs like hordes. They’d wait until some parent was away, then get right down to business—they’d swarm the place, waste themselves with loud music and toking and boozing, fuck everything including the family cat, trash the furniture, shoot up, overdose...rows of dingy houses; apartment buildings with tiny balconies, laundry strung on the railings; factories with smoke coming out of the chimneys; gravel pits. A huge pile of garbage next

to what he [Jimmy] supposed was a high-heat incinerator...accepted wisdom in the Compounds said that nothing of interest went on in the pleeblands, apart from buying and selling: there was no life of the mind. Buying and selling, plus a lot of criminal activity... (73, 196).

This description of the city is very like the description of Los Angeles from *Parable of the Sower*, but more than that, it is reminiscent of the criminal narrative of New York City espoused by journalist David Yergin discussed in chapter 2 of this dissertation. In that *New York Times* article, Yergin advanced the idea that crime was responsible for the white and capital flight from New York City rather than the idea that a depressed economy and abandoned city played any role in either the actual amount of crime or inflated crime statistics.

Both *Parable of the Sower* and *Oryx and Crake* posit American city life in the 90's and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as untenable, but none of the suburban residents of either novel are able to recognize the impact of economics on the city instead choosing to lay behavioral blame on urban residents for their plight. This chapter has already detailed Lauren Olamina's inability to empathize with the problems of city dwellers, but because capitalism is so successful in *Oryx and Crake* it is important to understand how Atwood's city is represented as having been decimated differently. The corporate run suburbs in *Oryx and Crake* follow both an Althusserian and a Lyotardian economic model which account, in part, for a totally defunded and abandoned urban landscape.

### ***Capitalism at the Expense of the City in Oryx and Crake***

The socio-economic status of someone's family and someone's neighborhood can have a drastic impact on that person's life chances. Professor of Sociology Patrick

Sharkey, in his 2013 book *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality* makes the case that “the story of neighborhoods and race in America is one of enduring *inherited* inequality” (emphasis in original, 9).

According to Sharkey, this largely breaks down along racial lines. He writes:

“The small number of studies that have examined patterns of continuity and change have reached a common conclusion: blacks from all income groups are much less likely than whites to exit from poor neighborhoods, and are more likely to experience downward contextual mobility (e.g., moving from a middle-income neighborhood to a poor neighborhood) than upward mobility...over 70 percent of African Americans who live in today’s poorest, most racially segregated neighborhoods are from the same families that lived in the ghettos of the 1970s” (35, 9).

This type of inherited poverty and downward mobility is present in *Oryx and Crake* and is represented in the novel as form of systematic oppression that results from a complex combination of the economic system, geography, and educational opportunities.

The neomedieval economic system Margaret Atwood describes in *Oryx and Crake* also takes on some frightening postmodern qualities because of the hyper-technological focus of all the corporations. Whether the business is gene-splicing in order to produce viable human organs for transplant, creating new and more effective beauty treatments, or working on immortality, the type of employee must be highly educated and exhibit a high amount of loyalty to their employer. The corporations in Atwood’s novel have created a capitalist solution to this, and it further isolates the suburb from the city in that it generates both an intellectual and class gap. By privatizing the school system in the suburb and attaching them to the specific controlling corporation, the company can determine enrollment and curriculum. It is a deterministic Althusserian method for what he calls the “reproduction of the means of production.” He writes that “in order to exist, every social formation [i.e. the corporation and accompanying suburb

in question] must reproduce the conditions of its production and the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce. It must therefore reproduce: 1) The productive forces, 2) the existing relations of production” (233). The corporation sponsoring the school accepts the children of their employees as students and directs the curriculum in an effort to train them as future employees. In this way, knowledge as well opportunity is given directly to those already in the suburbs and not those living in the pleeblands.

Both Jimmy and Crake attend HelthWyzer High School, the company school that both their parental units work for. The reader is meant to understand that this creates a certain amount of brand loyalty, but also that they are trained for working at the parent corporation. Atwood describes the high school, the student body, and the curriculum this way:

Crake was very smart---even in the world of HelthWyzer High, with its overstock of borderline geniuses and polymaths, he had no trouble floating at the top of the list. He turned out to be excellent at Nanotech Biochem, and together he and Jimmy worked on their single-molecular-layer splicing project, managing to produce the required purple nematode—using the colour-coder from a primitive seaweed—before schedule, and with no alarming variations (76).

This type of curriculum, aside from being highly advanced, is directly related to the HelthWyzer’s project of growing human organs in pigs. Jean-Francois Lyotard identified the disturbing trend of scientific research being directed only toward profit as early as 1984 in *The Postmodern Condition* that, “capitalism solves the scientific problem of research funding in its own way: directly by financing research departments in private companies, in which demands for performativity and recommercialization orient research first and foremost toward technological applications...” (90).

Lyotard recognized that profit driven research stands in tension with traditional narratives that have historically suggested a liberal purpose of knowledge and its widespread dispersal. Instead, HelthWyzer High School helps to disseminate knowledge only to a select privileged few who already live in the corporate suburb, and only in the interest of profit, as opposed to any Enlightenment ideal. Michel Foucault presciently wrote “behind all knowledge [savoir], behind all attainment of knowledge [connaissance], what is involved is a struggle for power” (Foucault Power 32). Controlling the schools, curriculum, and enrollment is, in this case, a means of maintaining suburban corporate power.

Furthermore, this type of capitalist scholastic system has no problem marginalizing those students who do not measure up to the company’s needs. Upon graduation, Crake, because his intelligence is so highly valued attends the prestigious Watson-Crick university studying transgenics (a highly profitable area of study), whereas Jimmy, who prefers the devalued humanities, is only accepted at the lowly Martha Graham. The descriptions of these schools mirror the description of the difference between city and the gated compound communities. Atwood writes:

The security at Martha Graham was falling apart. It was surrounded...by the tackiest kind of pleeblands: vacant warehouses, burnt-out tenements, empty parking lots. Here and there were sheds and huts put together from scavenged materials—sheets of tin, slabs of plywood—and inhabited no doubt by squatters. How did such people exist? Jimmy had no idea (185).

By way of comparison Watson Crick:

...was a palace. At the entranceway was a bronzed statue of the Institute’s mascot, the spoot/gider—one of the first successful splices...The extensive grounds inside the security wall were beautifully laid out...The students in Botanical Transgenics (Ornamental Division) had created a whole array of drought-and-flood resistant tropical blends, with flowers or leaves in lurid shades of chrome yellow and brilliant flame red and phosphorescent blue and neon

purple. The pathways, unlike the crumbling cement walks at Martha Graham, were smooth and wide. Students and faculty were beetling along them in their electric golf carts (199).

By explicitly comparing the two universities, Atwood puts them in stark relief of each other, and employs the difference to reinforce the idea that Jimmy has been sent off to a devalued school in the city because he does not have the aptitude to help the corporation profit. The city is not just isolated from the gated suburban corporate communities but is also used a place of exile for those deemed less important. Jimmy however, by virtue of his relationship with Crake is eventually rewarded with a high-end job with HelthWyzer, the most powerful of the corporations. Thus, cronyism preserves Jimmy's status as a valued corporate compound resident. But, there are no examples of someone born in the city "advancing" to the suburb in *Oryx and Crake*; and, much like in modern day urban America, geography determines much of someone's life chances.

### ***White Privilege, Drugs, Pornography, and Gaming in Suburbia***

There is a moment of irony when Jimmy describes how teen aged children behave in the city as opposed to the compounds. He claims that city kids would "waste themselves with loud music and toking and boozing..." (73). He explains this is a result of having little else to do, and the fact that there are no real police in the city to control crime. The irony is that just several pages later when describing his and Crake's recreational activities during their time at HelthWyzer high school, the reader learns that Crake and Jimmy regularly take drugs as well. Atwood writes:

"Crake had also located Uncle Pete's stash of high-grade Vancouver skunkweed, kept in orange-juice cans in the freezer; he'd take out about a quarter of the can, then mix in some of the low-octane carpet sweepings you could buy at the school tuck shop for fifty bucks a baggie. So they'd roll a few joints and smoke them while watching the executions and the porn..." (86).

We are meant to understand that their drug use is no big deal, that it does not interfere with their scholastic productivity, and that the compound can insulate them from the consequences of their behavior in ways the savage pleeblands could not.

As was discussed above, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton identified a complex system of blaming minorities for the conditions of their underserved communities, communities which are represented in *Oryx and Crake* by the pleeblands. Their theory is meant to help people understand that the geography of their birth is important when looking at life opportunities. And, part of the reason that being born in a poor neighborhood in an American city limits life chances is the fact that what happens as part of the norm in those neighborhoods is often considered a crime or a problem. Sometimes when similar actions take place in the suburb, they are treated differently by parents, police, and schools. There is also unequal treatment for behaviors in these communities because of the difference in perception between these disadvantaged neighborhoods and other more affluent ones. Consider for example, the ways in which the war on drugs has been handled in an explicitly discriminatory fashion.

It is beyond question that the “war on drugs,” which began in earnest in the 1970s when New York Governor Rockefeller signed mandatory sentencing laws for drug crimes, disproportionately targets minorities, especially black people. That move, reversed a long-standing philosophy by New York State and Rockefeller himself that rehabilitation was best practice when dealing with drug users (Kohler-Hausmann 71). This type of law was adopted by the federal government just over a decade later. Professors of criminology Ojmarrh Mitchell and Michael J. Lynch describe the law and its effects this way:

...the emergence of racial differentiation in sentencing in the 1986 *Controlled Substances Act* which provided penalties for crack-cocaine, a drug more widely used in minority communities that were 100 times as severe as the penalties for powdered cocaine, a drug more often used by affluent whites; to the long running 'war on drugs' that has influenced legislation and crime control in the U.S. since the Civil Rights Movement" (139).

The arrest rates are also telling. Mitchell and Lynch go on to note that "in 1980, 27% of drug arrests involved blacks but by 1988, after the spread of the WoD, 40% of drug arrestees were black. The percentages of drug arrestees who were black peaked in both 1989 and 1991 at 42% and declined slowly to 35% in 2007" (143). Crack cocaine was a crime wave which could only be fixed by systemic mass incarceration, whereas, the modern day opioid epidemic (largely a suburban problem) is being handled as a health concern.

One piece of evidence for the difference in the way the crack cocaine crime wave was being handled and the way the opioid epidemic is the way it is being studied. Dr. Christopher Ruhm, professor of health policy and economics, "revisited thousands of death certificates from 2008 through 2014 and concluded the mortality rates were 24 percent higher for opioids and 22 percent higher for heroin than previously reported" which ultimately accounted for "nearly 35,000" deaths in 2015 (Siemaszko). This type of study led to different policy decisions than the mandatory sentencing decisions of the 1970s and 1980s. President Trump recently declared the opioid epidemic a national emergency which "would allow the executive branch to direct funds towards expanding treatment facilities and supplying police officers with the anti-overdose remedy naloxone. It would also allow the administration to waive some federal rules, including one that restricts where Medicaid recipients can get addiction treatment" (Vitali and Siemaszko). And, former Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, who recently spoke at a suburban high

school in Maryland “released a report on opiates and addiction that emphasized that dependency on opioids and other substances must not be viewed as a character flaw” (Butler, Erika). This kind of rhetoric and public policy regarding a largely suburban drug problem is starkly at odds with the ways in which the crack cocaine problem was managed in urban centers.

Jimmy and Crake, both of whom are white suburban residents, cannot see that their actions are just as criminal and as morally bankrupt as those in the cities who they freely condemn. Not only are they breaking drug laws by buying and using, but they also commit identity fraud, view child pornography, watch animal “snuff films,” and watch live human executions. By any standard, Jimmy and Crake should be subject to criminal prosecution, but because their actions are not a threat to the company that owns the town they live in and their parents work for, they are ignored by the CorpSeCorps. This type of privilege mirrors the difference between treatment for heroin users and mandatory jail sentences for crack cocaine users.

While this type of treatment speaks to the privilege Jimmy and Crake enjoy as white, wealthy suburbanites, the games they play also speak to white privilege. They play “Barbarian Stomp (See If You Can Change History),” a game in which “one side had the cities and the riches and the other side had the hordes, and—usually but not always—the most viciousness” (77). From the safety of their bedroom, Jimmy and Crake fictionally play out some of the worst atrocities in human history, without recognizing the inherent racism and colonization the game embodies. But even more disturbing is “Blood and Roses:”

“Blood and Roses,” “[is] a trading game, along the lines of Monopoly. The Blood side played with human atrocities for the counters, atrocities on a large

scale: individual rapes and murders didn't count, there had to have been a large number of people wiped out. Massacres, genocides, that sort of thing. The Roses side played with human achievements. Artworks, scientific breakthroughs, stellar works of architecture, helpful inventions... The exchange rates—one *Mona Lisa* equaled Bergen Belsen..." (77-78).

