UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

WHITE PATHOLOGY: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CRITIQUE OF BLACK PATHOLOGY DISCOURSE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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Norman, Oklahoma
2018

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WHITE PATHOLOGY: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CRITIQUE OF BLACK PATHOLOGY DISCOURSE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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This project is dedicated to the memory of R .W. “Buddy” Burniske, who started this whole thing.

Acknowledgments

The only constants in this project have been the people who have encouraged me along the way. Their enduring support has guided me through uncertainties and challenges and coached me to the finish line. Francesca Sawaya has been an expert mentor. Beginning with our conversations about Charles Chesnutt at the University of Oklahoma and continuing by correspondence over the past two years, our exchanges have driven my thinking about this project. Her feedback at every step along the way has challenged my thinking and led me to more nuanced conclusions. She is a teacher in every sense of the word, and I'm a better reader and thinker for knowing her. Thank you to the members of my committee—Henry McDonald, Jim Zeigler, Ben Alpers, and Ron Schleifer—for showing me steadfast support and helping to guide me through this process, and to Dan Cottom for challenging me in classes, during office hours, and through my general exams. My family, including both the Davises and the Walkers, have shown incredible patience over holidays and vacations when my work intervened, and I appreciate their encouragement and their faith in me. Finally, Ashley has been a consummate partner in this and all endeavors, encouraging me when my confidence waned, challenging me to reach my potential, and always cheering me on. She never stopped believing in me, and I know that no matter what I take on next, she will be there to see me through it. I can think of no more comforting thought.

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Abstract

This project examines the ways African American authors from the turn of the twentieth century challenged racist violence and white supremacy and sought to create nuanced political responses and strategies. I focus on how Pauline Hopkins, Sutton Griggs, and Charles Chesnutt respond to a discourse of black pathology, exemplified in the work of Thomas Dixon, that inscribes racial difference in both biological and cultural terms. This discourse of black pathology emboldens white racism and enables violence against African Americans, so these critical voices identify and subvert that discourse to paint white supremacy in pathological terms. I lay out the paranoid logic of white supremacy in my chapter on Thomas Dixon, whose work argues for a biological definition of citizenship, rather than a socially constructed one, and depends on assumptions about pathological blackness to do so. I argue that one of Pauline Hopkins's most famous novels emphasizes the importance of a dynamic resistant political response to white supremacy that does not silence the voices of black women and that values history as a means to reject attempts to naturalize black pathology. In my chapter on Sutton Griggs, I argue that he confronts the specifically pathological language of white racism by depicting white supremacy in pathological terms, what he calls the "virus of race prejudice." Next, I argue that Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* uses a metaphor of lynching to analyze the ways that white supremacy uses political disfranchisement to create abject citizens who are vulnerable to white supremacist violence. Finally, my epilogue locates persistent examples of black pathology discourse, as well as resistant responses, in our current age, highlighting the continued relevance of black literary voices from the "nadir."

Introduction: White Supremacy, Black Pathology, and Resistant Responses

Kendrick Lamar's widely acclaimed album *DAMN.* was released in April 2017. Though he has found success with a number of albums in the past ten years, *DAMN.* represents a new milestone for Lamar in terms of albums sold and acclaim. Critics have praised Lamar for surpassing already high expectations, and this album represents perhaps the best example of his talent for music and trenchant social critique. The second track on the album, "DNA," expresses a theme that exists throughout the album: the direct confrontation with and rejection of an audience intent on dismissing the artist and his work.[1] The song includes a five-second audio sample from former Fox News anchor Geraldo Rivera, identifying Lamar's audience, at least initially, as the media, a group who contributes to popular distortions of young black men and hip-hop music.[2] Rivera makes the incredible claim: "This is why I say that hip hop has done more damage to young African Americans than racism in recent years." Because Rivera is a mouthpiece for Fox News in this scenario, his statement represents what Lamar and other artists see as a prevalent attitude among media outlets about rap music. Rivera's argument is preposterous and specious in terms of its quick dismissal of racism in the United States, but it also situates itself in a long tradition of denying black agency and, in the case of hip hop, of viewing the artistic endeavors and resistant responses of black people as politically dangerous, irrelevant, or merely evidence of their cultural—and

[1] The first track on the album, "Blood," includes music as well as spoken-word text to frame the album. It would be fair to say that "DNA" is the first "song" on the album.
[2] Lamar's targeting of Fox News continues in the next song, "Yah," as he says: "Fox News wanna use my name for percentage," suggesting that the channel benefits from its racist critiques of his music in terms of Fox News's economic bottom line.

therefore racial—inferiority.[3] This history, and Rivera's and Fox News's contributions to it, demonstrates attempts to deflect blame and make African Americans responsible for their own oppression. This example of white supremacist logic tries to erase accountability and figuratively cleanse whiteness of responsibility for black suffering. Furthermore, Rivera's claim demonstrates both historical continuity and adaptive change in terms of white supremacist ideology, as the paranoia evident in Rivera's assertion is consistent with overt nineteenth-century examples of biological essentialism but is covered by assumptions of cultural inferiority from the twentieth century.

