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THE POLITICS OF IMPOSSIBILITY: CECE MCDONALD AND TRAYVON MARTIN—  
THE BURSTING OF BLACK RAGE

by

TARYN D. JORDAN

Under the Direction of Amira Jarmakani and Tiffany King

ABSTRACT

What can the affect of black rage do in a era of impossibility marked by the circulation of neoliberal post-race post-feminist themes? I argue that black rage is a key weapon in the fight against our impossible era—black rage operates through an affective bursting apart, disrupting circulating narratives connected to a post racial, post feminist world and charting a new path of social unrest that has the potential to transform the social order. I locate political uses of black rage through two case studies: CeCe McDonald, a black Trans\* woman who was brutally attacked by a group of transphobic and white supremacist in summer of 2012. And in the Justice for Trayvon Martin March and Rally in Atlanta, Georgia in July of 2013. Both cases studies prove black rage can collectivize the struggles of differing people producing a feeling of possibility during our era of impossibility.

INDEX WORDS: Black Rage, Afro Pessimism, Affect, CeCe Mcdonald, Trayvon Martin

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THE BURSTING OF BLACK RAGE

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TARYN D. JORDAN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2014

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2014

THE POLITICS OF IMPOSSIBILITY: CECE MCDONALD AND TRAYVON MARTIN—  
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by

TARYN D. JORDAN

Committee Co-Chair: Amira Jarmakani

Tiffany King

Committee: Julie Kubala

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

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Georgia State University

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Literature Review.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.2 Time and The Accumulation of Violence.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>1.2.1 Impossibility and Social Death.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>1.2.2 Black Rage and Trauma.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<b>1.3 Method(ologie)s .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2 RAGE—A BLACK FEELING: CECE MCDONALD AND THE TRANS*</b>	
<b>DEATH NARRATIVE.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction: How Does it Feel to be A Problem? .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.2 What is Black Rage? .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>2.3 Black and Trans* .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>2.4 The Implications of CeCe’s Rage.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>2.5 End.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>3 AFRO PESSIMISM AND THE BUSTING OF BLACKNESS: TRAYVON</b>	
<b>MARTIN AND THE FORCE OF BLACK RAGE .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction: Aunt Hestor’s Screaming .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>3.2 Trayvon Martin Organizing Committee.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>3.3 I Burst Apart.....</b>	<b>50</b>

**3.4 End..... 55**

**Epilogue ..... 57**

**Works Cited..... 63**

**APENDIX: Sample Interview Questions ..... 68**

**NOTES ..... 69**



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The explosion will not happen today. It is too soon... or too late. I do not come with Timeless truths. My consciousness is not illumined with ultimate radiances. Nevertheless, in complete composure, I think it would be good if certain things were said.  
– (Fanon 9) – Frantz Fanon

Women respond to racism. My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, on that anger, beneath that anger, on top of that anger. Ignoring that anger, feeding upon that anger, learning to use that anger before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight of that anger. My fear of that anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also. (Lorde 278) - Audre Lorde

The politics of impossibility is a way to name our era of neoliberal individualist, post-race and post-feminist time. In other words we live in a post – post impossible political reality; I see the possibility in impossibility as a larger political strategy that is interested in a strategic reorganization of society towards liberatory pursuits. To understand what is possible in the impossibility is to become comfortable with the possibility of failure. One must not think only of the outcome of an action instead the possibility in impossible politics is focused upon the decision to act, with the intention that action may result in something, but knowing deep inside it may result in failure or something else entirely. Hence the need for a politics of impossibility that is expansive in its interventions in our current moment; it requires a diversity of tactics for non-beings within a complex web of relationality and kinship. I find our era of impossibility, with all of its sharp edges and devastating reality, hopeful; it is not too soon... or too late to begin to think of the implications of a politics that calls into question the very foundation of the nation-state.

Neoliberalism functions in a slippery and insidious way that makes it difficult to make the same exact demands, perform the same exact techniques and have the exact ideological belief-systems of the tumultuous social movement time of midcentury America. Political theorists and

practitioners of politics interested in the struggle for a liberatory new world should not get caught up in arguing which bodies of people are the most strategic. In other words we must fight against the desire to rely upon identity categories alone as a location of political action. Instead we must think through other ways, other forms of politics that attend to the multifaceted tenuous functions of neoliberalism as well. We must follow confrontations with power, combined with a deployable understanding of history, alongside analysis of the functions of political emotions to lead the way. And by doing exactly this practice the contemporary cases of both CeCe McDonald, a black trans\* woman who survived a white supremacist and trans misogynist attack, and Trayvon Martin, a young black man killed by a mixed race white supremacist vigilante, allow us to think through the political possibilities of black rage connected to the affective bursting of the black body.

I see black rage as a tactic against impossibility, a response to the sharp edges of a neoliberal political regime in concert with the various systems of power within which we all are located. Fanon's words in the epigraph describe the complicated nature of blackness reflected by whiteness in *Black Skin White Masks: The Experience of a Black Man in a White World*. The bursting emotions of blackness, which fester when one is an object among subjects, is at the center of my analysis (Fanon 109). The explosion Fanon describes, the technique of black rage, is at once politically destructive and productive, enacting love for the individual and a possible opening for kinship. I came to this conclusion through my own subjectivity; I am a black, queer, cis-gendered, working class woman who has experienced instances of trauma connected to my othered subjectivity. In fact it was my own process of dealing with trauma that has put me on the path of analyzing feelings as political. In my own moment of rage I chose to radically love myself and as Audre Lorde states, "not be afraid of that anger." I used that anger or as I choose

to call it rage, that I explain further in chapter two, to confront this instance of oppression. Cleansing myself of the historical pain that circulated around me all of my life; no matter how hard I tried to avoid it, I was continually caught in the web of white supremacy. I used the only tool I had available to me, my rage, to love myself, stop the narrative of victimization, and break the chain of silence so many of my ancestors who came before me had to endure.

The theoretical framing of my project stems from the assemblage of affect, Afro Pessimism, queer, and decolonial theory; specifically I interrogate a theory of black rage as an affective political strategy in an era of impossibility based on a feeling connected to non-beings. I argue that black rage is a key weapon in the fight against the neoliberal impossible era—black rage operates through an affective bursting apart, disrupting circulating narratives connected to a post racial, post feminist world and charting a new path of social unrest that has the potential to transform the social order. Impossibility provides an opening for objectified bodies to resist neoliberal regimes of power and broadly for communities to develop a political mode to mount insurrection.

My project is interested in how non-beings can make radical change in an impossible neoliberal era using the affect of black rage. I prioritize blackness in my research due to its positionality outside relation to another, its fungibility to other bodies, and the creation of blackness that sits at the foundation of American democracy. When I say non-beings I am evoking the work of Franz Fanon, Hortense Spillers, and Saidya Hartman who all think of blackness as a being outside of subjectivity. For Fanon he uses the language of object to evoke the relation blackness has to whiteness e.g. to be a subject is to be white, and only those who are white can be legible to the state (Fanon 109). For Spillers she uses the term flesh as a sign to demarcate the birth of blackness on the body during the transatlantic slave trade. Only people

who are not slaves have access to a body thus it is in the naming of blackness in relation to the flesh that she signals as illegible (Spillers 1987 66). Hartman defines non-being through the transatlantic slave trade as well, she views black people as an object or what she calls the “the ground” that allows for the birth of the bourgeois subject to emerge (Hartman 62). I affirm all of these scholars’ notions of non-being; however, I depart through a discussion of present neoliberal economic conditions that have provided shifts in how we think of non-being.

I depart from Afro Pessimism because of the complications of neoliberalism that have shifted flows of power between bodies and institutions. I want to ground a politics of impossibility on the realities of black life while keeping in tension how other non-beings relate to the histories, the struggles, and the dominations tested, developed and crafted on black flesh. The tension between blackness and all other forms of non-being is great; however, it is my project to highlight, through my theory of situated solidarity, moments where black people and other non-beings’ political interests and desires collide and burst apart what we previously thought was impossible. In other words Afro pessimist scholars laid the groundwork for my arguments about the reality of blackness in America, however I ultimately turn away from an Afro Pessimist frame, because I recognize that the quotidian technologies of domination are perfected on black flesh and expanded and utilized against other non-beings as well.

Thus my main research questions are how is rage useful? What does rage do for the black queer body in an accumulated time period of violence? Does rage provide useful ruptures that bring people together? Do moments of rage delimit the boundaries of identity categories? Does a tactic of rage mobilize various communities creating an instance of situated solidarity? Can rage create new worlds, kinship, systems of mutualism and new ways of being? Can rage make possible a liberatory reorganization of society?

I found that rage is incredibly useful; it operates on multiple levels, for individual rage can be a form of self-love by way of self protection as it was in the case of CeCe McDonald. CeCe's use of black rage had the ability to collectivize her struggle affectively and pull in the struggles of other non-beings to highlight the atrocities of the white supremacy and trans\* misogyny simultaneously disrupting the trans\* women death narrative. On a mass scale when connected to black death, as it was in the Justice for Trayvon March and Rally in Atlanta Georgia, research respondents described black rage as a force, an energy—an affective sense of elation alongside feelings of anger and of being distraught. In protest space the force of black rage filled in the gaps between different non-beings, allowing for an affective feeling of individuals' liberation being bounded up together. In other words, black rage brought about something that could be called situated solidarity—a phrase that captures the complexity of a form of solidarity centered on analysis dealing with the complexities of power relations between bodies in space. Avoiding the pitfalls of notions of solidarity that can elide the relative privileges among group members, the term situated solidarity both points to an interrelated solidarity that is situated—mindful of one's own social location and relation to axes of power for non-beings—and that gestures to possible long-term forms of kinship through affective political rupture. Black rage at the Justice for Trayvon Martin March and Rally made research respondents feel as though something else in Atlanta was possible. That something else was the taste and the smell of what a new world in the shell of the old could be—a space of collectivity and a sense of cohesion and togetherness that defies neoliberal forces of separation and isolation. Black rage in both case studies proves to be an affective weapon that can produce the material conditions and the social relations for a new world to emerge.

## 1.1 Literature Review

The literature review focuses upon the three tenets of my project: time and the accumulation of violence as a way to understand the temporality of bursting for non-beings; the relationship between neoliberal impossibility and socially dead non-beings that are raced, classed, trans and queer; and the link between black rage and trauma in relation to racial and gender based violence.

## 1.2 Time and The Accumulation of Violence

Afro Pessimist Scholarship is interested in interrogating the relationship of black slavery to black ontological modes of social and material death in the present, a line of inquiry that is in direct dialogue with my own work. My interest in Afro Pessimism is grounded in its analysis of blackness in negation—as a place of lack that speaks to the quotidian oppressions of blackness on the skin. Afro Pessimism posits that slavery did not end through emancipation; instead slavery continues to operate on different registers over time, gesturing towards a notion of an accumulation of violence. The notion of accumulation through time is fitting with my reading of impossibility through the spiraling of time that allows for particular moments of bursting connected to the violence of white supremacy. Thus my thesis births from the theories of Afro Pessimist scholarship steeped in notions of non-being, impossibility, and social death charting a different path towards the political possibility of black rage.

Hortense Spillers' article titled, *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book*, is a canonical text of Afro Pessimist scholarship. Spillers argues that her intention in writing the essay was to provide what she calls a vocabulary for the intensity and violence connected to American blackness in relationship to slavery (Spillers, Hartman, Griffin, Eversly, Morgan 2007). Within her framework blackness was forged within the transatlantic middle

passage, where Africans transitioned from being African and coming to blackness that was also not white, a positionality, she argues, that has no relational other (Spillers 1987 68-69). Further Spillers coins the term of flesh, in a complete rejection of the notion of a black subjectivity, because blackness is an object belonging to another, the notion that blackness can contain a body is not possible. Instead through captivity black people became objects—flesh to be bought and sold (Spillers 1987 66). Last Spillers argues that there is no differentiation of the black flesh within slavery or outside of it, the horrors of slavery follow though time (Spillers 1987, 68).