What is so disturbing about this game is that it is tied to market economics, trade values, and opportunism. Atwood writes that "you need to know the numbers—the total number of corpses for the atrocities, the latest open-market price for the artworks; or, if the artworks had been stolen, the amount paid out by the insurance policy" (78). In short, the game makes a capitalistic game out of atrocities without recognizing the possible causes that capitalism had in those atrocities. Both games testify to the awesome, enduring, and historical power of whiteness, but do so in a way that trivializes or mocks the disasters caused by it. Jimmy and Crake learn of historical atrocities, but not the lasting impact of those atrocities which have created their privilege.

Not only do Jimmy and Crake reenact horror as if it is fun, they take a sort of tourist trip to the city and treat it as a game. Crake secures the passes to get into the city, and suggests they "troll a few bars," (287) making their trip sound very much the joke they intend it to be. Crake is inordinately wealthy and important by this time in the book, and their trip to the city is a sort of slumming entertainment. But, despite the fact they consider the city as being very dangerous, they know they won't be in any danger because of their privileged position. Atwood writes:

It had taken them only a couple of hours to get there—bullet train to the nearest Compound, then an official Corps car with an armed driver, laid on by whoever was doing Crake's bidding. The car had taken them into the heart of what Crake called the action and dropped them off there. They'd be shadowed though, said Crake. They'd be protected. So no harm would come to them.

Before setting out, Crake had stuck a needle in Jimmy's arm—an all-purpose. Short-term vaccine he'd cooked himself. The pleeblands, he said were a

giant Petri dish: a lot of guck and contagious plasm got spread around there” (287).

Nevertheless, they are excited to venture into this unknown territory to have a few drinks. “They ended up in a bar featuring oral sex on trapezes...then they were somewhere else, on an endless green satin bed, being worked over by two girls covered from head to toe in sequins that were glued on to their skin and shimmered like the scales of a virtual fish” (289). They are able to avoid the consequences of these decisions, the drinks, the drugs, the unprotected sex, because of the privilege of having been born in the compounds, the knowledge disseminated to Crake in school and his profession, and the fact that his importance to the corporation allows him to use the police as his personal bodyguards.

### ***Dystopian Policing***

It is hardly surprising that given the dystopic setting of both *Parable of the Sower* and *Oryx and Crake* (a near post-capital society and a hyper-capital society respectively) that there are problems with how the police do their job. Both books portray a police department at odds with what is most commonly understood as the proper values, ethics, and duties of contemporary police departments and their officers. Modern day police are to follow a code of ethics that reads in part: “As a law enforcement officer, my fundamental duty is to serve the community; to safeguard lives and property; to protect the innocent against deception, the weak against oppression or intimidation...I will enforce the law courteously and appropriately without fear or favor...never employing unnecessary force or violence and never accepting gratuities” (Barker 16). The International Association of Chiefs of Police also advocates that all police take the following oath:

Law Enforcement Oath of Honor

On my honor,  
 I will never betray my badge,  
 my integrity, my character,  
 or the public trust.  
 I will always have  
 the courage to hold myself  
 and others accountable for our actions.  
 I will always uphold the constitution  
 and community I serve (Barker 17).

Both books depict either contemporary or historical problems with the ways in which are people paid to serve the public, and both either fail to serve dutifully, serve un- altruistically, or serve at the behest of corporations rather than the public. Ultimately the police in both novels fail to live up to the standards that are embodied by both the code of ethics or the Oath of Honor.

The police and fire department in *Parable of the Sower* both function much more like a private company than as a publicly provided service. The book is consistent about three points as regards the police and fire departments. 1. They don't respond quickly, or don't respond at all, 2. They only investigate something after collecting an exorbitant fee, and 3. The results of their investigations are ubiquitously unsuccessful. Lauren's father, before his disappearance and death, commented about the police noting that the family "can't afford their fees, and anyway, they're not interested until after a crime has been committed. Even then, if you call them, they won't show up for hours—maybe not for two or three days," (65), and slightly earlier in the book he says that "the police may be able to avenge you, but they can't protect you" (38). That last comment is sadly ironic, as the police were not able to discover anything or exercise any vengeance for his murder.

Bearing in mind that *Parable of the Sower* was first published in 1993, it is eerily predictive of an important failure of governmental service which happened in Obion County, Tennessee almost two decades later. The county had instituted a fee of 75\$ for fire protection which Gene and Paulette Cranick had forgotten to pay. As the fire burned their house down, killing their three dogs and their cat, the fire department arrived and watched the house burn. The only reason they showed up at all was to protect the Cranick's neighbor's property because they had paid the fee (Siegel and Kelly). The fact that the Cranicks had forgotten to pay the fee is really beside the point. The fee itself is not mandatory; if it were, it would be issued as part of a tax levy. Instead, it is more of a "subscriptions service" (Siegel and Kelly). And, as such it privileges those with money over those who are impoverished. It is a clear violation of the code of ethics and Oath of Honor quoted above to violate the public trust in this way.

If there is a failure of the ethics of public service by the police and fire department in *Parable of the Sower*, the CorpSeCorps (the police force representing corporations and the suburbs they exist in) abandon that ethical code entirely, serving only the interests of the corporation and those who work for the corporation. And if the police and fire department in *Parable of the Sower* prefigures a contemporary concern, the CorpSeCorps hearkens back to the past as a representation of police corruption. Michel Foucault, in "Truth and Juridical Forms" offers a theory about the creation of the police. He describes a number of "self-defense groups of a paramilitary sort" that arose in response to "great social and political movements" (Foucault Power 61-62). While many of these groups were religious in nature, meant to protect a shifting set of morals and ethics, Foucault

spends some time on the groups which formed in response to changing economic conditions. Foucault writes:

As a last category, there were the strictly economic societies. The great companies and great commercial enterprises first organized police societies, private police forces, to defend their property, their stock, their wares, the ships anchored in the port of London, against riot, banditry, everyday pillage and petty thievery. These privately organized police forces patrolled the districts of London and large towns such as Liverpool” (Foucault Power 62).

If police forces were originally designed to protect businesses, their assets, and their interests, then we can see the ways in which the CorpSeCorps do not represent a new corruptive possibility for law enforcement, but instead refer back to an older, more original one.

And yet, even as the CorpSeCorps hearken back to an older model of policing they Atwood also has her eye on contemporary issues with privatized security forces and both a racialized and class critique of police. Just as the CorpSeCorps serve their parent corporation at the expense of those in the city, policing in American urban centers often breaks down along class and racial lines. In *The Money and Politics of Criminal Justice Policy*, O. Hayden Griffin, III, Vanessa H. Woodward, and John J. Sloan, III remind us that “the poor have always been disproportionately affected by both prison and punishment,” and that “despite being 12% of the total population of the United States, African Americans account for almost 40% of arrests for violent crime and roughly 25% of arrests for property crimes. Furthermore, some reports estimate that there are five times more white drug users than African American drug users, yet African Americans are 13.4 times more likely to be sent to prison for drug charges (49). This type of mass incarceration serves the American neoliberal economy. Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore remind us that the “Thatcher and Reagan regimes manufactured legitimization

crises designed to refashion the state—massively slashing the social wage by cutting welfare benefits, public education, and public housing... all the while lowering the taxes on the rich and on corporations and increasing spending on military, police, and prisons” (174).

The economic effect of mass incarceration has generated an incredibly profitable industry of private prisons, which amounts to a privatized security force paid to detain those found unfit for a neoliberal society. Furthermore, there is much profit to be made on the prison system. Ruth Wilson Gilmore points out that private contractors built three new prisons in California since 1984 at a cost of \$280 - \$350 million dollars apiece..., and “thirteen small (500-bed) community corrections facilities, five prison camps, and five mother-prisoner centers to its pre-1984 inventory (Gilmore, *Golden* 7). Not only does prison construction provide for a privatized job market, but prison labor is often exploited. Noah Zatz notes that “well over 600,000 and probably close to a million inmates are working full time in jails and prisons throughout the United States...generate(ing) \$2 billion in revenue annually (868-869). And, we know that “dozens of Fortune 500 companies—including McDonald’s, Microsoft, Dell, and Victoria’s Secret—have moved at least part of their operations in to prisons” (Smith and Hattery 88), at great cost savings. Corporations have learned to leverage a privatized system of mass incarceration to their benefit.

Every instance the CorpSeCorps are mentioned in *Oryx and Crake* it is clear that they are in the service of the corporations. They too, like Foucault’s description of the original police forces, are charged with protecting the company’s assets, employees, and intellectual property, and because the corporations all form company towns, the actual

geography of the suburb as well. Jimmy's father and his friend speak at a bonfire necessitated by the failure of the CorpSeCorps to stop a biological attack on the compound refer to the CorpSeCorps as their people (18). As discussed earlier, they ignore crimes and unethical behavior as long as it does not impact the corporation, and also act as personal bodyguards for important employees. But even more disturbing is the way they act as judge, jury, and executioner of those whom they deem a danger to the corporate bottom line.

Early in the novel Jimmy's mother becomes disillusioned with the ways in which the corporation she works for and lives in subverts nature and controls people for profit. Not only does she leave the compound, her husband, and Jimmy, but she commits the unforgivable crime of corporate sabotage on her way out. Atwood describes her act of defiance this way:

His [Jimmy's] mother had left another note—a wordless message. She'd trashed Jimmy's father's home computer, and not only the contents, she'd taken the hammer to it.... She'd done her own computer too, if anything, more thoroughly. Thus neither Jimmy's father nor the CorpSeCorps men who were soon all over the place had any idea of what coded messages she might have been sending, what information she may or may not have downloaded and taken out with her (61-62).

Her act of abandonment is conflated with a potential threat to the corporation's intellectual property, and so she is branded a terrorist. Jimmy is questioned four times every year, all the way through college about his mother's whereabouts. At various points during these "interviews" he is shown pictures and videos of riots while "wired up" so that even if he remained loyal to his mom, they could "catch the spikes of neural electricity how wouldn't be able to control" (256). Finally, the CorpSeCorps show Jimmy a video of his mother being executed, and the wires pick up his reaction. It seems

she spent time in prison before she faced the firing squad. Her crime was holding a sign critiquing a corporation for using unsustainable farming practices. And, despite the fact that there are many mentions of tear gas, bludgeoning, and CorpSeCorps men charging the protesters, there is never a mention of due process. Jimmy's mom was executed for treason, not against the government, which no longer exists as we understand it, but for treason against capitalism.

So, not only is there a privatized corporate police force working only to protect the interests, geography, and elite workforce who live in company towns, there is also the complete abandoning of the welfare of those who live in the city. In both books, the city is untenable, represented as low-rent, full of crime, drugs, and other vices. What is to be the outcome the city if it so devalued, peopled with savages, filthy and dangerous? In the face of a fully formed suburban landscape, one privileged with income and infrastructure, where can they expand fruitfully and profitably? Chapter 4 looks at gentrification, which I will call a recolonization of the city, a cycle which systematizes and extends a cycle of keeping capital fluid. A system which ensures that those who controlled the past have the best chance to control the future.

### **Urban Gentrification and the Neoliberal Trap in Ernesto Quiñonez's *Chango's Fire* and Mat Johnson's *Hunting in Harlem***

In 1986 Neil Smith wrote, in his foundational edited collection of essays on urban gentrification, entitled *Gentrification of the City*, that “gentrification is a frontier on which fortunes are made” (34). His use of “frontier” was not a throwaway metaphor, but rather the centerpiece of his own included essay “Gentrification, the frontier, and the restructuring of urban space.” Beginning with Frederick Jackson Turner’s “frontier thesis” which posits that taming the wildness, wilderness, and savagery of the western frontier in successive waves was “the central experience which defined the uniqueness of the American national character” (15), Smith elucidates the ways in which the frontier mythologies surrounding the colonization of western America are central to understanding both the psychology of the so-called “urban pioneers” who first begin the gentrification process and the economics of transforming devalored and neglected neighborhoods into gentrified urban spaces.

Although the term “gentrification” was first coined in 1964 by Ruth Glass, a British sociologist, she was describing a process that had been happening for years before (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 4). We first see this term being used in wide application in America in the 1970s when American cities began to reinvest in neighborhoods devalued by both the white and capital flight that worked to create the suburbs. And it is this process that continues in American cities today, as the cycle of devaluation of certain neighborhoods continuously creates investment opportunities for people with means. Few people would suggest that investment in poor neighborhoods and relocating city services to those neighborhoods are necessarily negative policies, but as with so many

investments, there is a social cost to minority and poor populations who already inhabit those spaces. This chapter looks at initial neighborhood gentrification, where so-called “pioneer gentrifiers” buy cheap properties and seek to renovate them in order to increase their value. The capitalist ideological narrative of this process is one of positive progress as local property values are likely to increase and a fresh population is said to be more concerned for the state of their neighborhood. But, as Sociologists Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin Wyly remind us, gentrification can be said to be “the leading edge of neoliberal urbanism (xvii). It is a process that privileges those with the ability to invest, and devalues, relocates, and rewrites the cultural history of a place. By looking at literature, we can analyze alternate narratives which demonstrate what is lost when these “pioneers” enter, take control of, and change an existing neighborhood.