Lamar begins "DNA" by confronting the discourse Fox News and its proxies use to dismiss him: the supposed pathology of blackness, an ideology that implicitly—if not explicitly—promotes the belief that black people are essentially inferior and black culture is self-defeating. Rivera's statement suggests that this particular genre of music, commonly authored by young African Americans, is another sign of the moral failure of black America. It is a form of pathological blackness that migrated from the realm of biological race to that of culture in the twentieth century. By calling out "young African Americans" and denying their agency in constructing rap as an art form, Rivera hails a tradition that denigrates black cultural production and black culture generally. According to Rivera's position, rap music represents and supposedly glorifies the degeneration of the black family and its values. The "young generation" is often the target of older generations' ire, but in the specific case of black culture in the United States the implications are particularly complicated. Historically, supposed black

[3] In a review for *The Guardian*, Kitty Empire explains that Lamar "boggles at Fox News's wilful misunderstanding of hip-hop's relationship to black suffering."

cultural shortcomings have been marked as signs of racial inferiority, both by avowed white supremacists and paternalistic liberals.

Lamar responds to the sample by embracing a metaphor central to white supremacist racist critiques of black people that parallels this long history. The song begins with a catalog of what the speaker has "inside [his] DNA," including "loyalty" and "royalty" (2). He claims both "war and peace" as well as "power, poison, pain and joy inside [his] DNA," rejecting the premise that an effective response to a white supremacist discourse of black inferiority should be to tell anything but a whole and complex truth. Immediately after the Rivera audio sample, Lamar responds, "This is my heritage, all I'm inheritin'," laying claim to the power to define his own identity as he rejects Rivera's position. He says, "My DNA not for imitation / Your DNA an abomination," and in saying this, he reverses the assumptions that guide Rivera's logic and privileges his heritage and identity in the face of a media narrative that perpetuates stereotypes of black inferiority. Lamar begins his album with a song that asserts his power to define himself while pointing out an insidious discourse of white supremacy that attempts to define blackness in the language of pathology. For Lamar, Rivera's statement participates in a continuing discourse of black inferiority. Lamar responds to the sample's language that fetishizes supposed racial identity as blood with similar language—DNA in the 2017 context—and by doing so he takes over a pervasive white supremacist discourse.

In the chapters to follow, I assert that the period at the turn of the twentieth century that Rayford Logan famously dubbed the "nadir" for African Americans represents a key moment in the development of a discourse of black pathology,

ultimately serving as a precursor to contemporary works such as Lamar's.[4] Accordingly, a number of black artists from that period challenge black pathology discourse directly. I analyze four authors in terms of how they address white supremacy and the ways it constructs a discourse of pathological blackness to entrench racial hierarchy and to justify violence against African American citizens. I begin by examining the work of a famous white supremacist, Thomas Dixon, to trace the contours of white supremacist ideology and to provide a context for black responses to its logic and consequences. Three African American authors comprise the remainder of my study, and I identify the various ways they challenge a pervasive discourse of pathological blackness. Like Kendrick Lamar in 2017, the resistant black voices in this project recognize that white supremacy depends on discursive power as well as physical violence and that the ways in which black people are stereotyped and characterized have profound impacts on lived experience. White supremacy benefits from its adaptability in American culture and by its opportunism as white supremacist assumptions are naturalized and incorporated into mainstream thought. For this reason, part of my analysis concerns the important historicist work these black authors perform to reject white supremacist assumptions. Coupled with discursive interventions that call into question the language of black pathology, these historical frames elucidate and reject assumptions of racial hierarchy as the authors attempt to theorize white supremacy in order to offer resistant responses.