Saidiya V. Hartman's book *Scenes of Subjection Terror Slavery, and Self Making in the Nineteenth-Century America* follows in the wake of Spiller's *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book* by picking up on the key themes Spillers laid out in her seminal text. Hartman's project is to negotiate the accumulation of violence of blackness during reconstruction, the period immediately following slavery, through the early parts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hartman's focus is specifically on the mundane, quotidian, musical and legal realities of black life instead of a focus on the "shocking and the terrible" parts of blackness in order to look at other scenes where violence against blackness does not seem as apparent (Hartman 4). Her work charts a new path from Spillers by arguing that blackness is fungible to others, an experience based upon the pleasure whites receive upon reading or watching or engaging with the shocking and terrible parts of blackness (Hartman 21). Ultimately Hartman arrives at the notion that black people exist somewhere between freedom and no longer enslaved to gesture toward the dual performance of being a human through law and a slave through blackness.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, decolonial scholar Frantz Fanon advocates for violence on behalf of the native against the settler. Fanon discusses the tense relationship between the settler (colonizer) and the native (the colonized) in the French-controlled Algeria. The native/settler

dichotomy does not necessarily translate to an American context, due to the historical realities of slavery verses colonization, yet what is translatable to an American context is Fanon's exploration of the cleansing or democratizing force of violence enacted by the native. Fanon states: "In the colonial world, the emotional sensitivity of the native is kept on the surface of his skin like an open sore which flinches from the caustic agent;" (Fanon 44). This speaks to the sensitivity of the native that already exists that is caused by the realities of white supremacy and the pressures of a colonial political system that build over time. Enacting violence is the answer to healing this sore, "At the level of the individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the natives from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (Fanon 74). Fanon's charge that violence is cleansing and its ability to provide him self-respect is what is so useful about Fanon's work. He sees the act of violence as a pathway to a brief humanity, which directly aligns with my analysis of rage being synonymous with black experience. I use rage versus violence to show that the feeling of rage is similar to the sore on the body of the native; white supremacy, sexism, ableism, etc all function on a much more insidious register, thus the feeling of rage is now the sore that sits on the body of the impossible non-subject.

In Amber Musser's *Anti- Oedipus, Kinship, and the Subject of Affect: Reading Fanon with Deleuze and Guattari*, she compares and contrasts Deleuze and Guattari's body without organs (BWO) to the non-being of the colonized black man and their relationship, or rather lack of relationship, to Freud's Oedipus complex—the idea that man's sexuality is formed through his attachment to his mother and hatred toward his father. This non-being for Deleuze and Guattari is seen in the BWO. They focus on the masochist as the ultimate BWO, "The body in shock, after all, is overwhelmed. In this state there is only surface and sensations; corporeal reaction in



this universe is unattached to a psychic structure. Deleuze and Guattari understand masochism as a process of transformation rooted in the corporeal;" (Musser 79). It is in this corporeal that we begin to see disorganization, "In resisting organization and structure as modalities of regulation, the masochist opens the possibility of the reorganization along any number of axes, including those of kinship, subjectivity and gender, by providing a critique of the Oedipal myth" (Musser 79). Fanon, on the other hand, sees the black man's non-being as linked to his inability to be a man; he is interpellated by the domination of his body by his colonial masters. "Fanon rejects Oedipus for reasons that are distinct from Deleuze and Guattari, yet his critique resonates with their work. As not-a-man, Fanon's Negro is not only not free, but pained by his exclusion" (Musser 80). Clearly what is emerging through Musser's comparison is Fanon's notion of the bursting of blackness, the BWO is a body in shock and overwhelmed—this body and its subsequent rearrangement is where the possibility for what Musser calls queer kinship lies.

Stephen Dillon's article "It's here, it's time: Race Queer Futurity, and the Temporality of violence in *Born in Flames*" describes his conception of a temporality of violence. Using Hortense Spillers work *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book* he argues that time is not just an incremental process of counting of our lives—instead he frames it as an accumulation (Dillon 5). He uses the writings of George Jackson and Frantz Fanon on the realities of blackness to argue for an accumulation of violence through a relationship between the past and the present (Dillon 7-8). Dillon pushes back against Jose Esteban Muñoz's queer utopias by arguing for an idea of time that holds in relationship the past and the present simultaneously thus rendering the reliance on the future in utopia useless (Dillon 5-6). He makes this provocative argument while analyzing the film *Born in Flames*, in which the revolutionary women's army is insistent upon stopping the future. Dillon insists that to think of time fixing

anything is a liberal progressive narrative because it will produce similar conditions of the past but in different forms (Dillon 4). Dillon finishes the article by saying all we have is the present, leaving one to ponder what that exactly will mean. My work is in direct conversation with Dillon; he is also using Fanon to think of the impossible of futurity for queer folks, however where we diverge is in our conceptions of time. I add to the conversation by expanding upon time as a accumulation, rendering the process of time as we know happening all at once, spiraling around all of us as we move through various realities and temporalities, meaning that past and present are indeed in relationship to each other, however the future is not just ahead of us; rather I posit that the future is now.

### ***1.2.1 Impossibility and Social Death***

Morgan Bassichis, Alexander Lee, and Dean Spade write, “To claim our legacy of beautiful impossibility is to begin practicing ways of being with one another and making movements that sustain all life on this planet without exception. It is to begin to speak what we have not yet had the words to wish for” (15). I do not see this quote as a definition of impossibility, instead it leads to what is to be expected when one dreams, thinks and conjures impossibility. It is the something that is on the edge of the tongue, the thing we have been waiting for, the social movement that will not allow us to leave anyone behind. I find the words of Bassichis, et al important because their intervention into impossibility draws upon the work of Afro Pessimist Scholars and charts a new path for Trans\* bodies and other non-black people to engage the spiraling relationship between impossibility and non-being. Alongside trans\* studies is theorist Lisa Marie Cacho, who does not necessarily use the language of impossibility; however, I see her theorization of socially dead subjectivities who must enact what she calls “unthinkable politics” as in line with my own work of framing what a politics of impossibly may

be. Further, I build on the work of critical trans\* studies theorists like Stephen Dillon and Dean Spade to explore impossibility and its relationship to the larger LGBT movement.

In her work, Lisa Marie Cacho explores the role of the socially dead subjectivity, which she defines as an individual who is juridically unintelligible to the state. Cacho frames the socially dead as bodies that are not assigned moral or social value, rendering them only intelligible through the crime, violence and immoral acts they commit (Cacho 4). In other words she is thinking through the way stereotypes of black, immigrant and terrorist subjects are deployed as people who are inheritably, “criminalized... prevented from being law-abiding,” their everyday tactics of survival are criminalized and constructing them not as law-abiding citizens and instead as criminals (Cacho 4). These socially dead bodies are then marked by their actions as well as the spaces they inhabit; space becomes a site of surveillance and naturalization of state violence. Cacho looks at othered spaces as one way socially dead subjectivities are mapped as failed subjects, “...people of color are represented as products of environments that are identified as the cause, rationale, and evidence not only for the populations’ inability to access political and economic equality but also for its vulnerability to state-sanctioned violence” (Cacho 72). She furthers this argument by walking through the way exclusion creates impossibility in relation to how bodies are created through space and racialization. She states, “...criminalization as both a disciplinary and regularizing process of devaluation does not just exclude some people from legal ‘universality’ but makes their inclusion a necessary impossibility” (Cacho 64). Clearly what is emerging is Cacho’s analysis of the exclusionary workings of social death through individual subjectivities and space. For my project I frame my analysis using Cacho’s definition of social death as a way to expand upon Spade et al’s transgender impossible politics. Similar to transgender folks, socially dead subjectivities are

illegible to the state, and Cacho's analysis of socially dead subjectivities provides a useful bridge between the two. Cacho's conception of unthinkable politics, which she frames as a political project that works from the perspective of illegibility rather than as a fight for legibility or values-based arguments of socially dead subjectivities as valuable to society, provides a way of understanding what I mean by "non-beings." For Cacho, unthinkable politics is in the decision to struggle rather than in the outcome of that struggle (Cacho 30). While I borrow from and build on Cacho's framing of socially dead subjectivities and the spatialization of those bodies, along with her conception of unthinkable politics, I depart from her argument by shifting my analysis away from a solely legal frame. Cacho's argument is limited due to its embeddedness within a logic of legality to conceptualize the value or lack of value for the socially dead subject. She is pointing towards the political potential of socially dead subjectivities towards what she calls unthinkable politics; however, similar to transgender theorists, she does not exactly expand upon what unthinkable politics could look like.

My thinking of the politics of impossibility does not come out of a vacuum; at least two other scholars who are active in queer and transgender activist politics have been thinking closely about what it means to become comfortable with the possibilities of impossible demands. Stephen Dillon notes in his article "The Only Freedom I Can See" that freedom in terms of rights-based campaigns and policy platforms do not provide a pathway to a queer imaginable world, a world free from police and prisons (Dillon 182). He comes to this conclusion by exchanging letters between two different gender queer prisoners who are serving life in prison. Prisoner R notes that she finds her freedom after living in a solitary confinement cell through her physical death in a prison cell, "The only freedom I can see/Is Death in a prison cell" (Prisoner R 181). The impossibility of queer and transgender subjects in prison is based on the shift towards

neoliberal politics by the LGBT movement, which is no longer interested in members of the community who are most affected by poverty, transphobia, and white supremacy. Instead LGBT politics became concerned with neoliberal economies of gay respectability, economic affluence and whiteness (Dillon 181). Thus, it ultimately left those queer and transgender bodies behind in the chase for marriage and military, two institutions steeped in neoliberalism. Gay marriage creates a heteronormative family that is legible to the state and capable of being self-sufficient, leaving out the need for state or federal social welfare. Militarism broadens the project of American imperialism by incorporating gay and lesbian bodies, once seen as abject, into the fold of the American dream. The focus on marriage and military has the effect of splitting the LGBT political base into those who are legible and those who are not.

Dean Spade is also an activist and legal scholar who is interested in thinking through the potential of a politics based on impossibility. He, along with Morgan Bassichis and Alexander Lee in their article “Building an Abolitionist Trans and Queer Movement with Everything We’ve Got,” charts a variety of problems affecting poor and people of color (POC) gender queer and transgender people. I see their activist-focused manifesto as a way to think through the possibilities of impossibility, what they are demanding of us as activists and scholars is to think outside of the marriage and military fights put forward by mainstream LGBT movements (Bassichis, Lee, Spade 36). Instead they are interested in a politic that links to other struggles, seeks change that is focused on mass societal change versus policy-only strategies, that desires social transformation, and that attacks systems that affect queer POC and trans subjectivities the most. Taken together, these strategies urge us to become comfortable with politics that leaves no one behind, and think through how such a politic could be effective to all impossible bodies (Bassichis, Lee, and Spade 37).

Both Dillon and Bassichis, et al situate their work as rooted in critiquing LGBT politics writ large. While this is a worthy fight, I aim to take their critique further and think through what an impossible politic might mean for all bodies that are marked by various dominations emerging from race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability.

### ***1.2.2 Black Rage and Trauma***

My work on the politics of impossibility views rage as a technique to combat the insidious practices of white supremacy, transphobia, patriarchy, and the slow death of those who are poor and economically superfluous in an impossible political era. I pick up from the critical analysis done by two black feminist stalwarts, bell hooks' *Killing Rage* and Audre Lorde's "The Uses of Anger" as both works highlight the authors' personal struggles with being Black women in a white supremacist world. For hooks, my focus is on two essays from her book *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* titled, "Killing Rage: Militant Resistance" and "Beyond Black Rage: Ending Racism"; the first focuses on her personal narrative of a feeling experienced when dealing with insidious racism and the latter essay engages with rage as both productive politically as well as destructive. Lorde's engagement with rage is through the expression of anger, brought on through various direct acts of white supremacy in her everyday life as well as those committed by her fellow feminist colleagues.