There are some academic and cultural pitfalls in appropriating the language of settler colonialism and transferring it onto urban spaces. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang remind us in “Decolonization is not a metaphor:” “The horizons of the settler colonial nation-state are total and require a mode of total appropriation of Indigenous life and land, rather than the selective expropriation of profit-producing fragments (5),” and gentrification is, according to Neil Smith, about profit. Tuck and Yang might instead refer to the gentrifying of urban neighborhoods as a form of what they term “internal colonization,” which they define as: “...the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the ‘domestic’ borders of an imperial nation. This involves the use of particularized modes of control—prisons, ghettos, minoritizing, schooling, policing – to ensure the ascendancy of a nation as a white elite” (4-5). So, while it may be reasonable to limit the amount of conflation between settler colonialism

and gentrification, academia has leveraged this metaphor for decades to analyze the displacement, the uneven metropolitan redevelopment, and the allocation of government resources to assist in the capital accumulation produced during this process. But what is most interesting, apart from the debate about the suitability of colonialism as an appropriate metaphor to analyze gentrification, is the fact that so many of those who participate in urban gentrification self-apply this label, or the notion is sponsored by an official governmental or local narrative of the program. Thus, the myths of bravery, intrepidity, and even a sort of inward looking version of manifest destiny associated with the heroic white interpretation of the American colonial west are reimagined along with the concomitant stereotypes of those already inhabiting the land (in this case minorities in the inner-city) as dangerous, criminal, and undeserving squatters of the property they live upon. Several cases will demonstrate the long-lasting racist problematic of these “urban pioneers” imagining themselves and being imagined as settlers of a brave new frontier.

Baltimore is an extreme example of the official use of settler imagery in its governmental push to gentrify devalorized sections of the urban landscape. In the 1970’s Baltimore coined their gentrification program “homesteading,” under which they “sold blocks of abandoned Federal-style row houses in downtown neighborhoods for \$1 apiece with up to \$37,000 in low-interest construction loans” (Hinds). It was a clear call-back to the “Homesteading Act” of 1862 which the Library of Congress describes as follows:

Signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on May 20, 1862, the Homestead Act encouraged Western migration by providing settlers 160 acres of public land. In exchange, homesteaders paid a small filing fee and were required to complete five years of continuous residence before receiving ownership of the land. After six months of residency, homesteaders also had the option of purchasing the land from the government for \$1.25 per acre (The Library of Congress).

Newspapers at the time wrote favorably about this legislation, celebrating the passage and promoting the homesteading idea as a positive one. A Marysville, Kansas newspaper, *The Big Blue Union*, went so far as to suggest that the “Homestead Bill [would] form a new era in Western emigration” and that on the “unsettled land...the field is now fully open to the honest and energetic farmer who wishes to secure himself a home on easy terms” (The Big blue union). The rhetoric here of land as “unsettled” and “open” problematically lends itself to a conceptual imagination of open and available as if it were never being used by indigenous peoples, and in addition to the 1.03 billion acres disposed of, “after 1862 Between 100 and 125 million acres of Indian reservation land was also sold off to white settlers” (Johnson, Dennis 96).

Neil Smith makes this connection to urban gentrification explicit, writing that “the term ‘urban pioneer’ is as arrogant as the original notion of ‘pioneer’ in that it conveys the impression of a city that is not yet socially inhabited: like the Native Americans, the contemporary urban working class is seen as less than social, simply a part of the physical environment” (Smith and Hattery 16). Thus, urban property like property formerly on the American western frontier can be appropriated and put to its best and most profitable use without regard to those already using the land. Even as early as the 1980’s tension was rising because of the application of settler imagery to urban gentrification. *The Brownstoner*, a popular magazine produced by a local pro-gentrification committee self-styled the, “Brownstone Revival Committee,” in New York’s Park Slope neighborhood, was concerned with the perception that “gentrification describes areas in which development activity (wither private, government-aided or a

combination of both) results in the displacement of low—or moderate-income families by those in higher income categories (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 8).” Their response employed imagery which evoked the very essences of criticism of America’s treatment of indigenous Americans by publishing an article where they famously claimed that “gentrification is not ‘genocide,’ but ‘genesis (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 8).

And, the self-application of pioneer and settler imagery continues into the present moment of gentrification. Sociologist Japonica Brown-Saracino, relates the story of Richard, a “white attorney in his late 30’s who has lived in Chicago’s Argyle neighborhood for several years” (53). Richard refers to himself as a pioneer who is “taming the frontier” in Argyle (53). Brown-Saracino continues to tell Richard’s story with some very disturbing details:

“Despite his awareness that such transformation [Argyle] leads to displacement, Richard talks about his gentrification with moral certitude arguing that Chicago benefits from the taming of the frontier and that such benefits outweigh the cost of displacement...he describes gentrification as a natural and, therefore, inevitable economic process... ‘It was incredibly bad on the street where I bought. But the deal I got on the condo was unbelievable....when I moved in here, it was like the wild, wild west. It was, literally...some of the people feel threatened. Like it’s the white people coming in here, kicking them out, moving them out, and to some degree it’s true. It’s gentrification... We tried passing the word to all these people that we’re just trying to make it a cleaner, safer place for everybody...I mean, I feel sorry for the poor people what are decent people who won’t be able to live here, but, you know, I hope there will be places to go for them’” (53-54).

As much as Richard participates in the sort of settler colonial talk, he takes it one step further. Brown Saracino relates another anecdote that occurs during a planning meeting of gentrifiers in the Argyle neighborhood in which a discussion of local drug dealers disabling street lights came up. Richard indicated that any loss of life by electrocution would benefit the neighborhood, saying “then we’d be rid of them” (55). Perhaps aside from his focus on economic benefits and consistent use of settler language to describe his

efforts at changing Argyle is his overwhelming use of othering language to describe the longtime residents of Argyle, implying they no longer have a right to be there. He hopes there is somewhere for “them” to go, acknowledges that he is part of a process that is kicking and moving “them” out, and refers to long-time residents negatively as “these people.” Just as in the settler colonial days of the 1862s Homesteading Act, there is an innate superiority assumed and exercised that comes with “owning” land and holding economic power.

There are two major representational problems with either the government or people themselves employing settler colonial language to describe their gentrification efforts. 1. Phrases like pioneer and adventurer always imply an attitude of bravery in the face of unknown dangers, but in this case, the “danger” is always transferred as a principle characteristic of the people of color who live in neighborhoods to be gentrified. As we have seen in Chapter 3, pioneer as a self-identifying moniker has become possible because of the normalization of rhetoric describing the city as full of crime and populated by savages. Under this rhetorical rubric Richard’s perception that the city is a wilderness that needs to be tamed is part of decades old propaganda, the goal of which is, in part, to describe the economically disadvantaged as being responsible for their oppression and the dilapidated physical state of the communities they live in. And, 2. Gentrification of this sort, either sponsored by the government or by private money is attendant to and works to normalize neoliberal economics as an inevitable and proper system. That is, the idea that private ownership of property is endemic of one’s value to the economic system is reinforced by a governmental policy that encourages property ownership, in this case, especially by white people in a devalorized black neighborhood. Urban renewal is

portrayed as the needed outcome of a cycle of devaluation and revaluation of neighborhoods, but only attends to the properties, not the people who inhabit those properties. The ability to buy, own, and improve property are some of the hallmarks of neoliberal economics, and people who are able to participate in this activity have value. Thus, despite the fact that disadvantaged people of color are primarily the ones being displaced, gentrification works as if having money is a moral right, and the competitive bidding for private property (and putting that property to its most efficient economic use) are moral goods.

As complicated and troubling as the rhetoric is that accompanies gentrification, there are also many significant material problems for those whose neighborhoods are being gentrified. This chapter analyzes two different literary representations of the economic conditions and displacement created by urban gentrification. Both of these novels make visible the brunt of displacement gentrification generates is borne by people of color. Both of these novels suggest a narrative that people of color, despite trying to participate in local gentrification economies are still always brought into conflict with neoliberal norms by having to find extra-legal means to supplement their legitimate income. These books trade in on bell hooks' notion of racial representation being reinforced by mass media imagery. She notes that images can have "ideological intent," and asks, "what can the future hold if our present entertainment is the spectacle of contemporary colonization, dehumanization, and disempowerment where the image serves as a murder weapon?" (7). Ernesto Quiñonez and Mat Johnson deflect what appears to be a choice to commit crimes as the inevitable result of having to participate in the American neoliberal economy. Neither character, has the agency, the means, or the

wherewithal to participate in what amounts, for them, to a rigged white patriarchal neoliberal economy. This chapter also argues that the displacement caused by gentrification is in fact a technology for moving people around where they will best benefit the neoliberal capitalist process of urban renewal. Because the displacement is forced, either by rising rent prices, or otherwise, I contend this represents an erasure of both the culture of the neighborhood and the stories of the residents. Both Quiñonez' *Chango's Fire* and Hunter's *Hunting in Harlem* provide the reader a narrative of gentrification that challenges both the long-standing cultural and ideological narratives which suggest that gentrification is a moral and economic good, and that just because a neighborhood is devalorized it has no value. Although, as will be discussed, these authors represent the populations of neighborhoods differently, both books represent gentrification as exploitive of devalorized neighborhoods, and the people as having no choice but to participate in their neighborhood economies.

### ***Chango's Fire and the Exploitation of Labor in a Changing Neighborhood***

A key observation in Jodi Melamed's keyword essay "Racial Capitalism" is that we have to "recognize that contemporary racial capitalism deploys liberal and multicultural terms of inclusion to value and devalue forms of humanity differentially to fit the needs of reigning state capital orders" (77). If we couple that with David Harvey's and Neil Smith's assertion that "contemporary geography is not simply a *by-product* of the structure of capitalism but an integral component of capitalist development, a further question then presents itself: How has the use and organization of space fostered the development and even the survival of the capitalist mode of production?" (Harvey and Smith 104), then we can understand that the racialization of space in urban centers is also

an integrally tied to capitalism. Thus, who can live in an urban neighborhood is intimately tied to the life chances that determine at what level they can successfully participate in American capitalism. Julio, the protagonist of *Chango's Fire* is one example of how life chances are tied to the ability to live where one wants.

We learn very early in the novel (page 5) that Julio owns an apartment that he describes as an “old, battered, three-story walk up. Julio describes his pride in both his ownership, and the fact that he is trying to slowly make renovations to his apartment.

Quinonez writes in the first person, giving voice to Julio himself:

I've been upgrading my floor slowly, because it's so goddamn expensive. But I'm happy there. At times and for no reason, I go outside and cross the street and stare at my building. I smile. See the third floor? I own it, I tell myself. I see the windows a little crooked, not exactly fitting their frames. Got to fix that. I smile...I tell myself, I've come a long way from the clubhouse I built as a little kid. I had gathered refrigerator boxes, painted them, cut open windows, and placed my clubhouse on a vacant lot full of rats, charred bricks and thrown-out diapers. I called it the Brown House, home to the president of Spanish Harlem” (5-6).

This passage is important, because it provides the background that Julio has lived in Spanish Harlem all his life, setting up the idea that he is invested in, and part of, the history and culture of the neighborhood; it is also important because the reader is beginning to understand that the building that houses Julio's apartment is the central symbolic setting in the entire novel. Not only does it serve to house Julio, his parents, and all their history in Spanish Harlem, it also serves as the central site of Spanish Harlem's gentrification because of the white woman, Helen, who bought and lives on the second floor. Furthermore, the building is also the site of Maritza's (another life-long Spanish Harlem resident) church which serves as the central site of community organizing. But as central as this space is, and in spite of all the conflicts which occur

there, it is important to note that Julio's claim to ownership of the third-floor apartment is in fact not legally accurate. Julio's apartment is legally owned by Papelito, a local botanica owner and Orishna priest, who bought the property at Julio's request because Julio makes most of his money illegally (something which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter).

Julio is portrayed as the native who knows the neighborhood, who can navigate, albeit extra-legally, the vagaries of capitalism in order to stay where he believes he belongs. But, the fact is, Julio cannot afford even a modest apartment in dilapidated condition in the neighborhood he has lived in for decades while working a full-time hazardous job. The first time the reader is introduced to Julio's job we learn the following: "Just a minute ago I was stripping the roof of a five-story walk-up groomed for renovation. It's one of the five tenements lined up on 108<sup>th</sup> and First Avenue. They're beautiful buildings, one of the many were set afire years ago and are finally being renovated" (26). Julio is literally at gentrification ground zero, working on a demolition crew to prepare buildings for new so called "up-scale" residents.

Julio's particular labor exploitation is not the worst example of labor exploitation at this particular jobsite. The rest of the labor force on this project is made up of undocumented immigrants who also work on the demolition crew, who are subject to a more insidious form of exploitation than simply low wages for difficult and dangerous work. After Julio collects his paycheck, the foreman gives each of the undocumented workers the paychecks with names other than theirs on them, at which point their exploitation becomes clear. Quiñonez writes:

Just then the real owners of those names start trickling in. They drive their cars by the construction site. Out-of-towners entering Spanish Harlem, nothing new

these days. Some stay in their cars, and some park. The Mexican workers hand their checks over to the owners of the names, the owners of those social security numbers. And the owners of the names hand the Mexicans cash.