As editors Barbara McCaskill and Caroline Gebhard observe in the anthology *Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem: African American Literature and Culture, 1877–1919*, this

[4] See Rayford Logan's *The Negro in American Life and Thought; The Nadir, 1877–1901*.

particular period in African American literary history is often characterized as transitional. Charles Chesnutt's coinage of "post-bellum, pre-Harlem," according to these authors, "looked back to antebellum years and forward to a future glimpsed but not yet codified by the term 'Harlem Renaissance'" (1). The in-between characterization of this period is further bolstered by negative critical responses dismissing the literary merits of the work of the period, focusing on its "political" nature, often a euphemism for the absence of literary value. For these reasons, McCaskill and Gebhard assert the need for an "overdue appraisal" of "a period of high aesthetic experimentation and political dynamism" (2). My work contributes such an assessment. It treats the literary contributions of Pauline Hopkins, Sutton Griggs, and Charles Chesnutt as offering much more than reductive analyses of political questions posing as narrative. Instead these works provide innovative ways to address enduring, complex questions in the medium of the novel. In fact, the coexistence of continuity and subtle discursive shifts borne of white supremacist cultural adaptability between these turn-of-the-century authors and current resistant voices like Kendrick Lamar illustrates the impact of their artistic voices as well as the continuing problem of the white supremacist discourse of black pathology. McCaskill and Gebhard challenge the usage of "renaissance" to describe that particular period of black cultural development in the twentieth century precisely because it assumes a breaking with the past that "does not necessarily fit African American culture." According to McCaskill and Gebhard, politics "ha[ve] always played a dominant role in African American cultural production," and "the staying power of African American culture has been that it circles back to its roots to renew the fight once more" (7). Kenrick Lamar's "loyalty" affirms

historical parallels in white supremacist history while he crafts a resistant position that rejects white supremacist assumptions about what black cultural identity should look like. My study echoes the importance of a "cultural development … marked more by continuity with than by rejection of the past" while also acknowledging that the flexibility of white supremacist ideology represents a particular threat (8). By first tracing the history of black pathology discourse and then analyzing its theoretical implications, I illustrate the enduring presence of white supremacy and black response. It is a more complex relationship than is often understood, as parallels to the past indicate the persistence of racism, and modern claims of racial progress risk dismissing continuities in white supremacist thinking. At the same time, as evidenced in the discourse of black pathology, racial thinking evolves to respond to cultural pressures, hiding racist assumptions behind the language of cultural pathology and racial progress. Voices from the past echo in the present, illustrating this complex irony in the American racial scene and demonstrating the dynamism and applicability of these critical voices and the insidious and pervasive nature of white supremacy.

Scientific Racism and the Roots of Black Pathology Discourse

The black pathology discourse I describe is rooted in scientific racism, which developed over centuries but found specific application in the American context in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859–1900*, John S. Haller, Jr. argues that the work of nineteenth-century physicians, anthropologists, sociologists, and other scientists "provided a vocabulary and a set of concepts which rationalized and helped to justify the value

system upon which the idea of racial inferiority rested in American thought." He traces the way that eighteenth-century ideas of racial difference became codified in a nineteenth-century discourse of racial hierarchy that animated both conservative and liberal ideas about race, because for those "educated Americans who shunned the stigma of racial prejudice," science represented a means by which to confirm supposed African American inferiority and to rationalize "the politics of disenfranchisement and segregation into a social-scientific terminology that satiated the troubled conscience of the middle class" (x). A new enthusiasm for data and social science, coupled with the popularity of evolutionary ideas after Darwin, focused racial attitudes into empirical frames. Both Southern white supremacists and Northern liberals found in this data and in these conclusions reasons to believe that their racist feelings were justified, regardless of whether they believed that black physiological and cultural deficiencies were a promise of future extinction or were a lamentable tragedy. The history of scientific racism, like the history of white supremacy more broadly, reveals a changing and expanding discourse of racial thinking that adapts to new ideas and public trends. As part of this historical development, a specific discourse of black pathology began to structure white supremacist thinking in important ways that threatened African Americans.