In hook's first essay "Killing Rage: Militant Resistance" she describes an instance of intense killing rage, which results from an altercation at an airport with a white male passenger and airline staff members. The opening line of the essay states "I am writing this essay sitting beside an anonymous white male that I long to murder" (hooks 8). She goes on to explain that her rage grows out of the fact that the white man accused her and her black woman-traveling companion of occupying seats in first class that did not belong to them. The experience,

however, opens up to a long list of direct and insidious moments of white supremacy that hooks and her traveling companion experienced while attempting to board the plane, all of which lead up her moment of sheer hot burning rage that hooks describes as such: “I wanted to stab him softly, to shoot him with the gun I wished I had in my purse. And as I watched his pain, I would tell him tenderly racism hurts” (hooks 11). She is clearly angry at this very public display of white male supremacy that requires her to prove her existence, and to resort to aggressive tactics of social exchange, such as calling to speak to a supervisor when the airline representative would not honor her first class upgrade coupons. What hooks is describing, using personal narrative, undergirds her main argument, which is that the use of black rage is a decolonial act for hooks that provides clarity of understanding and shows both its potential to destroy and to construct (hooks 14 and 18). hooks goes on to argue that rage cannot continue to be used as a critique or to be simply pathologized; she admits that it can destroy, but it can also provide the militancy that is so needed for revolutionary acts—acts that are needed for the destruction of white supremacy (hook 19). My work takes up hooks’ arguments about the usefulness of rage completely as I am committed to thinking through rage as a dual process that can both destroy and construct; however, where I depart from hooks’ formulation is in the location of my analysis. hooks is somewhat unclear in her thinking around the deployment of rage by the black underclass; she makes it clear that most black folks who have made it are interested in characterizing rage by those who are poor in a way that situates them as “desperate and despairing black [people] who in their hopelessness feel no need to silence unwanted passions” and leaves it at that, she does not provide further analysis (hooks 12). Instead I situate my project in the desperate hopelessness of the black underclass in order to investigate the ways in which they are at the forefront of revolutionary world making.

In hooks' second essay "Beyond Black Rage: Ending Racism" she is still engaging in her arguments about black rage, however she is looking at the complicated ways tragic acts of rage are portrayed in the media while lodging a scathing critique of the way black rage affects black middle and upper class people (hooks 27-29). hooks charges that the media are to blame by depoliticizing the racism inherent to moments of rage, rendering it as an individual act instead of as a symptom of the larger system of white supremacy (hooks 23). She does this through critical analysis of a violent act committed by a middle class black man who randomly shot and killed people on a New York train (hooks 21). His coat pocket contained a note accusing black male leaders and Caucasians for being intertwined in the system of white supremacy that drove him to a place of desperation and rage (hooks 21-22). hooks argues that the media focused their attention on a black man killing white people instead of analyzing the incident from the position of the nuanced critique the shooter gave about the complications of the system of white supremacy as a whole (hooks 22). In this essay she provides a confusing argument on the use of black rage by the black middle class; however her conclusion to this critique is her charge that the rage of poor and disenfranchised black people is where militant and revolutionary political action can occur (hooks 29). hooks' confusing conclusion to her critical essay on "Beyond Black Rage: Ending Racism" leaves open space for my analysis of the world making of black subaltern communities.

In Audre Lorde's "The Uses of Anger," she contextualizes the anger that she, as a black lesbian woman, feels from microaggressive white supremacy and sexism on a daily level. The material she uses to analyze her theory of anger is the National Women's Studies Association annual conference; Lorde calls out NWSA for turning away a black women organizer because she could not pay the fee to attend the conference. She states, "Women respond to racism. My



response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, on that anger, beneath that anger, on top of that anger. Ignoring that anger, feeding upon that anger, learning to use that anger before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight of that anger. My fear of that anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also” (Lorde, 278). In other words I take Lorde to be describing the quotidian experience of anger for black women, my work follows closely in the tradition of Lorde by thinking through the way feelings of anger is something that is bound up in black experience.

I broaden the scope of my work by thinking through Ann Cvetkovich’s work on queer trauma in her book *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Her project is interested in the ways in which queers deal with trauma outside of the chair of a traditional therapist. While our work does not exactly line up—her analysis of the band Tribe 8’s dildo-cutting during public performance speaks to the spirit of my work, which is interested in acts of rage for individuals and communities that can be cleansing at the same time that they operate as political acts. Cvetkovich focuses upon Michfest headline performer Lynn Breedlove of Tribe 8’s performance of the song “Frat Pig.” Cvetkovich explains, “during the song ‘Frat Pig,’ a fantasy about revenge through gang castration, Breedlove, always a flamboyant performer, is at her spectacular best when she cuts off her strapped-on dildo with a large knife she has been wielding” (Cvetkovich 84). This idea of dealing with trauma with a performance of violence does not exactly line up with my project, however I do think that the performance of violence in order to fight against trauma does provide a similar function for the individual as a cleansing act a rage.

### 1.3 Method(ologie)s

My work is focused on the activities and emotions of people who encounter moments of bursting apart and those who may be drawn into those moments; thus a cultural studies method is useful in gaining the research material needed to further develop my theory. Specifically, I held three dialogical structured conversations which began from the position of the research subject as an active producer of meaning rather than a well spring of information as a way of reflexively situating myself into the interview as well (Gray 95). As a result of the complexities of investigating the feeling of black rage I thought it important to bifurcate my research process and perform a second group interview session where research respondents brought objects, images and media that represented to them the parts of black rage that are outside of discourse. The research respondents shared their various images and media and synthesized the parts of black rage that language sufficiently couldn't describe. A cultural studies approach is interested in the everyday activities of people who are actively living culture. Since my work is situated in the everyday accumulations of racialized rage, cultural studies attends to my needs to analyze data that is outside of processes of categorization and tagging. Instead I analyzed research material by looking for emerging themes that stem from the open-ended discussion prompts. The themes I looked for in my interviews are connected to my research questions; they are uses of rage and anger politically or individually motivating subjects toward political actions, kinship, and informal and formal organizations stemming from affective mobilizations.

A cultural studies interview was a successful method to examine public feelings due to the discipline's focus on everyday lived culture. Further, because the thesis is steeped in the complications of otherness and of identity, the research respondents I interviewed are from the various intersections of non-being. I interviewed one black straight woman, one Chicana or

brown queer woman and one Iranian woman who identified as cautiously queer to collect my data. I recorded both the individual and the group session with their full consent and approval, the text generated from my recorded conversations along with my copious notes is the data I drew upon for the framing and analysis of my thesis. Some of the questions I asked can be found in Appendix A but here are two questions with which I opened each interview:

1. Tell me about yourself, where are you from, how do you identify? (race, gender and sexuality)
2. Tell me about your experiences in social justice work.

I use a combination of decolonial and affect theory to interoperate data versus traditional social movement theory. It is difficult to use social movement theory to measure my work as it is interested in measuring the desire and motivation for political actors to participate in social movements; further social movement theory charts organizing successes, and it cannot account for the type of movement/ technologies of activism that I chart. Affect theory provides a useful frame of analysis in my work, it speaks to the productive nature of public feelings as theorized by scholar Ann Cvetokovich. I prefer the theoretical use of feeling versus intensity or affect similar to Cvetokovich. She states, "I favor feeling in part because it is intentionally imprecise, retaining the ambiguity between feeling as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences." (4). Here Cvetkovich calls attention to the complicated nature of feelings, which stem from both the corporeal experience of the body and the psychological expressions that link to various experiences. It is the connection between the psychological and the corporeal experience of the body the link between affect and decolonial theory is found. Fanon's analysis on the affective bursting of objecthood that is linked to historical and present conditions of blackness grounds Cvetkovich's work on feeling in a discourse steeped in

blackness. By linking the work of Cvetkovich and Fanon a unique method and methodology is formed that is grounded in affect as well as discourse, both based in the feelings of racialized otherness or non-being.

## 2 RAGE—A BLACK FEELING: CECE MCDONALD AND THE TRANS\* DEATH NARRATIVE

### 2.1 Introduction: How Does it Feel to be A Problem?

In one of Dubois's most prolific pieces of writing, he ponders the realities of blackness at the turn of century in *The Souls of Black Folks*. Meditating on the affect of blackness, he states:

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. How does it feel to be a problem? ... I answer seldom a word (Dubois 1).

Dubois's rumination on the problems of race in the early 1900s is situated in a moment where he is seeing any and all gains made by formerly enslaved black people during post civil war reconstruction period slowly erode. He was writing during a period referred to as the nadir of reconstruction where the systems set up to ensure full political participation of formerly enslaved people into civic life in America were to be usurped by the birth of Jim Crow—a formal and informal system of white supremacy that continued the violences of slavery upon black people through various systems of social and political laws and rules that made black life impossible. The question that Dubois is asking is one with which he himself cannot even contend, blackness and the various realities of black life are not easily experienced or expressed. I imagine that blackness for Dubois is so incredibly painful, angering and complicated that even he himself, a scholar of black life, refuses to put to language the complicated nature of blackness. Perhaps this move is political, Dubois's move to leave a gap in response to the feelings of blackness is linked to the inexpressibility of black rage that also exists outside of discourse. I follow in the tradition of Dubois by asking the question: What is the feeling of blackness? And I respond that a primary feeling of blackness is rage.

Similar to the nadir of reconstruction when Dubois asked the question, “What does it feel like to be a problem?” I find it useful to ask the same question during our neoliberal era. My preferred definition of neoliberalism is from scholar Stephen Dillon’s work in the article “The Only Freedom I Can See” where he describes the way neoliberalism functions in our lives materially, he states:

Neoliberalism manages cultural, political and economic life to prioritize and maximize the mobility and proliferation of capital all costs. Neoliberalism attempts to “free” the market and private enterprise from constraints implemented by the state. This is accomplished by dismantling unions, public funding of social services (welfare, education, infrastructure and so on); environmental, labor, health and safety regulations; price controls; and any barriers to “free trade.” The neoliberal project is to disembed capital from any and all constraints. In addition, any state-owned institutions that control key industries like transportation, energy, education, healthcare, food, water and prisons are privatized in the name of efficiency, deregulation and freedom (Dillon 172).

Dillon’s definition characterizes the influence of neoliberalism in everyday life by attempting to free the market of all entanglements, particularly those that are in place by the state to protect people from harm. The implication of neoliberalism’s harm stretches even further when it engages with black life; neoliberal politicians and ideologues are attempting to restrict and destroy institutional systems that the most vulnerable of the black community depend upon to gain entry into education, jobs, participate in civic life, or keep people housed and fed between jobs that have been eroded. The breakdown of these institutions render black people the ultimate neoliberal devices through a combination of the infiltration of crack cocaine in the 1980s into black communities combined with mass incarceration, and lack of access to jobs with a living wage. I use the term neoliberal device to gesture toward the circulation of controlling images<sup>1</sup> of black people that function to move forward or expand neoliberal economic policy for everyone. I use the term device because one of its core meanings is “ a plan, scheme, or trick with a

particular aim” (dictionary.com). The controlling images that make up a neoliberal device are tropes of blackness circulated through the media and popular culture. The tropes that function as neoliberal devices are the dangerous black thug, the welfare queen, and the third image I am adding to the list is the missing or dead/trans\* person—three bodies that the state has historically and presently practices techniques of control upon via various social, cultural, legal and political controls. Their emotions are inspired by the quotidian reminder that their bodies have been transformed/harvested into material for various legal and extra legal forms of capitalist circulations; in the process, they as people have been left behind and written off as excess, as other, and as non-being. What binds together these bodies in an unlikely alliance is their queerness as Cathy Cohen<sup>2</sup> suggests but also their social death and possibility for material death.