It's all profit really. These union jobs pay sixteen dollars an hour, the Mexican is given five, the owner of the name takes eleven. The undocumented worker is making more money than he ever imagined..." (28).

Quiñonez is providing the reader a powerful example of how capitalism and race are intertwined, and therefore, how this sort of labor exploitation is not an aberration but instead manifests itself as a normal and necessary aspect of how capitalism is racialized. In his book *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa After 1994*, sociologist Andy Clarno discusses the fact that Palestinian job opportunities are often limited to settlement construction despite the fact that this process serves to further dispossess them from traditional property claims. He goes further writing that "in much of the world, including South Africa and Palestine/Israel, neoliberal restructuring has intensified both exploitation and abandonment by producing surplus populations that exist at the margins of the capitalist economy where widespread structural unemployment exacerbates the exploitation of the precariously employed" (10). In a similar way, in *Chango's Fire*, we see a representation of undocumented workers whose job is to demolish the only property they can afford to live in (although many of them are, in fact, squatting to save money). Both their status as undocumented and their poverty mark them as a marginalized population, while the fact that they are represented as being only able to obtain jobs that both radically exploit their labor and works to dispossess them of places to live attest to the fact that they are the precariously employed. When coupled with the fact that the "owners of the names" (portrayed by Quiñonez as white men of means) collect more than two-thirds of the hourly wage while performing no work, one can see the life and job opportunities are racial, despite the neoliberal ideology which

codes itself as equal opportunity for all. Clarno partly defines neoliberal capitalism by quoting Saskia Sassen who writes that it operates by a “logic of expulsion, that increasingly dispossesses people of jobs, homes, lands, and welfare benefits” (10). Julio’s deconstruction crew is a representative example of how work does not provide freedom of choice where to live, but rather a form of entrapment in the absence of choice.

Julio is in a very different position than the undocumented laborers he works with on a daily basis. Because he owns an apartment in Spanish Harlem, because he has decades of history having grown up in Spanish Harlem, and because the building he lives in is the central symbol of the novel, it is to the building, the people and organizations that coexist there, and their respective geography within the building we turn to look at how Julio reconciles the fact that he not only wants to culturally save Spanish Harlem, but simultaneously works in the gentrification economy which is fundamentally changing it.

### ***Julio’s Building: A Microcosm of Gentrification***

Julio’s building is a three-story walk-up brownstone. He lives on the top floor with his parents, the middle floor is owned by a white gentrifier from Wisconsin, named Helen, and the bottom floor is owned by Julio’s friend Maritza who operates a community church as well as lives there. Their placement within the building is significant when considering the novel’s theme of gentrification and how it can change a neighborhood and serve to displace both cultural histories and people. Because Julio is the main character of the novel, and because the novel is delivered in the first person, situating Julio atop the building serves to put Julio in both position of cultural authority and still one of who maintains a certain amount of privilege. He is the native who is

looking to preserve his place, status, and cultural attachment to the neighborhood. Julio's parents live with him as well. They represent a deep connection, not just to the Puerto Rican population of Spanish Harlem, but to the island of Puerto Rico as well. Julio's parents are heavily invested in the Pentecostal church, his father was a famous salsa musician who lent his talents to the church after finding God. The reader is meant to understand that Julio is navigating several types of entrapment at once. He has enough ambition to work full-time, attend night school, and own the apartment, but he can only do so by supplementing his income by committing arson for a local gangster. He becomes romantically involved with Helen who, in Quiñonez' formulation is portrayed as working to erase the cultural history of his neighborhood by opening an art gallery that privileges art not native to Spanish Harlem (although in true multi-cultural blindness, she sees herself adding to Spanish Harlem culture, or at least a neutral influence), but his best friend Maritza is a community organizer. Julio, on the top floor, must literally walk through the effects of gentrification every time he leaves his house.

Helen is the pioneer gentrifier, and also the multi-culturalist gentrifier who feels as if she is making a positive contribution to the neighborhood rather than replacing a history of culture with a new bourgeoisie neoliberal culture. Helen is from the fictional Howard, Wisconsin, a city which "boasts the world's largest ball of twine." (49,) which is meant to imbue her with a sense of rural innocence, but she graduated from Cornell which further positions her as privileged, and because she is opening an art gallery in Spanish Harlem the reader is meant to understand that her position both as a white gentrifier and as someone who is introducing a new well financed culture to a neighborhood with a long cultural history. Helen names her art gallery SPA HA

GALLERY; Abbreviating Spanish Harlem in this way calls back to a process popular, according to Lees, Slater, and Wyly, in the “1970s through the 1990s” of renaming neighborhoods in order to make them sound as if they were “the latest, hippest edges of the frontier.” They write:

Among the most memorable (if annoying) labels that appeared were Mea-Pa, the Meatpacking District, with NoMeat just to the north; Rambo, Right Across the Manhattan Bridge Overpass (next to Dumbo, Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass, so know thanks to years of promotion by a single powerful developer); SoHa, South Harlem; and perhaps most remarkably SoBro, the South Bronx urban disaster memory of arson fires in the 1970s now celebrated on the front page of the *New York Times* as follows: ‘hundreds of artists, hipsters, Web designers, photographers, doctors and journalists have been seduced by the mix of industrial lofts and nineteenth-century rowhouses’” (39).

English Professor Sean Moiles writes of the SPA HA gallery commenting that “the fact that Helen owns a gallery relates significantly to the context of gentrification because art (along with tourism) has the potential to bring needed money and employment to Spanish Harlem. Nonetheless, art and tourism can also taint the public’s perception of Puerto Rican history (118). Moiles is right, that introducing art not endemic to the history of Spanish Harlem and associating it directly with the neighborhood by name is perpetrating a false idea of what Spanish Harlem is and was, and therefore Puerto Rican history. But, interestingly, Moiles does not focus on SPA HA as a diminutive moniker, one that deprives people of the agency of naming they place they live, of claiming ownership of it by naming it after themselves. SPA HA is not just a cute name meant to attract hipsters, it begins a process of defining who can live in a place and who cannot.

Helen is already convinced that she belongs in Spanish Harlem, that she has a right to be there, and that those people who have history there do not. Early in the novel, she arrives home just before Julio, and refuses to let him into his own building unless he

can prove he lives there. He's lived in Spanish Harlem all his life, owned his apartment longer than she has, but she is now the gatekeeper to his house. But the way she makes him prove his right to enter his own building is condescending in a way that betrays a sense of white privilege; the exchange is as follows, beginning with Helen:

“I don't want to let anyone I don't know in the building.”

I want to turn street on her and just rip her to pieces. Listen white bitch, I don't have to prove I live here. I lived in this neighborhood years back, when this very block was burned and broken. So move out of the way and go back to that town in Middle America where you came from.

I would love to say that.

Instead I take a deep breath.

“It's past midnight,” I sigh. “I don't want to wake my parents up.”

Why am I being polite when, unlike her, I have history here?

“I've just never seen you before. These aren't rentals” (15).

What is clear by this exchange is that Helen already considers it unlikely that anyone appearing to be Latin could afford to own property in Spanish Harlem. Although she is a pioneer gentrifier who just arrived, she assumes that the gentrification process has already raised property values so high that all Latin people living there must either be renters or already be displaced and therefore do not belong there, and furthermore, it appears that she thinks of them as criminals wanting to either rob her or break into her apartment.

But Helen is also more than an agent of white capitalist cultural change. She is also Helen of Troy, the “*blanquita*” who is admired by Julio's parents because of her white skin and blond hair. Like Helen of Troy she symbolizes the outside cultural element that creates the crisis. She literally lives between Julio's ambition to own a home and be part of gentrifying crowd, and the community that he desperately appreciates which exists in the form of Maritza, the community organizing social activist that runs the church on the first floor. Julio does in fact fall in love with Helen, and much of the

novel is centered around that relationship. Helen never explicitly admits to being a cultural version of a settler colonist, but she does conflate her the experience her parents had moving to a small town in Wisconsin, in order to suggest that everyone has a right to live anywhere. Julio describes the history of Spanish Harlem to her in an attempt to draw a distinction between fighting for a neighborhood (which is how he describes Puerto Rican immigrants) and appropriating one (which is what Helen is doing). Julio says to her:

Look, when we arrived in Spanish Harlem the Italians beat the shit out of us. But we hit back, we claimed it. If you are going to now live here you will have to bleed sometimes. I mean not bleed but be hurt, just like today, don't let those women fuck with you is what I'm saying. You make allies and you hit back...you learn when to hit verbally; humor is good. Making someone feel stupid. You can also claim it by not going to Starbucks or Old Navy but the Latino stores too—" I stop, because she stares at me like I has said things that shouldn't be said...I feel that Helen hasn't yet put her time in Spanish Harlem to talk to me about right or wrong. She didn't' have to sell a piece of her soul to buy anything... (51-52).

But Helen is immediately dismissive of the idea that having to fight for anything is right and proper. She still feels entitled to live in Spanish Harlem by dint of her superior economic standing. She says, "You are so small...you believe two wrongs make a right" (52). And rather than consider his point, she doubles down on hers in a letter to Julio that "I don't plan on changing anything in Spanish Harlem, but like my parents I will be myself" (69). She seems not to understand that her art gallery, the confrontations she has with long-time residents of Spanish Harlem in which she imputes that they are misbehaving because they do not respect her, and the very fact that she owns property (and therefore is ubiquitously present) have already changed Spanish Harlem. But Spanish Harlem is not all she is changing, Julio himself, after they consummate their

relationship, he thinks to himself “Helen is supposed to be a spy in my country. What should I do? Because it’s not only Spanish Harlem that’s being gentrified” (106).

If Helen is the cultural interloper who separates Julio from the street in many ways, Maritza, who runs a church out of the first floor of Julio’s building is the symbolic representation of the street. She challenges the patriarchy, but does so in a way that validates and celebrates Puerto Rican culture. Her church, “The First People’s Church of God in Spanish Harlem,” is indicative of the fact that not only is this church for Natives of Spanish Harlem, but that it, in fact, really operates more as a community outreach program rather than a church per se. Of the three tenants in the building, Maritza is literally on the ground floor, interacting and working to serve the most marginalized people inside an already marginalized population. Maritza’s mission is to help women, especially undocumented women who have been sexually abused. She does this in three ways...1. Maritza provides educational pamphlets about sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, and condoms, operating as sort of non-medical planned parenthood, 2. By acting as a sort of community police force in service to women, and 3. By providing stolen naturalization forms to undocumented women most in need of citizenship. English Professor Sean Moiles suggests that her “socialist racket” deceives the people she claims to save from patriarchal and capitalist exploitation” (125), but she is in fact fighting both the patriarchy, capitalism, and a sort of neighborhood imperialism in the most effective way she knows how.

In one particularly moving scene, Maritza leads a group of women to publicly humiliate and shame an undocumented man who serially raped his daughter infecting her with the AIDS virus. In the absence of police protection:

The women chase him, swatting him with their brooms and mops. He stumbles down and gets back up, tries to run again, but stops and finally faces the women. He is panting and could kill the women by hate alone. His eyes are huge, and both parties stare each other down as if it is a game of chicken... The man's hands are fists and his teeth are clenched, but he stands there panting and hating. The reason the man does not charge at the women is not because he is outnumbered or too tired, but because several men have witnessed this public display of humiliation and have started to ridicule him as well... Making fun of the man who knows that if he hits any of these women, the men would no longer ridicule him but join in the beating, and the men don't have brooms or mops but fists" (168).

Maritza's "police action," while it does not lead to an arrest or criminalization for the rapist, does serve the purpose of forever ostracizing him from the long-time residents of Spanish Harlem. Maritza and the women deprive him of his standing and dignity, and when the man begins to pray outside the barber shop, the barbers deprive him of that right to, throwing water on him and excommunicating him from the social fabric of Spanish Harlem symbolized by the barber shop. Significantly, after this episode, Maritza gives the victim of the sexual abuse, the daughter who has been infected with "the big disease with the little name" (169), one of the naturalization certificates. Maritza knows that this girl will need health care unavailable to her because of her undocumented status and can only seek treatment by extra-legal means.

Thus, the building shared by these two long-time residents of Spanish Harlem, and the newcomer, is the crucible in which Helen understands her impact on the neighborhood, Julio comes to understand his role in both how he is contributing the gentrification of Spanish Harlem and his increasing separation from the "ground floor," and the readership of the novel come to understand that Maritza, even though she operates "underground" is the only person able to help those who live on the street. But as much value as this building has while standing, as much as we can learn from the

interactions of its residents, we are perhaps to learn something even more when it is destroyed.

***Arson, Planned Shrinkage, and Julio's Side Job***

*Chango's Fire* opens with a quote from the infamous New York city bureaucrat and Master-Builder Robert Moses. It reads: "You must concede that this Bronx slum and others in Brooklyn and Manhattan are unrepairable. They are beyond rebuilding, tinkering and restoring. They must be leveled to the ground (Quiñonez epigraph). This is a particularly damning quotation given the arc of Robert Moses nearly five-decade long career given that he was not only as New York City's master builder, but he also "held several appointive offices and once occupied 12 positions simultaneously, including that of New York City Parks Commissioner, head of the State Parks Council, head of the State Power Commission and chairman of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (Sarachan). According to journalist Robert A. Caro in order:

"to build his highways, Moses threw out of their homes 250,000 persons—more people than lived in Albany or Chattanooga, or in Spokane, Tacoma, Duluth, Akron, Baton Rouge, Mobile, Nashville or Sacramento. He tore the hearts out of a score of neighborhoods...for his other projects—Lincoln Center, the United Nations, the Fordham, Pratt and Long Island University campuses, a dozen mammoth renewal projects—he dispossessed tens of thousands more; there are no accurate figures on the total number of people evicted from their homes for all Robert Moses public works, but the figure is almost certainly close to half a million; the one detailed study by an outside agency shows that in a ten-year period, 1946-1956, the number was 320,000. More significant even than the number of the dispossessed were their characteristics: a disproportionate share of them were black, Puerto Rican—and poor" (19-20).

All of this dispossession was in service to building New York City in a capitalist empire, and Andy Clarno reminds us that "Dispossessing people of their land and resources is not merely a precursor to capitalism but rather a constant, normal strategy of capital

accumulation from the English commons and the conquest of the Americas to the Iraqi oil fields and the privatization of public goods” (9). Quiñonez begins the novel with the Moses quote not just because of his legacy of dispossession, but also because the urban dispossession model in America, perfected by Robert Moses continues to generate an urban capitalist upswing at the expense of the poor.

But by the time Robert Moses passed away in 1974, the suburban movement was in full swing, and as discussed in both Chapters Two and Three, the perception of many urban neighborhoods in New York City were ones of crisis which included crime, drugs, gang activity, and poverty. Given the white and capital flight from the city, a new model of urban planning called “planned shrinkage” was developed. Planned shrinkage, according to journalist Roberta Brandes Gratz, “meant that in a city that was shrinking in terms of people and resources—as was generally the case then throughout the Northeast and Midwest—the shrinkage could be guided or planned. City resources should be carefully allocated to reflect the reality of the shrinking city” (175). Gratz attributes this urban planning philosophy to Robert Starr, who she credits with providing “the intellectual justification for minimal public investment in existing stock of older neighborhoods—whether in New York or elsewhere—and the planning rationale for maximum public investment in large-scale new construction projects” (176). Gratz continues by how Starr describes the possible benefits of abandoning old neighborhoods, providing federal tax subsidies for taking properties for tax delinquencies, and shifting public investment to newer areas. It is important however to look at how Starr planned to deal with the fully abandoned neighborhoods. Gratz quotes his writing: “The stretches of empty blocks may then be knocked down, services can be stopped, subway stations

closed, and the land left fallow until a change in the economic and demographic assumptions make the land useful once again” (176).

It is breathtaking to hear someone talk of dispossession so openly as a positive thing, but perhaps we should not be surprised given that Robert Starr is following Robert Moses as a city planner for New York City. And there are problems with the more positive aspects of his plan. His plan for federal subsidies largely did not reach minority populations, and landlords in New York City were not about to lose all their income and then let the land (and their profits) go fallow. Instead, New York City experienced an unheard of spate of arson, so that insurance money on the buildings could be collected. According to Historian Jill Jonnes, “during 1970 Engine Company 83 made 6,204 runs to 4,246 fires, or eleven fires a day,” and she quotes a memo from deputy fire chief Charles F. Kirby that reads in part: “Between 1964 and 1968 while structural fires in the city rose 42% the Bronx increased 70 percent” (233). Journalist Joe Flood provides an even more damning assessment of the proliferation of arson, and the reason for it. He writes:

In 1970, Bronx County census tract 2, in a neighborhood called Soundview, held 836 residential and commercial buildings. By 1980, there were nine left. Statistically, it wasn't even the most devastated area in the borough—that was tract 173, home to the schoolhouse left to burn during the World Series. Seven different census tracts in the borough lost more than 97 percent of their buildings to fire and abandonment; 44 tracts (out of 289 in the borough) lost more than 50 percent...And it wasn't just the Bronx. While there collapse wasn't quite as spectacular or nearly as famous, the same thing was happening in Harlem and the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and Brooklyn's Bushwick, Brownsville, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and East New York neighborhoods...The pat explanation for the scope of the fires is arson-for-profit...Fire marshals and police investigators uncovered enormous landlord arson rings that set fire to thousands of buildings and collected tens of millions of dollars in insurance. Arson graft went right up the political and economic food chain, from kids who were paid twenty dollars to spread gas and light the match to landlords, real estate title companies, insurance agents, federal urban renewal bureaucrats, even high-ranking politicians” (14-17).

The main character of *Chango's Fire*, Julio, was just such a kid, and even as an adult he participates in an insurance scam by setting fires to buildings for a local mob boss. His side job as an arsonist is the only way it was possible for him to be able to afford his home, and although he is trying to leave that part of his life behind him, he finds himself trapped by the criminal relationship he has forged.

It may seem ironic that Julio is an arsonist, because fire has been so much a part of his life. At one point in the novel is his sadly reminiscing on his childhood, and he reflects that “when I [he] was a kid, the fires were so common. A way of life even” (158). He notes that in the media the narrative was that they “were being punished for being junkies, thieves, whores and murderers,” but he also knows that “the truth was, it was a guy like me [him] who set those fires. As much like he who had been paid by a local city politician or a slumlord. Each and every one of them a poverty czar” (11-12). He has experience with displacement due to arson in the ultimate service of gentrification. He thinks to himself that: “Sometimes the date of when the landlord would set his building on fire did leak. The date of the fire had been thoughtfully been sent around, so people could escape...Kids would come up to the teacher and say, ‘I can’t be here for the test on Tuesday because that’s when the fire is.’...But us kids know that kid would not be back to the same school. I lost so many friends from relocation” (158). So as ironic as it may seem that he would find work in a field that has caused him so much pain, it is important to note that Julio burns down expensive homes, homes in which the owners are generally upside-down with relationship to their mortgage. But nevertheless, it set the stage for the destruction of his own home and the homes of Maritza and Helen, because when he runs afoul of the gangster he works for, he is

ordered to burn down the building and turn over his insurance money as recompense. Julio, thus is implicated in the destruction of his own neighborhood and his own eventual displacement, in a sort of victim blaming logic that precludes his choice, but nevertheless appears to accuse him of being at fault.

And, although this is the supreme irony of the book, the novel is at pains to make clear that this form of destruction only hurts the poor and the people who have long lived in the neighborhood. And Quiñonez redeems Julio's character in the eyes of the reader by having him act as ethically as possible given his lack of agency inside this economic system. Julio plans to burn the building down; he plans to, like the landlords he remembers, make sure the building is empty, but the gangster loses patience and hires someone else to burn the building down before Julio has a chance to make sure the coast is clear. The results are devastating for Julio, who, because he owned the property illegally didn't carry insurance, and considerably less so for Helen, who is able to bounce back almost immediately. Quiñonez writing in the first person as Julio describes the aftermath of the fire this way:

My father has disability, and so, we're back in the projects. The deed was in Papelito's name, and now that he is no more, I have no records, no proof that the place had ever been mine. It didn't take that long, less than a year, for something else to be built at the site where we used to live. One day I was walking by that street. I saw these white guys walk out of the new building that used to be my home. I stopped and looked up at the windows. There was this anger that someone else was occupying my space. And later, when a Starbuck's opened right in the space where the People's Church used to meet, I avoided the block altogether

Helen now lives in a brownstone on 120<sup>th</sup> and First (261).

And, Maritza, after spraying the remainder of the naturalization papers from a rooftop, disappears, moving completely underground, and so a powerful voice for community organization is lost forever. What is at stake here, of course, is that the only person who

is able to completely pick up the pieces is Helen. The fire surely inconvenienced her, although that is not dealt with in the novel, but she simply buys a new property, and moves on with her life. She is free to associate with who she wants, continue to run her business, and “every time she sees me [Julio] she crosses the street before I [he] can get near her” (261), meaning, of course, that she now views Julio as she did at the beginning of the novel when she would not let him into his own building. And while Helen is able to pick up the pieces, the long-time residents (Julio, Papelito, and Maritza) of Spanish Harlem are permanently displaced as a result of the same process that displaced so many poor New York residents in the 1970’s.

But despite the fire and the displacement, Julio remains optimistic, and that is part of what makes his character so likable even in light of all the mistakes he makes throughout the narrative. He thinks to himself that he got “knocked back down a few notches. I’ve been in the projects before and I got out. And I’ll get out again. This time I’ll do it right. This time I’ll do it for good” (273). There is also hope for Maritza, as Julio hears rumors of her “in Latin America...In Mexico they mention her name along with some saints...Some say that they have seen her in the Amazons. That she ate a mushroom and became enlightened...” (262). For Julio, there is hope in family, and religion; there is rebirth because he escaped his life as an arsonist; and he believes that Maritza is alive, and her mythological influence inspires him. The audience too feels hopeful here, and while the audience feels Papelito’s death as an avoidable tragedy, the examples of Maritza and Julio seems to suggest that death is not the automatic result of displacement. Quiñonez writes Julio’s character as a criminal who defies the criminal stereotype so often applied to inner-city residents. He is trapped by a criminal career,

looking to escape at every turn, and in that way, the audience comes to feel his displacement is the real tragedy, that he is the victim, not the deviant. That is not the case in Mat Johnson's *Hunting in Harlem*, a novel in which all of the protagonists, like Julio, are criminals, where the displacement caused by gentrification is literally a death sentence, and in which the optimism of a new and "better" Harlem is promised by a realty company whose corporate mission is grounded in a serious perversion of the writing and philosophy of one America's great Black leaders, W.E.B. Du Bois.

***Hunting in Harlem: Displacement, Death, Du Bois, and the Terrible Tenth***

When W.E.B. Du Bois wrote "The Talented Tenth" in 1903, he was partly responding, seemingly as always, to Booker T. Washington's suggestion that industrial education, essentially vocational and agricultural training hopefully leading to good paying jobs and possibly entrepreneurship. W.E.B. Du Bois, however, believed that professional jobs engendered by a liberal arts training was a better pathway toward equality, and that industrial education only allowed for black people to make money. Du Bois wrote that "if we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not, in nature, men" (842). He goes on to describe manhood as the proper work of schools, and defines it as "intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it" (843). Specifically, then, the essay calls for the most talented tenth of black men to be trained by liberal arts colleges and become teachers in a sort of grass roots effort to uplift all black people. It is a noble vision, (albeit someone chauvinistic by today's standards).

In Mat Johnson's 2003 novel, *Hunting in Harlem*, Harlem is experiencing an intense period of gentrification. The major player in the gentrification process is Horizon Realty, a company run by a popular former black (all of the characters in this novel are black characters) congressman from Harlem, Cyrus Marks. Horizon Realty is named so because it looks to the supposed bright future of Harlem. Horizon Realty's second in command Lester Baines describes the supposedly altruistic mission of the company to protagonist Cedric Snowden this way: "Mr. Snowden, listen to me. This isn't about cashing in on a boom market, it's about making something. Horizon does welfare-to-work training, provides schooling for local children. In Harlem, the congressman spreads love like it was peanut butter. Horizon is his dream" (5). And the congressman himself describes his plan and love for Harlem:

Harlem is more than a place, it's a symbol. It's our Mecca, it is our Jerusalem, the historic cradle of our culture, the ark of our covenant as Africans in this Western world. It must be protected, by any means necessary... This is our last chance. If we don't get this place together, attract our own people to come back and make it vital once more history will repeat itself. Gentlemen, we at Horizon Realty are not going to stand by and let them push us out this time. So it stops here! (15).

Cyrus Marks and Horizon Realty are attempting to occupy an interesting liminal space in the gentrification process. While acknowledging that Harlem needs infrastructure development, and an infusion of educated, artisans, businesspeople, and "good, influential" people with a view to living in and developing a neighborhood, they are also interestingly very interested in keeping Harlem segregated, claiming that Harlem should be reserved for black people, at any cost, which is why the Congressman references Malcolm X with "by any means necessary." Snowden describes what he sees as the

difference between gentrification and what Horizon is trying to accomplish to his sometimes girlfriend, and local reporter Piper Goines:

That's what Horizon is doing, trying to create another era of thriving black Harlem. Things been rough since the black middle class ran off to integration and took the money with them, right? So we're trying to bring them all back.

So how is that good? Piper asked. Helping the fortunate take Harlem away from the poor people who've been living here all this time?