In response to these three primary black tropes, another controlling image emerges—the figure of black social conservatism through the image of black respectability, characterized by Don Lemon, Bill Cosby, and as deployed by black institutions such as the church and the NAACP. Black respectability, as defined by Scholar Kali N. Gross, functions as a resistance to negative norms of blackness. Her work focuses specifically on the phenomenon of black respectability in the academy by thinking through black academics’ desires to craft images of blackness that are different from the ones that are circulated in the media, African Americans adopt a "politics of respectability. Claiming respectability through manners and morality furnished an avenue for African Americans to assert the will and agency to redefine themselves outside the prevailing racist discourses” (Gross 15-17). Circulating an image of black respectability does not disrupt negative feelings of blackness, in fact the circulation of a black respectable image, serves to further reinforce systemic controls based on white supremacy, classist, sexist, and abletist notions of black people. The ramifications of this split are dangerous;

it disallows black people with the most financial and political resources to align themselves with black communities who bear the brunt of oppressive regimes of power every single day. The split functions to keep black folks fighting each other when the fight is actually being waged against black people on the outside. The attacks on black people are characterized by the slow erosion of civil right gains made by movement foremothers and fathers during the tumultuous mid-century civil rights and Black Nationalist era. Specifically I am speaking to the institutional changes that have nearly destroyed affirmative action, key parts of the 1965 voting right act, and any all-social welfare systems. Instead black respectable outrage looks like Don Lemon furthering white supremacist-neoliberal aims by telling black people how to fix the problem of blackness he states:

"Black people, if you really want to fix the problem, here's just five things that you should think about doing," Lemon continued. Those five things, he said, were hiking up their pants, finishing school, not using the n-word, taking care of their communities and not having children out of wedlock." (Fung 1)

Lemon's comments are blaming all of the insidious terrors of white supremacy on black people instead of critiquing the institutionalizing techniques of neoliberalism as played out on the bodies of black folk. Outside of black internal fighting this era of neoliberalism is marked by a pervasive anti-black racism that is rooted in claims by whites of reverse racism, substantiated by technologies of diversity, and so-called color blind politics that are operating in such a way that maintains our delicate race, classed, gendered and abletist social order through the discourse of post raciality. All of these things have worked to render our ability to struggle impossible.



## 2.2 What is Black Rage?

We are living in a period of time in which it seems almost no individual ideology or nationalist politic based on identity alone can provide a clear pathway to change. Asking the question again, “What does it feel like to be a problem?” I answer that in this context it feels like rage, like silence, like love, like sadness, like “I don’t give a fuck” (nihilism). Black rage in particular is one of the primary feelings of blackness, an affect that is experienced on multiple registers of the body and psyche combined, an affect that is simultaneously incredibly sad and bursting with energy and force. The crushing feeling of blackness is still a system of silences impregnated with various centuries-old affect stemming from the peculiar institution of American slavery—feelings of failure, fear, pain, despair, rage, love, and liberation, to name a few.

Discourse fails to adequately describe the functioning of black rage for black people or racialized rage for othered bodies in general; thus to get closer to the meaning of what black rage is, group session respondents were asked to bring an object, image or media clip that represents black rage specifically and/or racialized rage more generally. Respondents shared the various media clips and stories with the rest of group explaining why they each brought specific items or media. What they provided was incredibly interesting; one examples that stands out is how Respondent #3 described black rage as a scene of the fictional retelling of the death of Hitler in the film *Inglorious Bastards*, written and directed by Quentin Tarantino. In his fictional rewriting of history, a band of American and European allies storm a theater performance where they believe Hitler is present. The main objective of the attack is to assassinate Hitler and kill as many Nazi and Nazi sympathizers present in the theater as possible. The clip is a multiple sensory experience, the theatre is on fire, the only sounds heard are screaming and bullets exiting

the chamber of a automatic gun. The final image shown is the impaling of Hitler's chest and head with bullets. The character shooting Hitler's face is a mixture of tenseness, pleasure, and release. The scene for Respondent #3 represents how black rage moves through her body physically and emotionally. The act of killing Hitler, represents her desire to kill white supremacy, an act she described as, "an appropriate amount of death" (Respondent #3). Further Respondent #1 described black rage as the tectonic sounds of the electronic synthesizer, or the thumping dark rhythmic sounds of a drum. The notion of rage represented through sound was influenced by the jarring lyrics to hip hop artist JA Rule's song, "Fuck You," which hurls at the listener, "I better murda them before they murda me." For Respondent #1 the intensity of the song conjures the reasons why black folks should be angry. Within the lyrics, a feeling of the possibility of death and the need to kill before being killed is indicative of the distinctive relationship between blackness and death—one that is present in some of her favorite hip-hop songs. These two descriptions of black rage affirm the intensity, the pain and the ontological reality of blackness; they suggest that to be black in America is to be a death-bound being.

Black rage is akin to a large burning room with the sounds of bullets leaving the chamber of a rifle ready to burst—explode at any time. Black rage is beats on a drum—a reverberation of sounds echoing through metal; black rage is electric. Black rage is a feeling that arises in response to the realities of blackness experienced in the everyday lives of black people. Rage however in of itself as a feeling borders upon the boundaries of psychological meaning, the bursting of the psyche, which could also be accompanied by the possibility of violence. Rage differs from anger in nuance; I prefer rage to anger due to the possibility of violence within the affect, rage as a feeling is both felt within the psyche as well as felt in the body. Research respondents describe physically feeling rage in the throat down through the bowels and describe

experiencing a temporary loss of self or of the body—leaving one to feel as though an extreme amount of time has passed when it has only been minutes or seconds (Respondent #2).

Further black rage is incredibly powerful because it is the very emotion that one is not supposed to reside within. Black indignation is strictly forbidden, policed, and circulates on the register of the stereotype due to the prevailing respectable notion that peace and inaction are the only way to respond to white supremacy and/or the possibility of death. Religious leaders, politicians, and police officers live in constant fear of black rage because rage in response to black death or black social death can keep one alive as evidenced in the case of CeCe McDonald or mobilize thousands of people across the globe to take radical action in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the death of Trayvon Martin. The power of black rage can shift the trajectory of political movements, which is proven by movement work from the past. Black Nationalism birthed from rage and frustration when the status quo of peaceful protest, the political strategy of the civil rights movement, focused upon turning the other cheek. When Stokely Carmichael chanted “black power” “black power” at the March Against Fear in 1966, he said it while pumping his fist in the air and with an earnest look on his face. A new movement was born in the wake of rage that emerged from the feeling and reality of black non-being. Thus black rage becomes political when intertwined with the material realities of both social and material death.

Each and every single time a black person dies at the hands of the state or by a white supremacist vigilante we tap into a collective black affective economy that keeps the ever-present reality of death present in our realities lest we forget. Black people know how to handle death because we intimately know that systemic injustices can end our lives at any moment, at any juncture, and for any reason. Culturally death, social or material it is something we have

become accustomed to; the colloquial phrase “All I have to do is be black and die” is a phrase uttered by elders passed on through generations. Stated in moments of extreme frustration or feelings of powerlessness, this phrase is key to affective black ontology. An affective black ontology is found in the black non-being or black social death. The notion of non-being evokes the reality that blackness in its current form cannot simultaneously function as a subject—a subject is literally a human who is recognizable by the state apparatus, one who can enjoy the protections of the state police, who can fully participate in civic life, a life where you understand that to be human means that you will die...one day, but it does not mean that death is a ever presently awaiting you. Black non-being is the physical manifestation of black slavery, Jim Crow, and white supremacy on the skin. Black people are a constant reminder of the ugly parts of the American past and the persistent problem, to re-invoke DuBois’s question, of black American life in the present. Black material and social death has been present throughout modern (neo)colonial history but literal black death in combination with black rage creates an opening, a space, for a possible rupture in the social fabric that stitches our lives together.

The possibilities of black rage and social death working in concert are present in the case study of CeCe McDonald, who as a black transgender working class woman is deeply cemented in notions of non-being due to her blackness and her counter gender identity that does not align with the gender she was assigned at birth. CeCe’s moment of rage did not set off a massive black political response problematically however her moment of rage bursted apart what it means to be black and trans\* for queer communities. Instead CeCe’s use of black rage allowed for her to disrupt the narrative that trans\* women must die by killing her transmisogynist attacker with a pair of scissors she kept in her purse for protection. Black rage became a tool of protection for CeCe, similar to the scissors she kept in her purse, which on an individual level

helped to keep her alive that evening. Collectively, her use of black and trans\* rage ignited the queer community to rally for her cause and set off a conversation in the queer and transgender communities on anti-black racism in combination with gender based transphobic attacks.

### **2.3 Black and Trans\***

In my exploration of what black rage can do in response to social death therein lies a great possibility; the rest of the chapter will explore how rage in concert with the affect of love disrupt the victim narrative of trans\* women must die. In the case of CeCe McDonald, she utilized rage as a two-fold device to protect herself, evoking notions of self-love to defend her black and trans\* body from white supremacist and transmisogynist attackers.

*Women respond to racism. My response to racism is anger. I have lived with that anger, on that anger, beneath that anger, on top of that anger. Ignoring that anger, feeding upon that anger, learning to use that anger before it laid my visions to waste, for most of my life. Once I did it in silence, afraid of the weight of that anger. My fear of that anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also. (Lorde, pg. 278) - Audre Lorde 1981*

Audre Lorde's words tell us that we should not be afraid of our anger, in fact she exhorts us to learn how to use it lest we ourselves may be destroyed in the process. Clearly in this quote Lorde is discussing the affect of anger specifically; however, what she describes more closely resembles my vision of the function of black rage. For black folks—and the same could be extended to trans\* people—rage is a mode of survival, a tool of existence that radically shapes our realities. CeCe utilized a tool most people of color must have in their proverbial back pocket and raged against the bigotry and violence pressed upon her. To rage or commit violence against those who choose to destroy you is a liberating act, an act of love, to have love for oneself is to take care of the body mentally and physically. So, the question that bubbles to the surface is,

what does it mean for a non-being to radically love themselves, and what if that love means they must rage against those who seek to destroy them? This is the question that I want to interrogate. Thus, I argue that rage is the affective vehicle for historically marginalized subjects to radically love themselves by disrupting historical narratives of otherness on the skin when faced with violence.

The rage that ensues from CeCe's confrontation with a white supremacist and transphobic crowd presents a unique location of analysis of affect, queer, and transgender studies. My interrogation of CeCe McDonald's case is not an attempt to speak for her; I am using CeCe McDonald's case because it simultaneously rips apart the narrative of a post racial and post feminist society where diversity reigns supreme and makes visible the contradictions and bias inherent to our judicial system with regard to black and transgender bodies.

*Narrative of the events of June 5, 2011 in the Case of CeCe McDonald:*

*Around 12:30 am on June 5, 2011, McDonald and four of her friends (all of them black) were on their way to Cub Foods to get some food. As they walked past the Schooner Tavern, at 2901 27th Ave S in Minneapolis, a man and two women (all of them white) began to yell epithets at them. They called McDonald and her friends 'faggots,' 'niggers,' and 'chicks with dicks,' and suggested that McDonald was 'dressed as a woman' in order to 'rape' Dean Schmitz, one of the attackers.*

*As they were shouting, one of the women smashed her drink into the side of McDonald's face, lacerating her salivary gland and slicing her cheek all the way through. A fight ensued, with more people joining in. What happened during the fight is unclear, but during the incident Dean Schmitz was stabbed; he later died of his injuries (Support CeCe Committee 1).*

Sara Ahmed's work on the cultural politics of emotions provides a useful frame through which to think about CeCe's altercation with Schmitz. She contends:

The ordinary becomes that which is already under threat by the imagined other whose proximity becomes a crime against a person as well as place... They are assumed to 'cause' injury to the ordinary white subject such that their proximity is read as the origin of feelings (Ahmed 43 - 44).

The appearance of CeCe within the proximity of Schmitz and crew rendered CeCe already guilty for merely appearing in space. CeCe's blackness and trans\* body was immediately registered as an assault to the space of Schmitz, circulating a feeling of being under siege from the harmful others. Ahmed's ideas of how the ordinary that can become a perceived object of harm is incredibly salient when thinking about CeCe and Schmitz's encounter. Reading CeCe's body through Ahmed's notion of affect in relationship to object situates CeCe McDonald as non-being and not legible to heteropatriarchal power. CeCe's objecthood was affirmed through the anti-black and transphobic epithets hurled at her that night. Schmitz's subjectivity was under attack in relation to CeCe's objecthood; in other words because CeCe is trans\*black and poor, she is not seen as human; instead she is seen as an object of harm to Schmitz who is a subject due to his white skin and cis-gender masculine identity.

Ahmed states that "feelings instead take the 'shape' of contact we have with objects...we do not love and hate because objects are good or bad, but rather they seem 'beneficial' or 'harmful'" (Ahmed 5). Clearly in the instance of the attack, Dean Schmitz and crew felt that CeCe was a harmful object, she presented a threat not only to him personally but a blatant attack on his notions of white nationalism. I cannot speak for Dean Schmitz much like I am not the voice for CeCe, but what can be speculated is Schmitz's insecurity about his white nationalism is connected to the declining wages of whiteness compounded by a shrinking economy. The fabled promises of whiteness in the past meant that a white men would never face juridical charges for the killing of a black body; white men had the choice of procuring a good job; access to the privileges and protections of the state; easier access to capital; and the guarantee of social and spatial divisions between white and non white. Regardless of the decline of the informal promises of whiteness, white supremacy is alive and well but in our post-post reality it operates

on differing registers and in combination with other forms of discourse based on the bodies of other non-beings. Through this formulation CeCe became an object of harm—a physical manifestation of all the losses of a real and imagined white past.

As a harmful object, CeCe is then incredibly sticky, to borrow Ahmed’s formulation: “[E]motions can move through the movement or circulation of objects. Such objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension” (Ahmed 11). The social tensions attached to the epithets that were used by Schmitz and crew that night — “*faggots,*’ *niggers,*’ and *chicks with dicks*”— stuck to CeCe, reinforcing her objectivity, and cementing her as an object of hate. She then became saturated with affect, the historical narrative flashing back to a time in American history where a white man controlled the nation and the body of the slave, thus his language solidified racial tensions that boil under the surface of the United States supposed post-racial piety. These abject narratives that equate blackness with criminality, blackness with disposability, and transgender with sexually depravity reinforced her harmfulness as an object, and stuck to CeCe that night.

#### **2.4 The Implications of CeCe’s Rage**

CeCe used black rage to unstick abject circulating emotions centered on her body as an object in relation to the subject of Dean Schmitz on June 5, 2011. This argument is heavily influenced by the historical implications of decolonization as framed in Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*. In his seminal work, he discusses the tense relationship between the settler (colonizer) and the native (the colonized) in French-controlled Algeria. The native settler dichotomy does not necessarily translate to an American context, due to the historical realities of slavery verses colonization, yet what is translatable is Fanon’s exploration of the cleansing or democratizing force of violence and enacted by the native. By situating herself as the native, and



Dean Schmitz as the settler, CeCe interrupts the notion that transgender women must die by employing black rage shown through violence to stop the symbolic evocation of power and the threat of physical violence. The dead or dying trans\* women narrative is the usual story circulated around the lives of trans\* women, in fact it is easy to believe that the only news of trans\* women's lives is told in their death. CeCe's survival disrupted this narrative, as stated here from the Minneapolis Star Tribune on June 5, 2012, violence was not new to CeCe:

*Chrishaun "CeCe" McDonald admitted Monday that an inner rage brewed long before an exchange of words that ended with the deadly stabbing of Dean Schmitz outside a bar in south Minneapolis last year.*

*The pressures of being transgendered -- namely, fear of rejection and of hostile reactions from others -- resulted in spite and hatefulness, said McDonald, who is transitioning from a man to a woman.*

*That pent-up fury exploded on the night of June 5, 2011, during an argument when McDonald stabbed the 47-year-old in the heart, killing him instantly.*

*But McDonald, who on Monday was sent to prison for 3 1/2 years, said the responsibility for what happened is mutual. "I'm sure that to Dean's family, he was a loving, caring person," McDonald, 24, told Judge Daniel Moreno. "But that is not what I saw that night. I saw a racist, transphobic, narcissistic bigot who did not have any regard for my friends and I."*

The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* usefully illuminates the extreme scrutiny and difficulty of CeCe's life prior to her interaction with Schmitz, while this quote speaks to the long-term rage she felt from existing as a non-being, it also serves as force to condemn her. The affect of rage is both productive and destructive, in CeCe's case it literally saved her life, but this quote also serves as a warning. The reporter is simultaneously publicizing the power of black rage and warning others the extent in which the law will go to in order to control and contain it. CeCe's quote, "namely, fear of rejection and hostile reactions from others" allude to a life full of fear and isolation. The crushing weight and pressure pushed her to act, she was not going to take

Dean Schmitz's attempt to evoke historical discourse meant to objectify her and nullify her subjectivity. Clearly Schmitz could identify the sensitivities of her black transgendered identity, and he chose to exploit them. Fanon compares the sensitivities of historical and present indiscretions to an open sore, "In the colonial world, the emotional sensitivity of the native is kept on the surface of his skin like an open sore which flinches from the caustic agent;" (Fanon 44) This open sore of transgender = sexuality depraved, black = criminal, and black = disposable made her an easy target that night. CeCe used rage based on her non-being as both black and trans\* as an affective tool of last resort similar to the scissors she kept in her purse for physical protection. She used rage, its productive cleansing, to push out the pain and fear associated with the material realities of her life. Such a use of rage can work to unstick the abject emotions coming from the historical narratives of slavery, gender policing and sexual repression in her life. Fanon validates this claim in reference to the native, "At the level of the individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the natives from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (Fanon 74). For CeCe living as black and transgender was not easy and she faced violence daily. So often on the news or from the pulpit someone is condemning the use of violence in communities, or in the world. But when it comes to violence at home, what is missing from the outcry is a thorough investigation of the violence non-beings negotiate every day. The violence of capitalism, the violence of policing, the violence of food insecurity, the violence of white supremacy, the violence of gender oppression are all crushing forms of violence.

What is missing from the analysis is an interrogation of the psychological effects of having to live under the "pressure" of non-being, in other words CeCe speaks of being black

and trans\*, homeless and abandoned. After her act of rage CeCe states from her jail cell confirming Fanon's theory:

*I would have rather been punished for asserting myself than become another victim of hatred. No, I'm not saying violence is key or all people should react the way I did, but our communities, whether here or abroad, have become the victim of malicious and hateful crimes (Support CeCe blog).*

CeCe's comments clearly demonstrate that violence enacted through black rage—what she describes as “*pent-up fury exploding*”—describe her feeling when she killed Dean Schmitz. The bursting of black rage is not a new affect; in *black Skin White Masks*, Fanon discusses the realities of being an object among subjects (Fanon 109). The bursting that Fanon locates and the space between the subsequent rearrangement of the new body is where the revolutionary possibilities of black rage become apparent. The force, the energy of black rage burst apart CeCe and in her process of rearranging a new self she lived and by doing so she disrupted the trans\* women must die narrative that is wrapped up in white supremacist heteropatriarchal power. Further CeCe's objecthood as black and transgender situates her connection to the circulating narratives of historical oppression based on her identity. Her survival of this attack and the subsequent collective response to first free her then save her CeCe charts a different sort of path of what a black and transgender struggle could be. When CeCe states that “our communities, whether here or abroad, have become the victim of malicious and hateful crimes,” she connects her struggle to other non-being who face similar violences. CeCe fought back and, in doing so, recognized and claimed her own agency in her actions. Her retrospective framing of those actions through the invocation of a collective—“our communities”—implies that her experience is not the exception rather it is the norm. The fact that members of those communities responded, namely by creating a blog, publishing her letter to her supporters,

sending CeCe books to read, or letters of encouragement, and organizing jail visits further demonstrates that there is a concrete materiality to that notion of community.

The question that still remains is how did CeCe radically love herself by using rage as the proverbial tool of last resort? More effectively how do love and rage work in a spiral?

CeCe's own words give a useful starting point for answering these questions:

*Those who oppose us couldn't stop the love which has, and was defined, to bring us all together. To give us the strength and the mental durability to go the distance and fight this evil who tells us we are wrong. We all were made in the image of God, and he makes no mistakes. CeCe McDonald (Support CeCe blog)*

In order to fully understand how love and rage work in spiral, an exploration of the affect of pain must first occur. Pain, extreme pain, hurt, fear, feelings of rejection is what the subjects feel prior to the event of rage. Dean Schmitz sought to hurt CeCe by yelling violent racial and sexual epithets meant to solidify and reinforce her status as non-being. Pain is the first reaction to the hurt that Dean enacted toward CeCe, before the rage. CeCe was hurt by Dean Schmitz's attack, and to stop that pain she used rage as a radical action to love herself. CeCe's rage became love in the moment CeCe fought back. The spiral of love and rage stopped the painful event and in the aftermath of this action, CeCe insisted upon connecting her violent event to other systemic attacks on people of color and transgender communities and to her own decision to love herself and those communities with which she identifies. CeCe shared her pain, an act that functions as a radical opening to love. "Love is often conveyed by wanting to feel the loved one's pain, to feel the pain on the her behalf. I want to have her pain so she can be released from it" (Ahmed, 30). The creation of the Support CeCe blog by her supporter shared updates on CeCe's case and published letters written by CeCe is the digital manifestation of CeCe's love and her communities' love for her back. The blog created by the collective (the location of the

majority of the material used for this paper) started off a chain of events that worked to circulate love across the country and bringing to light the need to fight gender oppression as well as white supremacy simultaneously.

The original aim of the support CeCe collective was to “Free CeCe,” a call that changed due to CeCe’s demand that they stop trying to free her. On the Support CeCe blog, the collective published a letter requesting supporters to stop all attempts get a pardon granted on her behalf, “CeCe does not want supporters to launch long-term campaigns on her behalf that exceptionalize her situation.... For supporters to push for her to be transferred from one hell to another only serves the purpose of misdirecting energy away from the real problems of incarceration in the U.S., and the problem of the Prison Industrial Complex as a whole” (Support CeCe Collective). CeCe’s decision to stop all attempt of calling for a pardon was another use of love stemming from her rage, she insisted upon not becoming exceptional because she knew that her story is not unusual. In our neoliberal era prisons are in the business of locking up non-beings particularly people of color, queer, trans\* and poor folks—using their bodies as raw material to generate profit. CeCe’s move to collectivize her struggle has bridged the gaps between non-beings bringing groups of people closer to one another through shared understandings of what it means to exist as a non-being to large institutional regimes of power. CeCe used the media attention along with the attention of the queer communities to link her struggle to all sorts of bodies who are excessive, disposable and unimportant. The spiral of love and rage that CeCe had for herself had successfully unstuck abject circulating emotions from her body, that love spread outside herself through CeCe’s connecting her struggle to other non-beings and structural forces that want to entrap her and others like her.

## 2.5 End

There is something outside of discourse about the simultaneity of blackness and trans\* identity on the skin of the body that renders one an object of harm. That something has its connections to histories of bygone eras and current manifestations of gender-based hatred that spiraled in concert on June 5, 2011. The actions of CeCe McDonald on that night could be analyzed in numerous directions; however in my investigation of her actions on that night as well as her own narrative she has crafted in reflecting on that evening CeCe very powerfully used black rage as a force to protect herself from the death. She was able to disrupt the typical trans\* woman narrative that always renders trans\* women dead at the end of the story. I say this with great care, what CeCe managed was at great cost to her, at the end of the narrative there is the death of Dean Schmitz. But in the spirit of Fanon sometimes the blood of the settler, the blood of the white supremacist trans\* misogynist is needed to cleanse the body of the native for her to gain herself respect and illuminate the destructive nature of white supremacy in concert with the transmisogyny rampant in American society.

Recently CeCe's plight has gained renewed interest through the attention of prominent trans\* actress, Lavern Cox, who stars in Netflix's *Orange is the New Black*, a dramity that is based on the lives of various women in a federal minimum-security prison. The documentary Cox is producing is tentatively titled: "Free CECE" where Cox is trying to use CeCe's story to help raise consciousness on the sometimes devastating realities of trans\* people in particular and the lives of trans\* women in general in the United States. Cox and CeCe have become experts at doing the impossible; they bring together issues of white supremacy and trans misogyny by critiquing the prison industrial complex, a system that they both name as violent toward trans\* people, people of color and in particular trans\* people of color. Through their process of

strategic discourse they are aligning issues that could flatly be perceived as trans\* issues only or as /people of color issue only in a way that powerfully links communities to which both CeCe and Lavern belong, but due to their gender identity are assumed to only be represented through trans\* discourse.