No, that's not it, that's not what I'm saying. What Horizon has planned is better than that. They don't want to displace everybody, they just want to bring enough people back here to make the place healthy again. People to spend money, create some vibrant retail life like back in the day, create jobs. Straight up, also to have some folks as role models walking around, to show that you can do it...It's not gentrification when it's black folks moving back into the black community. It's...it's housekeeping. (85-86).

But as idealistic as this sounds, Horizon Realty is in fact operating under a gross perversion of W.E.B Du Bois' "Talented Tenth" thesis, working, despite their claims to the opposite, to displace many people who they feel are unworthy of living in Harlem, people whom they feel are cultural, economic, and social drags on the public perception of black people. In this way, Horizon Realty is succumbing to the long-standing narrative, beginning in the 1960s, and discussed in depth in both Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation, that Harlem, and other inner-city neighborhoods in New York (and other major cities) are dangerous, peopled with criminals, and therefore undesirable.

But unlike Julio, from *Chango's Fire*, who was displaced to the projects and lived to see his apartment rebuilt and occupied by others, Horizon Realty's lower-class targets are murdered in order to permanently displace them and eliminate their "troublesome" perception of black people, so Horizon Realty can remodel and therefore resell the apartments, literally changing the face of Harlem. Lester, (the second in charge of Horizon Realty), describes the people targeted for murder this way.

You take almost any block in Harlem, almost any apartment building, and out of every hundred people, ninety are basically decent, hardworking folk just trying to take care of their own. But that ten, the drug dealers, the thugs, thieves, and rapists, those that abuse their children directly and through neglect, the ones who have no respect for others, civilization, society, all of these parasites set the tone that everybody else has to live by. ‘The Terrible Tenth’ I like to call them, that keeps everybody down (43).

It is apparently true that Horizon Realty is targeting mostly what would be considered criminals of varying degrees of seriousness. For every child abuser killed in the book, they also kill a pick-pocket or a womanizer, and it should go without saying, that while crime is bad, only Horizon Realty is guilty of a capital crime, in their effort to spur a new black renaissance in Harlem.

The central ethical problem with the way Horizon Realty proposes to serve Harlem’s future, is akin to colonial pioneering mythology. Settler colonialism ideology suggested that land could be put to a better, more efficient, and therefore a more positive moral and ethical use, all the while cruelly displacing native people. Mat Johnson in *Hunting in Harlem* is making visible the neoliberal structure that presents gentrification as a moral and ethical good for, in this case, Harlem, but doing so in an effort to call to attention the lower-class victims of that capitalist process. Whereas Cyrus Marks and Lester are career criminals leveraging their knowledge and power to succeed in their version of neoliberal American capitalism, Snowden and Bobby are presented as having no choice but to participate in the Horizon Realty criminal empire. But Johnson goes a step further than just criticizing a particular capitalist process, and instead places the only likeable character in the book, local reporter Piper Goines, in stark opposition to the very idea of the existence of a black petty bourgeois that participates in the conspicuous

consumerism and appears, at least in the case of Horizon Realty, to value class concerns rather than racial ones.

***Piper Goines and the Problem of the Black Petty Bourgeois***

There is some long-standing historical debate regarding whether or not American capitalism is a system capable of uplifting the black community, and whether or not the success of the black petty bourgeois is sustainable or even necessarily a positive occurrence. Historian and African-American Studies professor Manning Marable describes some of the early public advocates of Black Capitalism:

Capitalism has always had proponents in the Black community...Abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass, a strong integrationist, for example, encouraged newly emancipated Blacks to accumulate capital and to invest in their own enterprises. Racial accommodationist Booker T. Washington and Black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey developed detailed programs separately to coordinate small Black entrepreneurs (139).

Marable describes their collective goals this way:

For these leaders and the majority of black political organization of the last 100 years Black Capitalism connotes several key concepts: the accumulation of capital by individual Black entrepreneurs; strategies designed to maintain Black control over the Black consumer market in the U.S.; collective programs to improve the economic condition of all Blacks within the overall framework of U.S. capitalism. Beneath this is a theory of development, rooted in the often unchallenged assumptions that U.S. capitalism is not structurally racist, and that the devastated condition of most Blacks throughout history could be alleviated through the acceleration of capital accumulation in the hands of a small number of Blacks (139).

Current analyses of the structure of U.S. capitalism, however, do challenge these assumptions.

Beginning with Cedric Robinson's 1983 seminal work *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, critics began to argue as Robinson argued that "the development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially

racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism” (2-3). Thus, if one subscribes to Robinson’s notion of Racial Capitalism, the idea that racism and capitalism developed in tandem and are now (and always have been) inseparable, capitalism is ill-equipped to address problems of inequality. But Robinson’s critique is not only about the structure of American capitalism but extends even to those Black people who find success within it. Historian Robin D.G. Kelley in a special edition of the *Boston Review* dedicated to Robinson reminds us that Robinson also argued “that the black petit bourgeoisie was disconnected from the political and cultural traditions that sustained them anti-colonial movements in the past (129). Kelley, Robinson and Marable appear to be in conversation here. Marable buttresses this argument, commenting that personal success stories “perpetuate the myth of black capitalism (151). He cites as examples, high ranking black political appointments by Nixon, and, of course the same could be said of every President since, including appointment of neoliberal apologist Dr. Ben Carson to direct the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. Even the election of President Barack Obama was deployed by conservatives to argue that America is essentially post-racial, and therefore the American Capitalist system is one where everyone, regardless of race, can succeed.

In *Hunting in Harlem* Mat Johnson engages with this debate in two important ways: 1. By placing Piper Goines, a local reporter and the only character not working to advance in what might be considered a capitalist way, accumulating and earning capital and property, but instead by having her do work for what she considers to be service to the community. And, 2. By piling multiple layers of criminal and ethical corruption on

the main capitalist enterprise of the novel, Horizon Realty, and by having them operate at odds with their supposed ideological claim that a Black and unified Harlem is good for everyone involved.

Piper Goines occupies a liminal space in terms of Harlem's gentrification. She moves into the third floor of his sister's and brother-in-law's brownstone in Harlem, because she accepted a job for a very meager wage as a local reporter at a very small local newspaper, the *New Holland Herald*. Her sister and brother-in-law are the pioneer gentrifiers, buying a beautiful refurbished brownstone from Horizon Realty in dangerous Harlem, and living as much as possible, according to Piper as the "materially driven intentional archetypes of the bourgeoisie" (75). Piper hates having to pass through their living space on the way to her apartment, because their "home was a museum of all the class accoutrements they'd collected in just seven years working as a tag team: rich woods, fabrics, and leathers placed on rugs so expensive that having them on the floor was indulgent insolence" (75). She, on the other hand, although not native to Harlem sees herself as a sort of organic intellectual, looking for social injustice to fight. Johnson describes her as someone who "got happiness doing, not buying, which worked out well because her job gave her a lot to do but hardly any money to buy anything" (77). Johnson intentionally puts her at odds with the capitalist impulse that drives gentrification, but still ties her closely enough to it to make her opposition to gentrification and her allegiance to social justice one of choice rather than the sum total of her life chances. Piper, in other words, has rejected the chance to be a successful gentrifier, graduating from Earlham college, and instead gone to work living with, and serving the community.

Piper is starkly opposed to the gentrification of Harlem, and refuses to agree with Horizon Realty's agent, and her off again-on again boyfriend Snowden, when he regurgitates the companies ideology of a new Harlem. Piper responds to Snowden's pitch of Horizon Realty's ideology in this way when she's starting to realize just who in Harlem is being permanently displaced after beginning the research for her story on the Harlem "accidental" deaths (and publishing preliminary reports on those accidents), and after Horizon Realty planted a story in the *New York Times* to scoop her and begin the narrative that the deaths were in fact "accidental and not murder." First she reads from the *Times* article:

Although much has been made in our local tabloid press about the high number of accidental deaths in the Historic Mount Morris section of Harlem, it must be taken into account that these figures apply entirely to lower-income residents of the area, the elderly, the drug-addicted, and others who are obviously at a much higher risk than the flourishing and unaffected high-income newcomers (150).

And Piper responds angrily to this, and more generally to Horizon Realty's purported mission: "The thing that kills me is the morally reprehensible tone this guy gets...It's like he's implying it's some bourgeois Manifest Destiny, like Harlem is just weeding itself to make room for the moneyed fucks to come steal it away for themselves. It's disgusting" (151). What is interesting about Piper here, aside from her anger and vulgarity that is, is the fact that her repudiation of the planted article employs a settler colonialism metaphor. Johnson is using Piper Goines, (perhaps unfairly according to Yang and Tucker) to draw a comparison between those displaced by settler colonialism, and those displaced by gentrification.

In some ways, Piper is an interesting combination of both Julio and Maritza from *Chango's Fire*. Her position on the third floor of the brownstone is reminiscent of Julio,

in that she has the bird's eye view of Harlem, and like Julio, she develops a relationship with the very person working to change her neighborhood. But her job as a local reporter and her willingness to place herself in harm's way to expose the fact that Horizon Realty is murdering low-income renters for profit makes her character function more like Maritza. But while Maritza was technically a criminal with good intentions, Piper is a representative of the fourth estate, and although Maritza escaped into myth (a permanent, but somehow optimistic displacement), Piper is murdered (permanently displaced) to protect the economic power of Horizon Realty which represents what Political Scientists Michael C. Dawson and Megan Ming Francis call the "neoliberal racial order."

Dawson and Francis describe a long-standing system of continuous white supremacy that adapts itself to contemporary political and economic conditions and contemporary ideology. Having passed through capitalism's birth and flourishing under chattel slavery, continuing under Jim Crow with racial oppression codified into law, we are now in an era, according to Dawson and Ming, where racial oppression obviously still exists, but where "talk of racism is viewed as irrelevant to a government that has long since formally removed Jim Crow restrictions and embraced minorities into its political and economic fabric"..., but "instead of a permanent destabilization of the infrastructure of Jim Crow, neoliberalism has facilitated a rebirth of two of its flagship elements: race based crime policies and economic exploitation" (Dawson and Francis 28, 34). What's at stake here, as with neoliberalism in general, is the normalization of "displacing the uneven life chances that are inescapably part of capitalist social relations onto fictions of differing human capacities, historically race" (Melamed 77).

Mat Johnson's *Hunting in Harlem* recognizes the idea of neoliberal racial order that oppresses the majority of Harlem, but the novel also represents that there is no viable alternative to participating in the neoliberal economic system. The novel makes visible a neoliberalism system that is so ubiquitous, so ingrained in the American capitalist system, and whose values are so universally accepted, that not to believe in it, in its goodness and superiority and not to participate invites alienation or death. The novel does this by representing the murderous, profit lusting, Harlem gentrification company, Horizon Realty, as able to trap the protagonist Cedric Snowden in its plot subverting his ethical code and convincing him to accept their version of neoliberalism. In other words, Cedric comes to believe that the oppression of the underclass is reasonable, even necessary, because just the fact of their being underclass means they have no value.

The method by which Horizon Realty disguises its plan for murdering the lower-class and remodeling Harlem at huge profit is by disguising their ideology as a neoliberal company. Horizon Realty projects a public face more akin to Keynesianism than Neoliberalism, and markets a brand of racial uplift which might have been sponsored by, interestingly enough, both Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. Horizon Realty runs a boarding school called the Horizon's Little Leaders League (55); the student body is "almost all" comprised of the orphans displaced by Horizon's murders. The ideology of the school is not just one of racial uplift, but also dedicated to train the students to be successful in America's neoliberal economy. Cyrus Marks, Horizon's President describes the school this way:

It really is an amazing program...Some of the best tutors in the city, museum trips weekly... We're even planning a language component, we'll have them fluent in French in two years...All their college tuition will be paid for. Horizon has done even better than I could have planned. I'm selling vacant shells right

now I bought at forty thousand for ten times that! If the housing boom continues just a bit longer, we'll even be able to set up graduate school funds as well...Not only are we breaking poverty's cycle of ignorance and violence, we are literally producing the next generation of leaders right here (119-120).

So, the Little Leaders program ostensibly operates in the as a practical application of W.E.B Du Bois' famous "The Talented Tenth" essay discussed earlier, but it is built upon a neoliberal foundation which blames the poor, drug addicted, unemployed, and elderly for their condition rather than understand that it is some way a systemic problem caused a heritage of unequal life opportunities derived under slavery and Jim Crow.

Another way Horizon Realty maintains a false public image is through their Second Chance program. This program, also Keynesian in appearance, offers job opportunities to ex-convicts. The four principle employees of Horizon Realty are all released prisoners convicted of murder in various degrees. The protagonist, Cedric Snowden, for example was convicted of manslaughter, while Horus Manley served time for various offenses including assault, manslaughter, attempted homicide, and racketeering. They came to Harlem, according to the first sentence of the novel, "looking to become something more" (1). They are ostensibly offered job training, and a chance at real economic success first as furniture movers and later, after a free class is provided, as real estate agents with the promise that one of them will win a refurbished Brownstone in Harlem. And, as an added bonus, the second chancers learn later, an opportunity to set up a Horizon Realty gentrification franchise in Washington D.C., Baltimore, or presumably another "run-down" and "crime-ridden" Black neighborhood in a major U.S. metropolis.