CeCe's use of black rage is not meant to be cause for complete celebration, she paid a great debt for her survival by spending nineteen months of a forty-one month sentence in a Minnesota prison and was released on January 13, 2014 due to "good behavior." She literally was punished by civil society for surviving a racist and transphobic attack on her body, and further degraded by spending her time in a men's prison. CeCe loved herself and her community so much, that she used black rage as a tool of last resort. The device of love and rage allowed for her pain to be shared with communities so they can love her back. CeCe's usage of the devices of love and rage spurred a social justice campaign that continued to support her while she was in prison. In this case study, CeCe McDonald's use of black rage that evoked notions of self love has proven 1) that black rage is an energy—a force capable of helping CeCe survive the terrible spectacl-ization of her flesh, and proved Scholar Fred Moten's argument correct, "The history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist" (Moten 1). 2) Through her survival CeCe's rage was capable of rupturing the narrative of trans\* women must die by surviving her attack and killing her aggressor. Dean Schmitz's death and CeCe's survival ruptured the narrative surrounding trans\* women and crafted a new narrative—one that shows that even the most othered amongst us can defeat the physical manifestations of oppressive power bent on destruction of difference. 3) When black rage is utilized in a moment of life or death it can bridge the gaps and the spaces between non-beings allowing for situated solidarity to emerge.

### 3 AFRO PESSIMISM AND THE BUSTING OF BLACKNESS: TRAYVON MARTIN AND THE FORCE OF BLACK RAGE

#### 3.1 Introduction: Aunt Hestor's Screaming

In the canon of Afro-Pessimism, Saidya V. Hartman's book *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-century America* approaches the terror of slavery by situating the violent unbecoming of a slave through the everyday performances of blackness. She starts the opening paragraph with a gesture towards Fredrick Douglass's account of Aunt Hestor's screaming in his slave narrative. Hartman purposely starts at the place of Aunt Hestor's screaming to alert the reader to the active decision *not* to describe "the terrible spectacle" of her screaming. Hartman's project is to focus on the mundane, the musicality, the juridical to think through the harsh realities of blackness both during and in the period immediately following American black chattel slavery. In her own words Hartman states:

Rather than inciting indignation, too often they immure us to pain by virtue of their familiarity—the oft-repeated or restored character of these accounts and our distance from them are signaled by the theatrical language usually resorted to in describing these instances—and especially because they reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering. (3)

Hartman is pointing to the distancing between the experience of the black slave and the reality of the reader who engages in attempting to understand the sheer capacity of slavery to enact such despicable tactics of destruction on a body. Instead of leading the reader toward rage and I would presume action—the reader engages with the most painful parts of the narrative, the parts that make the telling of tragedies of slavery become unreal, therefore pushing the reader toward self-reflection and pity. These are orientations and/or feelings that allow the reader to feel a distance from slavery and assume a certain sort of resolve about this horrendous thing that occurred so very long ago. Reaffirming that the distance between the reader of the horrendous



act and from culpability with slavery. Hartman is thus disrupting the libidinal nature of slave narratives for whites by proving to the reader that there is no ontological difference between the life of slave during slavery verses life black people post slavery. The reason why Aunt Hestor is screaming does not matter, instead it is the very fact that she is screaming that for Hartman and other Afro Pessimists denotes black ontology. I would add that it is a black ontology that is steeped in social and material death, and a constancy of unbecoming through an accumulation of everyday acts that can lead one to the place of bursting. I start my work here, at the advent of Aunt Hestor's screaming juxtaposed to the screaming of Trayvon Martin as he died at the hands of mixed-race white supremacist George Zimmerman. Trayvon's screams, recorded through Zimmerman's recorded 911 call, occurred as Zimmerman wrestled Trayvon to the ground. Trayvon could be heard screaming, "help!" and suddenly the sound of a gunshot ended fifteen-year-old Martin's life (*Mother Jones*). I share the details of Trayvon's screaming alongside Hartman's discussion of Aunt Hestor's screaming to explore scholar Frantz Fanon's notions of "bursting."

I depart from Afro Pessimism just as I turn toward it—a large portion of my project is interested in thinking through the positionality of blackness within in an Afro Pessimist frame. Afro Pessimism argues that blackness is constituted on the skin through an accumulation of violence upon the flesh of the slave/black; the lack of ontological differentiation of blackness during and post slavery; the primacy of the relationship of black captive flesh to American white democracy in order to maintain civil society; the fungibility of blackness to others; and more succinctly the realities of blackness as an object rather than a subject and the positionality of black death as the lenses through which to understand Black life (Pak 5-12 ). Where I depart from my own pessimist turn is to engage seriously with black rage as a hopeful disruption of the

sometimes devastating realities of blackness. The very notion of providing a hopeful possibility out of the negation of blackness goes against what Afro pessimist Frank Wilderson argues is the utility of Afro Pessimist scholarship as it leaves an openness to blackness most black scholars want to fill (Wilderson Hartman 183). Nevertheless, black rage is a powerful affect— one that Wilderson gestures towards in the last few paragraphs of his interview with Saidya Hartman titled, *The Position of the Unthought: Frank Wilderson Interviews Saidya Hartman* thereby contradicting his previous position. They discuss black rage and its possibility through a critique and reformulation of the politics of reparations for descendents of the formerly enslaved. Wilderson specifically critiques the reparations people for presenting slavery as a historical phenomenon that has *ended* and as he coyly states, “has left blacks at an unfair disadvantage.” Instead Wilderson and Hartman both critique reparations for assuming that the despotism of slavery in black life has ended, when they both believe that the violences of slavery have shifted and now operate on a different register. The error of the reparations people, which has serious implications by situating slavery as having an end, has managed to tap into black rage while simultaneously trying to control it, thus lessening the power of black rage. He describes the implications of the reparations framework in the quote:

Through such a move the reparations folks literally waste a political weapon, they dull the knife, they keep the tiger in the cage, because here is a weapon which could spew forth in untold directions: I’m thinking here of Nat Turner’s greatest night. Instead, that weapon is denuded or, maybe a policed method of conveyance. They’re trying to simultaneously mobilize and manage black rage. If the reparation were thought of not as something to be achieved, but as a weapon that could precipitate a crisis in American Institutionally, then it could be worked out a lot differently from the way its presented... Unleash the Tiger and let it do its thing.

SVH— at the very least that would entail a transformation of the social order  
 F.W.—Yes, they would have to call for a revolution (Wilderson and Hartman 198-99).

I am picking up on the unexpected opening for black rage that Hartman and Wilderson have provided. In the moment where they do the exact opposite of what an Afro Pessimist position is against— providing a way out of the negation of blackness, buried in the last few lines of their interview, they gesture toward black rage as a weapon that can transform the social order and create the conditions for a revolution. Thus I am advocating for a serious consideration of what black rage can do when using an Afro Pessimist frame on a massive political scale. When unleashed, uncontrolled, and unfettered from the pole of control and surveillance put into place by the black political class and white elite, black rage is one of the best weapons against neoliberalism. Black rage has the capability of bridging the gaps between bodies and creating a feeling of cooperation and connectedness between various sorts of non-beings.

Asking the question of what black rage can do sets up the other half of my project—a framework of bursting that 1) situates black rage as synonymous with bursting. Black rage is an exceptional feeling grounded in the accumulation of the mundane and quotidian violence of white supremacy on the body. 2) Black rage is a political emotion and affect that disrupts linear notions of time. 3) Black rage is fungible to other non-beings in protest space. An exploration of black rage that is synonymous with bursting will chart all parts of the bursting. The formulation comes from Fanon:

“Dirty nigger!” Or Simply, “Look, a Negro!”... Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others. Their attention was a liberation running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it. But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed. Nothing Happened, *I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self* (Fanon 109).

The feeling of bursting, however incredibly painful, does produce something new in its rearrangement. For Fanon, the rearrangement was his psyche within in his new body; for my work the rearrangement is seen within the gathering of distraught angry people within protest space. When a framework of bursting is applied to the justice for Trayvon Martin rally and protests in summer of 2013 in Atlanta, Georgia in West End Park the possibility in impossibility is apparent. The possibility is in the bursting of the black body and the subsequent fleeting moments of rearrangement is central to my argument. Black rage shared among differing people within protest space can shatter our current social order dependent upon post-post notions of race and gender and give all of us a glimpse and the feeling of liberation.

Black rage as an energy source presents us with other possibilities when connected with (social and material) death. For CeCe McDonald black rage was used to save her life, collectivize support for her in prison, connect her experience to other people within the prison industrial complex, and her survival was able to disrupt the transgender women must die narrative charting a new narrative around the lives of trans\* women. When black rage is attached to the death of a young black man it becomes like the dry smoldering tinder of a raging wild fire able to set off a chain of protests across the world that lead to radical actions. In other words the horrible reality of Trayvon Martin's death allowed for a complete bursting apart of the post-post racial and feminist reality of our neoliberal era by spurring people to take over streets and highways across the world. While the repercussions of the various marches that took place across the world on July 14, 2013 are not quite yet known, it is however clear that something different occurred and all of us who participated in the various marches across the world have been changed for it. Trayvon Martin's death tapped into the affective economy of black rage that spans multiple time periods and allowed for new forms of social relations to emerge.

Specifically in this chapter I will argue that Black Rage during the Justice for Trayvon Martin rally allowed for the edges of what a new world within the shell of the old can become. As I have argued earlier, the analysis of Trayvon Martin is contextualized by my understanding of the hopeful possibilities in an Afro pessimist framework in order to emphasize a different register of hope – not one that is naive or colorblind, but one that is attendant to the realities of non-beings. Through the pain of non-being and the audible sounds of black death, what can emerge is a new political class of bodies who are black, who are brown, who are white, queer, disabled—othered.

Methodologically this chapter will analyze interviews of participants in the justice for Trayvon Martin rally and march that took place on July 14, 2013 in the West End park of Southwest Atlanta Georgia, organized by a national body of people who called themselves the Justice for Trayvon Martin Committee, and of which I was a member. It was within the space of outrage, anger, and sadness that, as politico and scholar, I had the opportunity to test my own theory of the possibilities of black rage. This chapter represents my findings and the experiences of research respondents who attended the march/rally as well. I make this move to guard against solely relying on my own interpretations of the protest and rally rendering my conclusions biased and instead provide a limited amount of my own experience of the march and rally in conversation with research respondents' experiences.

### **3.2 Trayvon Martin Organizing Committee**

The Trayvon Martin Organizing Committee (TMOC) was a temporary political collective interested in cultivating the possible rupture that emerged after the shock of the George Zimmerman Verdict. What follows is a copy of statement we wrote days prior to the verdict:

*No Justice in the Courts! National Action for Trayvon Martin When the Verdict Comes!*

*We have no plans to celebrate any conviction, since all possible “legal” outcomes point squarely toward a re-imagined Jim Crow justice*

A verdict is coming in the trial of George Zimmerman, for the cold-blooded murder of Trayvon Martin. We don't know what the mostly white jury will decide, but this much we do know: there will be NO justice for Trayvon or the thousands of others like him.

Zimmerman may be acquitted, and while this would be a slap in the face, the *entire trial* has been a slap in the face, the media campaign to demonize this young man is a slap in the face, and the entire system of racial profiling, mass incarceration, capitalist exploitation, and police terror is a slap in the face and a punch in the gut.

Trayvon Martin *stood his ground*, and we applaud him, although it didn't save his life and has been used to justify his death.

Zimmerman is certainly worthy of a murder conviction, but even this unlikely outcome doesn't bring Trayvon back certainly does not mean an end to similar vigilante executions or the more official executions carried out daily by police. A conviction would serve as false “proof” that we are truly post-racial, that justice has been served, something we know is a brutal lie.

A manslaughter verdict would be even worse than an acquittal: the “justice” system could crow about how it had delivered the goods while Zimmerman is locked up for a couple of measly years. *We have no plans to celebrate any conviction, since all possible “legal” outcomes point squarely toward a re-imagined Jim Crow justice*, where only those interested in upholding a white supremacist and classist status quo will find freedom.

Thus we ask you to stand up on your block, in your community, in your city and join us in the streets at 6pm on the day of the verdict, regardless of what it is. Come to express your sorrow, your rage, and your continuing demand for justice for Trayvon and beyond.

The legal system won't save us, the California prison strike reminds us.

The clergy won't save us, and some are already teaming up with the police to prevent the righteous anger of the people from being expressed.

The politicians damn sure won't save us.

*Only we can save us.*

(trayvonmartinorganizingcommittee.org)

The TMOC wrote the statement to capitalize on the sensational nature of the case in the media and use it to tap into the economy of black rage nationally. The death of Trayvon Martin became a sensation—different than a spectacle in that a spectacle implies a fetish of otherness. To call the media attention and the political activism around the death of Trayvon a spectacle the activism around it was meant to satisfy the libidinal desires of a spectator (Hall 264-7). Instead, sensation implies a certain amount of feeling that builds and is inescapable from one's cultural imaginary; it is therefore also able to register affect. The death of Trayvon Martin became sensational nationally due to an accumulation of racially motivated mistakes and blatant refusal to arrest white people for killing black folks by the Sanford Florida Police prior to the death of Trayvon Martin. On January 2011 it was reported by the Orlando Sentinel that previous chief of police Brian Tooley was forced out of office for allowing Justin Collison, son of a police lieutenant, to sucker punch a black homeless man and go unpunished. A few days after the event, chief Tooley was emailed a YouTube video of Collison punching the homeless man and still refused to arrest him, one month later the clip went viral and Collison was forced by the black community's demand for justice to turn himself into the Sanford Police department (Lee 2011). Another example of whites not being punished for the death of black folks is the death of unarmed black teenager Travares McGill by a pair of apartment complex security guards, one of whom was the son of a Sanford police officer and the other a police department volunteer. The two guards claimed they fired shots into McGill's vehicle to stop him from running them over with his car after McGill dropped off friends in the early morning hours; this claim is incongruent with the autopsy reports that claims McGill died of gunshot wounds to the back. The two men were charged and

arrested but their case was dismissed immediately due to a lack of evidence provided by the Sanford police (Lee 2011). The details of both of these cases show how an accumulation of white terror on black communities created the conditions for a bursting. The police chief was fired for not arresting Collison and charges were filed for the two security guards who executed another black man and went free but what has not occurred is justice for either case. What we have seen is a reinforcement by the police and the courts that there will be no retribution for killing black people locally in Sanford, Florida, a reality that buttresses an ontology of black death and white supremacist terror nationally.

Second, the TMOC wrote the statement to present a third pole within the media coverage, to burst apart the various opposing poles that created a binary within the narrative about the case. One of the positions held that Zimmerman's claim that his killing of Trayvon was self-defense and not racially motivated are true. A second pole represented the combined interests of the police and the black pastoral class who were instructed to send the message to their congregations that justice had been served to avoid potential race riots stemming from what they thought was going to be a Rodney King-type response to Zimmerman's acquittal (Carnell). This coordinated effort on behalf of black pastors is shown through Reverend Jessie Jackson's tweets on the night of the acquittal: "Avoid violence, it will lead to more tragedies... Find a way for self construction not deconstruction in this time of despair" (Jackson). Our statement burst apart the binary positions around Trayvon Martin and our message of justice and liberation with a distinct departure from the old ways of doing black politics, one that did not depend upon leaders religious or otherwise. Instead our message depended upon regular people deciding together with other regular people what they wanted their justice to look like. The statement created by



the TMOC argues that justice could not be found within the official court apparatus, regardless of a conviction or an acquittal; it further argues that no amount of punishment could bring back Trayvon to his family or his community. So we demanded that everyone in every city take our flyer templates and photocopy the location of the march in their locale at 6:00 p.m. the day after the verdict. At best we thought the member cities represented on the TMOC would pull off a small speak out. Instead what happened was unimaginable. Over sixty cities in the United States and globally had a protest and/or march (Trayvon Martin Organizing Committee). Black rage on a mass scale at the Justice for Trayvon Martin marches across the world created space for radical political action as protestors took to the streets, took over highways, and worked to burst apart the boundaries of what is possible in our impossible era.

Nationally the TMOC message of justified black rage reached people globally who began to organize marches and protest in their cities and towns. The statement was shared thousands of times via various social media outlets such as Facebook via a public event page, on twitter with the hashtag of #HoodiesUp and on the ground using the visually stunning flyer templates. The TMOC website became a digital meeting place for various people to ask if anyone was organizing an event in a given city; members of the TMOC national committee would respond quickly, “none yet you organize one.” The TMOC utilized the sensational nature of the Zimmerman acquittal to pull people away from the comfort of their homes, onto the streets, taking over highways, chanting we will not take it anymore. We will not stand for legally sanctioned white supremacist violence and all of us together are here to prove it.

On July 14, 2013 the West End in Southwest Atlanta burst apart, to our knowledge no one had done a protest at the West End park before, and this made it incredibly easy for people who were most affected by white supremacist terror to walk out of their homes and take to the

streets to voice their rage, their pain and their sorrow. The Justice for Trayvon rally and march was organized by a small cadre of seven people, who within a space of twelve hours, managed to get over a thousand people to show up to the protest. The Atlanta TMOC accomplished this task through the TMOC national website, the flyer and the #HoodiesUP twitter hashtag combined with the on-the-ground leafleting in various neighborhoods in Atlanta. The Atlanta TMOC picked West End Park as the location, in contrast to the usual location of the Georgia State Capital, because it is situated in a historically black neighborhood that has not completely shifted due to gentrification. Every summer the park is renamed Malcolm X Park in celebration of the life of the revolutionary political leader's birthday through a festival featuring food and music. The park was a gathering place, it had a well-maintained children's play ground, it had a covered basketball court where community members could play ball regardless of rain or some other form of precipitation. The West End park became a starting place of the Atlanta Trayvon Protest where numerous people—mostly black but also visibly queer, white, and brown all together—came together to share in our rage and in our disgust with the realities of black life in America.

### **3.3 I Burst Apart**

Question: Why did you attend the Justice for Trayvon March on July 14, 2013 in West End Park in Atlanta Georgia?

Answer: "I came because he (Zimmerman) was brown ... and I didn't want them (black folks) to associate him with me... I wanted them to know I was angry too" (Respondent #1)

Answer: "I came to the march because it...it just felt personal" – (Respondent #2)

Answer: "Black boys are killed all the time by white men." – (Respondent #3)

The framework of bursting apart provides a useful analytical tool to understand the experience of the respondents at the Atlanta Trayvon Martin March and Rally. Beginning with the first part of the framework, the notion of bursting or in other words rage provided the drive

for the various respondents to take part in organizing the Atlanta march and protest. The bursting in each instance had rage at the base of the first initial burst. Respondents who were not black felt black rage was fungible to them and allowed them to feel connected to the black people in the protest space although they themselves are not black nor white. Last the bursting of black rage locally in Atlanta and nationally is a result of the quotidian realities of black death linked to notions of post raciality. The everydayness of black death is something that is so regular, we no longer really respond to it; however, the case of Trayvon's death was too-much and represented an overflow of emotions and feelings connected to the pressures of blackness. Each of the respondent's individual rage is connected to different parts of the bursting framework: for respondent #1 being Chicana, queer and working class, it felt important for her show her rage alongside black folks during this moment, her feelings in this moment locates the primacy of situated solidarity—a theory I will explore in another section. For respondent #2, who identifies as Iranian and cautiously queer, the death of Trayvon for her felt incredibly personal; her experience is connected to the spiraling of time that black rage precipitates as opposed to a linear notion of time. And as a straight, black, working class woman, respondent #3 felt the need for the black community to do something on a mass scale because black death is just too much. Her comments undergird the quotidian experience of black death that accumulates over time and in the body. What follows is transcriptions of their responses, I have chosen to include their words verbatim to highlight how they themselves burst apart when they heard the news that George Zimmerman was acquitted on Saturday July 13 2013 at 6:00 p.m.

During my interview with respondent #1(R1) I stated, "I explicitly said black rage on the consent form because I am interested in what can black rage do ... and you as a brown Chicana

queer women what was at stake for you? What made you go? What made you an organizer?"

What follows is her response:

Respondent #1: I think it was an opportunity—it was an opening to have people from multiple places and locations come together around Trayvon’s death. And um being a young black man who wasn’t doing anything except trying to go to his house or I think was his family’s friends house that he was going to and like getting attacked for just being black literally, you (researcher) always say, “All I have to do is be black and die” and that is exactly what happened to him. And I think that makes it complicated because the person who killed him was somewhat of a brown man. I remember when it happened I was like disassociating myself from him because he was not brown... I didn’t want this to come down and to like further divide us in that sort of way—even though black and brown people kill each other every day— and so this I think plays to like the stickiness of how complicated our shit is. I was really nervous being there being a brown person in this crowd because people might look at me and somehow I don’t know blame me or yeah correlate me with Zimmerman. That’s why I wasn’t approaching people because I was afraid of reaction because people were angry and they were in their entire right to be angry and what they didn’t know was that I was angry as well, which is why I was there. I think it was also an opportunity to hopefully address those complications of race and not because regardless because it was about Trayvon and he is the manifestation of all of this and why people get killed because of stereotypes and racism. (respondent #1).

R1 wanted to prove her anger and her dedication to a politics of black and brown people united by not only attending the march but also helping to organize the local Atlanta rally and participate on the national TMOC. I take the tearful words that R1 shared with me to indicate her bursting prior to and within the space of protest. Bursting because of her rage about the acquittal of Zimmerman, bursting because no matter the result of the trial she knew none of it would bring back Trayvon or others like him. R1 burst apart because she is brown and felt afraid that her similarities to Zimmerman through a shared brownness would isolate her from others, specifically black people experiencing rage. The march and rally for R1 was not just about a simple solidarity; it was about her liberation as a Chicana woman as a queer person being bound up in that freedom of Trayvon and feeling—really feeling—all the complex emotions within the

protest space. For R1, rage filled in the gaps that separated her from the other folks in the protest. In other words, black rage helped her feel in her body what it meant to understand and experience what it feels like to have your freedom bound to other people who are similar to, but different from, oneself.

For respondent # 2, her bursting was predicated upon watching the details of the case through the media and by reading the statement by TMOC on Facebook. The narrative circulating in media for her felt incredibly similar to the historical case of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old black boy who was killed by white supremacists on August 28, 1955 for supposedly flirting with a white woman. R2 identifies as an Iranian woman who is cautiously queer; the Trayvon Martin verdict for her, “felt incredibly personal.” She goes on to say, “I don’t remember exact details of the march all I can recall is the feeling of the march” which she describes as feelings of “invigoration, excitement and force” (respondent #2). I eventually ask her how did it feel to be brown in the space? She stated, “ I felt present and apart of this thing because I was so excited I can barely remember talking to anyone other than the people I came with I was just so full of energy and anger.” R2 along with other friends who attended the march brought a banner with Emmet Till on it alongside an image of Trayvon Martin; what did occur for her was discomfort over the way she and her friends were being photographed due to their banner and their differing racial identities among march goers. R2 tells me that she and her friends did not want to be photographed because it felt as though they as a group that was both brown, white and queer there was a feeling of them being made exceptional because they were holding a banner connecting the death of Trayvon to Emmet Till. Further in the interview with R2, she stated why she and her group of friends created the banner featuring Emmet Till and Trayvon Martin she said simply, “it’s the same.” In this example, the death of Martin created a

disruption of a linear reading of time and created the space for a reading of time that is much messier than we can perceive. In this case, the reality of time operates on a spiral, making it possible for scenes of unbecoming and becoming side by side to show the complexities of blackness within a frame of time and relate the very real material realities of the bursting of black flesh side by side with the traumas of slavery in the past and in the present. And for R2 her bursting was connected to another time and another place where simultaneously the effect of rage burst apart any liberal notions that we live in the post-post reality. (Respondent #2)

For respondent # 3 (R3) the death of Trayvon was an accumulation of quotidian, everyday violence for black people and in particular she was interested in “What the trial meant for the black masses.” R3 identifies as a young black straight woman and considers herself to be a revolutionary—a person who is politically aware of the relationship between race and economics. When I asked her, “Why did you participate in the Atlanta TMOC” she stated:

Black boys are killed by white men all the time. George Zimmerman, while mixed and Latino was living the life of a white man. And for whatever reason black people were really paying attention to the case, I was interested in? what this meant for black political consciousness (Respondent #3).