But like the false ideology of racial uplift marketed by Horizon Realty, the Second Chance program is also a purposeful deception. Very early in the novel, and very

early into his entry into the Second Chance program, Snowden is given a “special project...an opportunity to learn the business and earn some extra dough” (30).

Ostensibly, Snowden is to clean out the apartment of a recently deceased elderly man, in order that they may rent it out, but as he and his boss do the work, they discuss the problem of profit in a rent-controlled situation. Snowden asks if Horizon is “upping the rent”? And, Lester responds: “Rent stabilized. Even if we wanted to up the rent, we can only do it by the allotted citywide percentage for the year, understand. Even on new tenants, we can only raise it fifteen percent of the existing rent” (36). But after Horizon Realty cleans out the apartment, renovates it, perhaps combines it with the one next to it, they have a new property they can sell or rent at enormous profit. While on the surface, it seems that Snowden is being given an extra real-estate lesson, what he comes to realize later is that he is suddenly an accomplice in removing evidence from crime scenes, in which people were murdered so that property may be put its most profitable and efficient use.

If we extend the pioneer mythology to the displacement being made visible in *Hunting in Harlem*, Horizon Realty is acting in the place of United States government, dictating who has value, what is the best use of land, and not just who had the right to live there, but who has the right to live at all. Even if we were to take Cyrus Marks at his word, that Horizon Realty was enacting a perverted W.E.B Du Bois style program of racial uplift by removing the “Terrible Tenth,” it remains unavoidable that he is working to institute the neoliberal racial order described by Dawson and Francis at the expense of those whose life chances have left them in a position unable to participate in the very values he accuses them of rejecting. Thus, Horizon Realty represents not just the epitome

of capitalist corruption, but also the ultimate form of racial self-loathing for those unable to measure up to a white neoliberal set of values. And, that although they are ostensibly trying to reserve Harlem for Black people, they do so with the veneer of assimilation and success in a white capitalist context.

But, perhaps, the most sinister, and disappointing representation in the book, is that Johnson is suggesting there is no viable alternative than participating in American neoliberalism if you want to, not just succeed, but even live a peaceful existence. The trap is so complete, that Snowden even comes to espouse Horizon Realty's ideology sincerely. Snowden, feels real and true guilt for most of the novel after learning about his participation in the murders of Harlem's marginalized, and especially after being a part of his first murder. He wakes up from bad dreams with feelings of paranoia (149), he begins drinking heavily in an attempt to erase the memory (139), he looks for ways out of the Second Chance program, hoping to get fired, but he is in too deep, and Lester threatens to pin the murders on him (122, 141). But as he realizes there is no way to go but forward, he manages to convince himself that Horizon Realty is in reality doing a positive thing for Harlem. After Piper confronts him with the knowledge that Horizon Realty is conducting the murders he responds with a short speech that echoes Horizon's "Terrible Tenth" ideology perfectly. Snowden says:

Piper, be honest with yourself. You read their folders. These people were scum, they were parasites. I know it sounds harsh, but just be real for a second. Armed robbers, burglars, drug dealers, pedophiles, they were all people who specifically lived by creating misery for the rest of us. In lots of countries people are executed for living like that. Come on, if you read the files, then you really saw them. Imagine what this neighborhood would be like if all those animals were still around (262).

There are two interesting takeaways from this passage: 1. Snowden dehumanizes his victims in the same way that black people (and other groups) have been historically dehumanized thus justifying their treatment, and 2. He attempts to convince Piper to keep quiet, which is really the same as joining the Horizon program. He attempts to convert her, or coerce her participation, into the same corrupted racial uplift program he has apparently come to believe in. And, although Snowden does not actually shove Piper over the railing precipitating the fall that kills her, Horus does that, Snowden does work to cover it up, adding the death of someone not of the “Terrible Tenth” to his ledger.

Snowden is trapped, unable to extricate himself from crime, he has no choice but to embrace Horizon Realty’s dangerous ideological philosophy. The book ends with Snowden getting ready to begin a new Horizon Realty franchise. A newspaper article details Snowden’s capitalist ascension and his ideological conversion, and ends the novel this way:

In the wake of the announced retirement of flamboyant former congress Cyrus Marks, Horizon was continuing its tradition of high-profile front men with the appointment of Cedric Snowden Jr., a product of Horizon’s own Second Chance Program. A swashbuckling figure in his public relations photo, a rags to riches story, it had all the ingredients that *New Holland Herald* readers demanded. The man even answered questions in the form of sound bites. When asked what was the key to Horizon’s success, particularly in light of their planned expansion into Brooklyn, Newark, Pittsburgh’s Hill District, and Washington D.C., in the year to follow, Cedric Snowden smoothly replied, “When you believe in what you do, what you can do you won’t believe” (283).

Thus, Mat Johnson suggests that anyone who is ensnared by capitalism must forego both their ethical and intellectual beliefs in order to believe that capitalist success always justifies the means. Snowden is trapped; If he comes clean, admits to his and Horizon’s crimes, he will be imprisoned and erased, and if not, he is a successful criminal capitalist who has knowingly betrayed himself and what he knows to be right and wrong.

Julio's situation is slightly different, because Julio, in the end, did not choose to continue his criminal activity and is suffering the consequences of that choice, but he is still sees neoliberal capitalism as the pathway to success and happiness. He loses his job at the deconstruction site which was sponsored by his boss in the insurance scam. His brownstone (which he did not legally own, and therefore has no insurance on) is burned down, his mentor is dead, and he is relocated with his parents to the projects. He takes a job in a pizzeria for menial wages and continues night school. But where the reader sees Snowden as a traitor to what he knows is right, we see Julio as strangely optimistic, still striving for upward mobility, but this time in the "right" way. Julio is reminiscent of Lutie Johnson from Ann Petry's *The Street*, who early in novel believed she had a punchers chance to earn her way out of poverty. Julio thinks to himself on the final page of the novel: "So what? I got knocked back down a few notches. I've been in the projects before and I got out. And I'll get out again. This time, I'll do it right. This time, I'll do it for good" (273). What makes this optimism strange, is that there is no model in the novel for Julio to believe that this sort of strategy of participating in the neoliberal system will work for him; it almost appears to be a matter of faith, especially given Papelito's death and Maritza's exile. Julio cannot imagine any viable alternative to neoliberal capitalism, therefore, like Snowden, he must participate; like Snowden, he has no real choice in the matter.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, Michelle. "New Jim Crow, The Symposium: Mass Incarceration: Causes, Consequences, and Exit Strategies." *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law* 9.Fall 2011 (2011): 7-26. Web.
- Althusser, Louis. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Trans. G. M. Goshgarian. London, 2014. Print.
- Andrews, Larry R. "The Sensory Assault of the City in Ann Petry's *The Street*." *The Critical Response to Ann Petry*. Ed. Hazel Arnett Ervin. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2005. 195-210. Print.
- Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake: A Novel*. New York: Nan A. Talese, 2003. Print.
- Barker, Tom. *Police Ethics: Crisis in Law Enforcement*. Third. Springfield: Charles C Thomas, 2011. Print.
- Beaugard, Robert A. *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities*. Second. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Blakely, Edward J. and Mary Gail Snyder. *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 1997. Print.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *Bigger Thomas: Edited and with an Introduction by Harold Bloom*. New York: Chelsea House, 1990.
- Borstelmann, Thomas. *The 1970s: A New Global History From Civil Rights To Economic Inequality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. Print.
- Bowman, Rob. *Soulsville U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records*. New York: Schirmer Trade Books, 1997. Print.
- Browne, Jaron. "Rooted in Slavery: Prison Labor Exploitation." *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 14.1 (2007): 42-44. Web. 20 March 2017.
- Browne, Simone. "Everybody's Got A Little Light Under The Sun." *Cultural Studies* 264 (2012): 542-564. Print. 9 March 2016.
- Brown-Saracino, Japonica. *A Neighborhood That Never Changes: Gentrification, Social Preservation, and the Search for Authenticity*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009. Print.
- Bumpass, Larry and Charles F. Westoff. "Unwanted Births and U.S. Population Growth." *The American Population Debate*. Ed. Daniel Callahan. Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971. 267-274.

- Butler, Erika. "Former surgeon general to discuss heroin epidemic in Harford, nation." *The Baltimore Sun* 6 September 2017. Web. 7 September 2017. <<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/harford/aegis/ph-ag-facing-addiction-preview-0906-story.html>>.
- Butler, Octavia E. *Parable of the Sower*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993. Print.
- . *Parable of the Talents*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 1998. Print.
- Canavan, Gerry. *Octavia E. Butler*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016. Print.
- Cannato, Vincent J. *The Ungovernable City: John Lindsay and His Struggle to Save New York*. New York City: Basic Books, 2001. Print.
- Caro, Robert A. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Knopf, 1974. Print.
- Cashman, Sean Dennis. *America in the Twenties and Thirties: The Olympian Age of Franklin Delano Roosevelt*. New York: New York University Press, 1989.
- Clark, Charles H., M.D. "Prevention of Racial Deterioration and Degeneracy." *Politics and Population Control: A Documentary History*. Ed. Kathleen A. Tobin. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004. 36-37. Print.
- Clark, Keith. "A Distaff Dream Deferred? Ann Petry and the Art of Subversion." *The Critical Response to Ann Petry*. Ed. Hazel Arnett Ervin. Westport: Prager Publishers, 2005. 166-178. Print.
- Clarno, Andy. *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa after 1994*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Web.
- Crossman, Richard, ed. *The God That Failed*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1983. Print.
- Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. London: Verso, 1990. Print.
- . *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998. Print.
- Dawson, Michael C. and Megan Ming Francis. "Black Politics and the Neoliberal Racial Order." *Public Culture* 28.1 (2016): 23-62. Web. 7 February 2018.
- DeCoste, Damon Marcel. "'To Blot It All Out: The Politics of Realism in Richard Wright's 'Native Son''.'" *Style* 32.1 (1998): 127-147. Web.

- Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. "Images of the Outsider in American Law and Culture." *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*. Ed. Richard Delgado. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995. 217-227. Print.
- Drake, St. Claire and Horace R. Clayton. *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993. Print.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. and Nathan Higgins. *Writings*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1986. Print.
- Eby, Clare Virginia. "Beyond Protest: "The Street" as Humanitarian Narrative." *MELUS* 3.1 (2008): 33-53. Web. 1 August 2018.
- Ervin, Hazel Arnett. *Ann Petry: A Bio-Bibliography*. New York: G.K Hall & Co, 1993. Print.
- Escape From New York*. By John Carpenter and Nick Castle. Dir. John Carpenter. Perf. Kurt Russell. 1981. DVD.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1952. Print.
- Federal Bureau of Prisons*. 25 February 2017. Web. 21 March 2017.  
<[https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics\\_inmate\\_race.jsp](https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_inmate_race.jsp),  
[https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics\\_staff\\_ethnicity\\_race.jsp](https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_staff_ethnicity_race.jsp)>.
- "Federal Mandatory Minimums." 13 February 2013. *FAMM.org*. Web. 19 January 2017.  
<<file:///C:/Users/mookh/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/IE/8TLTSPE1/Chart-All-Fed-MMs-NW.pdf>>.
- Ferretti, Fred. *The Year the Big Apple Went Bust*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1976. Print.
- Fleetwood, Nicole R. *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011. Print.
- Flood, Joe. *The Fires: How a Computer Formula Burned Down New York City--and Determined the Future of American Cities*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2010. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. "Discipline and Punish." *Literary Theory: An Anthology Second Edition*. Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 549-566. Print.
- . *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, 1977. Print.
- . *Power: Volume Three*. Ed. James D. Faubion. New York City: The New Press, 2000.

- Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth and Eugene D. Genovese. *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983. Print.
- Freeman, Joshua B. *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II*. New York: The New Press, 2000. Print.
- Frost, Robert. *Collected Poems of Robert Frost*. New York City: Halcyon House, 1940. Print.
- Gillon, Steven M. *Separate and Unequal: The Kerner Commission and the Unraveling of American Liberalism*. New York: Basic Books, 2018. Print.
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson and Craig Gilmore. "Beyond Bratton." *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*. Ed. Jordan T Capm and Christina Heatherton. London: Verso, 2016. 173-200. Print.
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, And Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. Web. 12 Jan. 2017.
- Godden, Richard. *Fictions of Capital: The American novel from James to Mailer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. Print.
- Gratz, Roberta Brandes. "The Living City: How America's Cities are Being Revitalized by Thinking Small in a Big Way." n.d. *Google Books*. Web. 17 January 2018. <[https://books.google.com/books?id=fmdd4dptfz4C&pg=PA62&source=gbs\\_toc\\_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=fmdd4dptfz4C&pg=PA62&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false)>.
- Gregory, James, N. *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005. Print.
- Griffin, Farah Jasmine. *Who Set You Flowin'?: The African American Migration Narrative*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Print.
- Griffin, III, O. Hayden, III, Vanessa H Woodward and III, John J. Sloan. *The Money and Politics of Criminal Justice Policy*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2016. Print.
- Hakutani, Yoshinobu. "The City and Richard Wright's Quest for Freedom." *The City in African-American Literature*. Ed. Yoshinobu Hakutani and Robert Butler. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995. 50-63. Print.
- Haney Lopez, Ian F. "The Social Construction of Race." *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. 2nd Edition. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 964-974. Print.

- Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Print.
- Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Print.
- Harvey, David and Neil Smith. "Geography: From Capitals to Capital." *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses Volume II*. Ed. Bertell Ollman and Edward Vernoff. New York: Praeger, 1984. 99-122. Print.
- Harvey, David. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. London: Verso, 2012. Print.
- Hayes, Isaac. "Soulsville." *Shaft: Music From the Soundtrack*. By Isaac Hayes. Memphis: Stax Records, 1971. Compact Disc.
- Hinds, Michael deCourcy. "Baltimore's Story of City Homesteading." *The New York Times* 16 January 1986. Web. 10 August 2018.  
<<https://www.nytimes.com/1986/01/16/garden/baltimore-s-story-of-city-homesteading.html>>.
- hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992. Print.
- Huxley, Aldous. "What is Happening to Our Population." *Politics and Population Control*. Ed. Kathleen A. Tobin. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004. 39-40. Print.
- Illingsworth, James. "Erroneous and Incongruous Notions of Liberty: Urban Unrest and the Origins of Radical Reconstruction in New Orleans, 1865-1868." *After Slavery: Race, Labor, and Citizenship in the Reconstruction South*. Ed. Bruce E and Brian Kelly Baker. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2013. 35-57. Print.
- Inness, Sherrie A. "Introduction: The 1970s and Women's Changing Roles." *Disco Divas: Women and Popular Culture in the 1970s*. Ed. Sherrie A. Inness. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2003. 1-9. Print.
- Jameson, Frederic. *The Seeds of Time*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Print.
- Johnson, Dennis W. *The Laws that Shaped America: Fifteen Acts of Congress and Their Lasting Impact*. New York: Routledge, 2009. Print.
- Johnson, Marilyn S. *Street Justice: A History of Police Violence in New York City*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003. Print.
- Johnson, Mat. *Hunting in Harlem*. New York: Bloombury, 2003. Print.

- Jonnes, Jill. *South Bronx Rising: The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of an American City*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002. Print.
- Kelley, Robin D.G. and Earl Lewis. *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
- Kelley, Robin D.G. "Births of a Nation: Surveying Trumpland with Cedric Robinson." *Boston Review Forum* 1 (2017): 117-137. Print.
- Kennedy, Liam. *Race and Urban Space in Contemporary American Culture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. Print.
- Kohler-Hausmann, Julilly. "The Attila the Hun Law": New York's Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Making of a Punitive State." *Journal of Social History* 44.1 (2010): 71-95. Electronic. 16 March 2017.
- Lauter, Paul, ed. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Fourth. Vol. 2. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. Print.
- Lee, James Kyung-Jin. *Urban Triage: Race and the Fictions of Multiculturalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. Print.
- Lees, Loretta, Tom Slater and Elvin Wyly. *Gentrification*. New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.
- Lehman, Richard. *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. Print.
- Lincoln, Abraham and William H. Seward. *Transcript of the Proclamation*. 5 May 2017. Web. 8 June 2018. <<https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation/transcript.html>>.
- Lipsitz, George. *How Racism Takes Place*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011. Print.
- Louis Gates, Jr., Henry. "The "Blackness of Blackness": A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey." *Critical Inquiry* 9.4 (1983): 685-723. Web.
- Low, Setha M. *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America*. London: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Lyotard, Jean Francois. *The Lyotard Reader and Guide*. Ed. Keith Crome and James Williams. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. Print.
- Malthus, Rev. T.R. "An Essay on the Principle of Population; or, A View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; With an Inquiry Into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which it Occasions."

- Politics and Population Control: A Documentary History*. Ed. Kathleen, A. Tobin. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004. 2-4. Print.
- Marable, Manning. *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy, and Society: Updated Edition*. Cambridge: South End Press, 2000. Print.
- Massey, Douglass S. and Nancy A. Denton. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. Print.
- McKay, Nellie Y. "'From Ann Petry's The Street and The Narrows: A Study of the Influence of Class, Race, and Gender on Afro-American Women's Lives.'" *The Critical Response to Ann Petry*. Ed. Hazel Arnett Ervin. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2005. 156-165. Print.
- Melamed, Jodi. "Racial Capitalism." *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1.1 (2015): 76-85. Web. 12 March 2016.
- Miller, Hayley. "'Trump Repeats Huge Lie About The U.S. Murder Rate.'" 7 February 2017. *The Huffington Post*. Web. 15 [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-lie-murder-rate\\_us\\_589a1c57e4b040613139c232](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-lie-murder-rate_us_589a1c57e4b040613139c232) June 2018 .
- Mitchell, Don. "Working-Class Geographies: Capital, Space, and Place." *New Working-Class Studies*. Ed. John Russo and Sherry Lee Linkon. Ithaca: ILR Press, 2005. 78-97. Print.
- Mitchell, Ojmarrh and Michael J. Lynch. "Criminal Justice, Race and the War on Drugs." *Disproportionate Minority Contact: Current Issues and Policies*. Ed. Nicolle Y. Parsons-Pollard. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2011. 153-167. Print.
- Moiles, Sean. "The Politics of Gentrification in Ernesto Quinonez's Novels." *Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 52.1 (2011): 114-133. Web. 19 December 2017.
- Moran, Donimique. *Carceral Geography: Spaaces and Practices of Incarceration*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015. Print.
- Morris, Norval. *The Future of Imprisonment*. Chicago: The Universith of Chicago Press, 1974. Print.
- National Labor Relations Act*. 10 June 2016. <<https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/content/nlra-act.html>>.
- National Labor Relations Board*. 10 August 2016. <<https://www.nlr.gov/resources/national-labor-relations-act>>.
- Newman, Mark. *The Civil Right Movement*. Westport: Praeger, 2004. Print.

- Ovalle, Priscilla Pena. "Framing Jennifer Lopez: Mobilizing race from the wide shot to close uup." *The Persistence of Whiteness: Race and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. Ed. Daniel Bernardi. London: Routledge, 2008. 165-184. Print.
- Page, Max. *The City's End: Two Centuries of Fantasies, Fears, and Premonitions of New York's Destruction*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. Print.
- Perez, Gina M. *The Near Northwest Side Story: Migration, Displacement, and Puerto Rican Families*. Berkely: University of California Press, 2004. Print.
- Petry, Ann. *The Street*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974. Print.
- Petry, Elisabeth. *At Home Inside: A Daughter's Tribute to Ann Petry*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009. Print.
- Powell, John A. "Race and Space: What Really Drives Metropolitan Growth." *The Brookings Review* 16.4 (1998): 20-22. Web.
- Quiñonez, Ernesto. *Chango's Fire*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2004. Print.
- Rand, Ayn. *Atlas Shrugged*. New York: Signet, 1996. Print.
- Reddy, Chandan. *Freedom With Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.
- Reitano, Joanne. *The Restless City: A Short History of New York from Colonial Times to the Present*. New York: Rutledge, 2010. Print.
- Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Universit of North Carolina Press, 2000. Web.
- Rotella, Carlo. *October Cities: The Redevelopment of Urban Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998. Print.
- Sanger, Margaret. "The Prevention of Conception." *Politics and Population Control: A Documentary History*. Ed. Kathleen A. Tobin. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004. 140. Print.
- Sarachan, Sydney. "The Legacy of Robert Moses." 17 January 2013. *Need to Know on PBS*. Web. 17 January 2018. <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/environment/the-legacy-of-robert-moses/16018/>>.
- Schäfer-Wunsch, Elisabeth. "Borders and Catastrophes: T.C. Boyle's Californian Ecology." *Space in America: Theory HIstory Culture*. Ed. Klaus Benesch and Kerstin Schmidt. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005. 401-417. Print.
- Shabazz, Rashad. *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015. Print.

- Sharkey, Patrick. *Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013. Print.
- Siegel, Paul N. "The Conclusion of Richard Wright's *Native Son*." *PMLA* 89.3 (1974): 517-523. Web.
- Siegel, Robert and Mary Louise Kelly. *Owner Didn't Pay Fee, So Firefighters Let Home Burn*. 8 October 2010. National Public Radio. Web. 11 September 2017. <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130435529>>.
- Siemaszko, Corky. "Opioid Crisis: The Awful Arithmetic of America's Overdoses May Have Gotten Worse." *NBC News* 7 August 2017. Web. 7 September 2017. <<https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/americas-heroin-epidemic/opioid-crisis-awful-arithmetic-america-s-overdoses-may-have-gotten-n790361>>.
- Silverberg, Louis G., ed. *The Wagner Act: After Ten Years*. Washington, D.C.: The Bureau of National Affairs Inc., 1945.
- Simpson, Tyrone R. II. *Ghetto Images in Twentieth Century American Literature: Writing Apartheid*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.
- Smith, Earl and Angela J. Hattery. "Incarceration: A Tool for Racial Segregation and Labor Exploitation." *Race, Gender & Class* 15.1/2 (2008): 79-97. Web. 20 March 2017.
- Smith, Neil and Peter Williams, *Gentrification of the City*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1986. Print.
- Smith, Neil. "Gentrification, the frontier, and the restructuring of urban space." *Gentrification of the City*. Ed. Neil Smith and Peter Williams. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1986. 15-34. Print.
- Solow, Barbara L. *The Economic Consequences of the Atlantic Slave Trade*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014. Print.
- Soylent Green*. By Staneley R. Greenberg. Dir. Richard Fleischer. Perf. Charlton Heston. 1973. DVD.
- Spiegel, Michael. "Character in a Post-National World: Neomedievalism in Atwood's 'Oryx and Crake'." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 43.3 (2010): 119-134. Web. 4 February 2017.
- Spitzer, Robert J. *The Politics of Gun Control*. 6th. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2015. Print.
- Stanback, Thomas M., Jr and Richard V. Knight. *Suburbanization and the City*. New York: Allanheld, Osmun & Co. and by Universe Books, 1976. Print.

Suarez-Villa, Luis. *Technocapitalism: A Critical Perspective on Technological Innovation and Corporatism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009. Print.

*The Big blue union., December 27, 1862, Image 1.* 27 December 1862. Web. 25 November 2017. <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84027640/1862-12-27/ed-1/seq-1/#date1=12%2F27%2F1862&index=0&rows=20&searchType=advanced&language=&sequence=0&words=ACT+HOMESTEAD&proxdistance=5&date2=12%2F27%2F1862&ortext=&proxtext=&phrasertext=HOMESTEAD+ACT&andt>>.

*The Library of Congress.* 26 October 2017. Web. 25 November 2017. <<https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/homestead.html>>.

Triece, Mary E. *On the Picket Line: Strategies of Working-Class Women During the Depression*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007. Print.

Tuck, Eve and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization is not a metaphor." 2012. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. Web. 10 November 2017.

Tuttle, Ian. "The Neighborhood Zimmerman Watched." *National Review*. 22 July 2013. Web. 6 June 2017. <<https://www.nationalreview.com/2013/07/neighborhood-zimmerman-watched-ian-tuttle/>>.

Vitali, Ali and Corky Siemaszko. "Trump Declares Opioid Crisis National Emergency." *NBC News* 10 August 2017. Web. 7 September 2017. <<https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/americas-heroin-epidemic/trump-declares-opioid-crisis-national-emergency-n791576>>.

Weiss, D.C. "Shifting Stance." *ABA Journal* 99.4 (2013). Electronic. 22 June 2017.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973. Print.

*Wisconsin Castle Doctrine Explained.* 2017. Website. 26 June 2017. <<https://www.grievelaw.com/MilwaukeeCriminalDefenseAttorneyBlog/WisconsinCastleDoctrineExplained>>.

Wood, Phillip J. "The Rise of the Prison Industrial Complex in the United States." *Capital Punishment: Prison Privatization & Human Rights*. Ed. Andrew Coyle, Allison Campbell and Rodney Neufeld. Atlanta: Clarity Press, Inc., 2003. 16-29. Print.

Wright, Richard. *12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States*. New York: The Viking Press, 1941. Print.

—. *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954.

—. *Early Works*. New York: Library of America, 1991. Print.

—. *Native Son*. Cutchogue: Buccaneer Books, 1993. Print.

Yoder, Dale and George R. Davies. *Depression and Recovery*. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1934. Print.

Zatz, Noah D. "Working at the Bounaries of Markets: Prison Labor and the Economic Dimension of Employment Relationships." *Vanderbilt Law Review* 61.3 (2008): 857-958. Web. 20 March 2017.