In her comment, R3 illuminates one of the key tenets of the bursting framework by highlighting that that black boys die all the time at the hands of white men. The death of Trayvon in this moment represents a key argument of Afro Pessimism—what Spillers calls an accumulation of violence on the black flesh (Spillers 68). The deaths of black folks go unnoticed and are considered to be forgettable because they are so regular. The black ontological relation to death buttresses the regularity that R3 highlights in her comments, and the bursting nationally of the black masses over the death of Trayvon represents a feeling of too much—an overflow of black rage.

The comments of the research respondents prove how the bursting framework operates within a space of protest. For R1, her experience of fungible black rage allowed for her to fill in the gaps she experienced between her Chicana and brown body to that of black folks. For R2 the black rage brought up closeness to the death of Trayvon that she could not bring into words. She rather experienced it through the spiraling nature of time influenced by black rage; she traveled back and forth through the past and present by paralleling the travesty of Trayvon Martin's death to that of Emmet Till. R3 affirmed why instances of black rage explode by gesturing toward the regularity and quotidian nature of black death—the death of Trayvon Martin burst apart the black affective economy allowing for black folks and other non-beings to find each other in the space of protest.

### **3.4 End**

Black rage is a powerful affect that is built upon and a departure from Afro Pessimism. Specifically the bursting framework is undergirded by of Afro Pessimist themes: 1) bursting and black rage are synonymous. The bursting is located in the quotidian accumulation of violences against black people. 2) The bursting of black rage can disrupt linear notions of time revealing that time operates on a spiral-creating moment where the past and the present are side by side. 3) Black rage is fungible to others because blackness is fungible to others through the realities of captive flesh. The framework of bursting is built off of the opening provided by Afro Pessimism; however, I depart from Afro Pessimism by foregrounding a thinking through of the affect of black rage.

The Justice for Trayvon Martin march and rally is black rage unfettered; the Trayvon Martin organizing committee was interested in exploding the binary oppositions within the narrative around George Zimmerman's acquittal for killing Trayvon Martin. The TMOC's

message of justice in the streets no matter the outcome of the trial was the provocative position that precipitated a bursting apart of a black affective economy. Black rage at the Justice for Trayvon Martin protest and rally shifted social relations between bodies—relations that would have taken years to build were bound together in seconds allowing for the edges of situated solidarity to appear and the feeling of what a new world in the shell of the old could be.



## Epilogue

As I finish my thesis another young black man has been killed at the hands of police officers in Ferguson, Missouri—I am eerily living my own theory and watching myself and others burst with black rage. On August 9, 2014 around 12:00pm Michael Brown, an 18 year old black man, was shot ten times by a unnamed St. Louis County police officer while he held his hands in the air; he was unarmed. Brown's body was left uncovered on the street for over four hours as the police department blocked off and secured the area. Ferguson, Missouri is a small majority black suburb outside of St. Louis with a population of a little over 20,000 people; it is led by a majority white political leadership (Goyette). Black people of Ferguson are now, in response to the execution style death of Mike Brown, engaged in a full urban rebellion fueled by black rage. Thus far the rebellion has lasted a full nine days, the local police department has lodged a full scale war, and instituted rolling media black outs during periods of intense repression going as far as shutting down of air space above the small city (*St Louis Post-Dispatch* Staff writers). It took almost forty-eight hours before major national media outlets began to cover the case. Instead, the story of Mike Brown and the resistance of the black community on the ground circulated on various social media outlets. Folks were able to get information out about what was happening on twitter using the hashtags #MikeBrown #Ferguson #OpFerguson #Fergusononfireusa. Folks on the ground in Ferguson shared Vines (six second video clips) of the militarism they were facing as they showed their rage collectively. On my personal Facebook feed numerous people were bursting—aggressively realizing that notions of post-raciality were no longer possible to ignore, state sponsored white supremacist violence was on display for the whole world to see, ripping the curtain away of post racial America.

The question that lingers in this moment is how does the Ferguson Rebellion connect to the case studies of both CeCe McDonald and Trayvon Martin? A clear connection among the three cases is the force of black rage based on a black ontology of death—a way of knowing that is situated in recognizing that to be black is to know that one’s life may be extinguished at any moment, for any reason. For Trayvon Martin black folks and other non-beings burst apart because they felt the judicial system failed them, however I would disagree and say that the Sanford court system functioned the way it always has and continued the American tradition of not punishing those who take it upon themselves to extinguish black life. The black rage based on Trayvon’s death was focused upon what was seen and felt to be an egregious injustice. For the Ferguson Rebellion, similar to Trayvon Martin, the death of Mike Brown was seen as unjust because he was both unarmed and physically showing signs of surrender to police authorities when he was killed in front of a group of onlookers. Once again there was a shared feeling among Ferguson community members that surrounded Brown’s body after his death, which circulated feelings of disgust, rage, and pain for the clear disrespect for Brown’s life in particular and black people generally. For CeCe the black ontology of death operated differently, the white supremacist and transmisogynist crowd attempted to kill CeCe, shown through the slash to her salivary gland she sustained, and by the Dean Schmitz’s action of chasing of her. CeCe’s case shifted from the others when she used black rage as a weapon by pulling out a pair of scissors from her purse and stabbing Schmitz. Secondly, in all of these cases black rage was a force that provided the strength to resist white supremacy and for CeCe transphobic violence leading to a massive national bursting on social media and in protest space. Last, the Ferguson Rebellion substantiates my findings in both CeCe and Trayvon’s case studies that black rage can shift social relations creating the material conditions for a new world to emerge. Thus how do we go

from the feeling of rage to a new world in the shell of the old? This question is answered through my theory of situated solidarity—a theory of solidarity that is interested in the way black rage fills in the gaps between people in space.

My theorization of situated solidarity is crafted in direct response to liberal notions of solidarity that serve to separate people from one another. The difference between liberal notions of solidarity and situated solidarity is similar to the nuanced differences between a rights-based political framework and a framework based on justice. The former assumes that the most disadvantaged of people must fight to access the same rights that other more privileged people can access, the latter wants to explode the notion of a rights-based political framework and instead is interested in how everyone can live a life absent of dominating or repressive institutions, laws, or policies. Similarly to the nuanced differences between equality and justice, the differences between liberal solidarity and situated solidarity stem from a differentiation between power operating as repressive versus functioning on a multivalent system. Liberal notions of solidarity assume problematically that power only operates repressively—with privileged people with the most amount of power on top and disadvantaged people with the least amount of power on the bottom (Foucault 10-12). By invoking Foucault's mode of power, liberal notions of solidarity function 1) to maintain political status quo instead of shifting whole systems. In other words, liberal solidarity is interested in maintaining the larger political apparatus, e.g. making space at the symbolic rights and privileges table for everyone. 2) When liberal notions of solidarity are operationalized it renders allies with more privilege or power as paternalist actors, often eliding the agentic behavior of non-beings. 3) It assumes a certain amount of fear-based relativism, meaning that to be a person in power "on top" one can, through a liberal notion of solidarity, look to see the atrocities of oppressive dominations against non-

beings. However, staying in one's position of privilege and acting from that place creates a distance between those on the top and those on the bottom of a repressive power structure.

Situated Solidarity is grounded in Foucault's understanding of power; he insists that power flows through multiple nodes and nexuses of power. Each individual node has power flowing between them and the larger nexuses of power (Foucault 92-3). Using Foucault's notion of power, situated solidarity insists upon thinking of different people existing on and moving through networks of power with some people situated closer or further away from the nexus of institutional power. The implication of using Foucault's notion of power in building a theory of situated solidarity is to build a path to kinship that exists within identity categories but also includes other non-beings who are affectively tied to the bursting feelings of black rage. Situated solidarity insists 1) that those acting as allies are aware of their relative access to institutional nodes of power and understand that their feelings of bursting are based on a partial view, meaning while they can access black rage through the fungibility of blackness, they themselves cannot ever be black. 2) Black rage in all three of the case studies fills in the gaps between people, allowing for a feeling of one's liberation being bound to another, even if that other body is not like one's own. 3) Situated solidarity allows for political action that is not based on identity politics alone but brings together forces of people who are also othered through oppressive dominations binding together people—creating a force of people to challenge the state apparatus instead of merely calling for reform.

Both of the case studies explored in this thesis have shown the edges of situated solidarity—moments where folks who are both similar to and different from CeCe and Trayvon found themselves bursting due to the atrocities of their cases. For CeCe situated solidarity looked like the Committee to Support CeCe, who circulated the details of her case, published

hand-written letters from CeCe directly to a blog site, held various rallies and marches in CeCe's honor, coordinated visits and funds for her while she was in prison, and provided much needed analysis connecting CeCe's attack to white supremacist and trans misogynistic dominations. In the Justice for Trayvon Martin March and Rally, situated solidarity was experienced through the shared body of protest space. Protestors burst apart at the realization that in our current moment historical violence against blackness has not changed, but instead the registers in which the violence occurs has shifted behind a veil of post race narratives. This moment of clarity was brought upon the protestors by the connection of Trayvon's murder to the murder of Emmet Till in 1955 who was also killed by white supremacist vigilantes. Various affects circulated through the space from rage, to shock, to ambivalence. As respondent #1 detailed in chapter 3, she wanted the black people in the space to know, although she was Chicana and brown—different than the vast majority of people in the protest space—that she too was angry about the state sanctioned murder of Trayvon Martin. The protest space at this point became impenetrable—folks in the rally were calling for a spontaneous march from west end park to a unknown place—all we knew we were going to get “there” together. People took off to the streets and marched through the neighborhood toward downtown Atlanta, nothing could stop us, even the sky burst open into a famous Georgia rainstorm, dumping buckets of water on all of us, with lightning and thunder escaping the clouds. We just kept going, people took care of each other, sharing umbrellas or laughing and hugging each other in the rain. We were a force to be reckoned with, police officers dared not to touch us because they knew if they did a force similar to the transgressions in the Ferguson rebellion would explode. Situated solidarity in the Atlanta Justice for Trayvon March and Rally made the possibility in impossibility emerge or as respondent #2 alluded to in chapter 3, so much more became possible in Atlanta after that march.

I am not sure what is going to come from the Ferguson Rebellion; however, what I do know from this particular moment in time, as I write this, is that I am affirmed in the notion that black rage can shift social relations in such a way that new forms of kinship and a new world can emerge through situated solidarity. I have been transformed after participating in the Justice for Trayvon March and Rally, and I am waiting with baited breath to see how the Ferguson Rebellion will transform all of us who have been waiting for the explosion to happen right now. It is not too late or too soon, for the struggles of the Ferguson Rebellion based on black rage, linked to the ontology of black death—to bring in about the seed of the new society in the shell of the old.

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**APENDIX: Sample Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about yourself, where are you from? How do you identify? (race, gender, class, sexuality)?
2. Tell me about your experiences/history in Social Justice.
3. Are you the first person in your family to do social justice work?
4. Tell me about the communities you have worked in.
5. Why do you do political work/social justice work?
6. How would you classify your work? Was it within non-profit or another form of organization? Or if it is/was something else, how would you describe it?
7. Is there a relationship between your political work and your emotions? If any, what are they?
8. What has your activism done for you?
9. What outcome/s do you think your activism could have?
10. Why did you attend the Trayvon Martin Protest and Rally in the West End Park in Atlanta, GA on July 14, 2013?
11. What was your role at the protest?
12. What did the protest space feel like?
13. How did people take care of each other?
14. Can you name the various forces within the protest space?
15. Was there any point where you felt uncomfortable?
16. What did the protest change if anything?

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> “Controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustices appear natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (Hill-Collins 77).

<sup>2</sup> “Only by recognizing the link between the ideological, social, political and economic marginalizations of Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens can we begin to develop political analysis and political strategies effective in confronting the linked yet varied sites of power in this country” (Cohen 47).