In this Introduction, I rely on Haller's *Outcasts from Evolution* and Stephen Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* to trace the history of scientific racism and to provide the context for applied scientific racism at the turn of the twentieth century, when violence against African Americans increased and citizenship rights receded. Both Haller and Gould identify key contributors and influential ideas in the development of a

white supremacist race science that relied upon circular reasoning and flawed methodology to proliferate ideas about racial hierarchy and black inferiority. Haller points to Carl Linnaeus and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach in the eighteenth century as foundational figures who established racial categories based on skin color and ascribed behavioral characteristics to those apparent distinctions. Haller asserts that Linnaeus's observations about racially deterministic traits—including some who were "phlegmatic, cunning, lazy, lustful, careless, and governed by caprice"—influenced a scientific taxonomy and "became more fixed than the races themselves" (4). Blumenbach extended Linnaeus's racial classification of skin color to consider "a combination of color, hair, skull, and facial characteristics as fundamental means for classifying the five varieties of man" (5). He constructed three "principal races"—Caucasian, Mongolian, and Ethiopian—and believed that Caucasian was primary while the other two were derived from the Caucasian. The work of these early fathers of anthropology demonstrates the co-mingling of attitudes about racial difference with the apparent objectivity of science. In the nineteenth century, an interest in anthropometry, or the production of empirical data for the purpose of anthropological study, further ingrained social belief into a system of scientific classification and comparison.

In *The Mismeasure of Man*, Stephen Jay Gould provides a history of anthropometry and scientific racism and observes the ways that influential ideas about supposed racial difference found their way into American racial thinking. Gould points to "the doctrine of polygeny" as an importantly American idea in race discourse that won the respect of European scientists, "so much so that Europeans referred to

polygeny as the 'American school' of anthropology" (42).[5] Put simply, polygeny is the belief in multiple origins for racial groups, as opposed to monogeny, which argues for a single origin, in which all current races descended from a common origin.[6] Polygeny asserts that "lesser" races are actually a different species from the Caucasian race, and polygeny's most famous advocate, the Swiss naturalist Louis Agassiz, "converted to the doctrine of human races as separate species after his first experiences with American blacks" (43).[7] According to Gould, Agassiz's personal revulsion extended to his work, as he "never generated any data for polygeny … [and] [h]is conversion followed an immediate visceral judgment and some persistent persuasion by friends." His support for the doctrine "rested on nothing deeper in the realm of biological knowledge" (44).

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[5] Polygeny and monogeny are also called "polygenesis" and "monogenesis." For more on the history of the concepts that I explain in this section, see Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*.

[6] George M. Frederickson identifies Samuel Stanhope Smith as a well-known advocate for monogenesis, who argued that all races "were members of the same species and had a common remote ancestry [and] differences in color, anatomy, intelligence, temperament, and morality could be attributed to different physical and social environments, especially climate and the contrasting habits of life produced by 'savagery' and 'civilization'." According to Frederickson, such a view "did not make Smith a thoroughgoing egalitarian in the twentieth century sense" because "like most other eighteenth-century advocates of the unity of the human species, he believed that the white race was the superior race, the original human norm from which other races had degenerated." Blacks "could become equal to the whites, but only by ceasing to be a Negro—i.e., by actually turning white" (72).

[7] George Frederickson notes that Dr. Charles Caldwell was an early critic of Smith and the monogenesis doctrine. Caldwell, "employing the accepted Biblical chronology of Archbishop James Ussher, argued that Negroes were known to have existed 3,445 years ago, or only 743 years after Noah's ark—not enough time for a new race to come into existence through the effects of climate" (73). The only explanation, then, was that blacks were separately created as a different species.

As is the case with many of these nineteenth-century race scientists, Agassiz privileged feeling and belief over evidence in his work.[8]

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Agassiz's concept of polygeny was controversial not because of its lack of evidence but because it challenged the prevalent belief in monogeny advocated by the Bible and its myths of human origin. The conflict between Agassiz and monogenisists demonstrates the adaptive nature of racial thinking, as no contradiction, even an existential one, proved too challenging to overcome in the logic of white supremacy. According to Gould, polygeny, "in asserting a plurality of human creations, contradicted the doctrine of a single Adam and contravened the literal truth of scripture" (70). In *The Black Image in the White Mind*, Frederickson observes that Dr. Josiah Nott was one of the most provocative contributors to this controversy in the 1840s and 50s, as monogenesists "accused him and his supporters of infidelity for denying the accepted biblical view of the origin of all races in the progeny of Adam" (82).[9] Environmental explanations for racial difference asserted the influence of climate and other environmental factors and therefore supported the monogenesist view. Frederickson argues that "the narrow and technical nature of this controversy, when

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[8] As another example of a useful theory for racial hierarchy, "recapitulation theory," or the idea that "an individual, in its own growth, passes through a series of stages representing adult ancestral forms in their correct order," found adherents in the nineteenth century and "provided an irresistible criterion for any scientist who wanted to rank human groups as higher and lower." Gould explains that, according to this view, "If adult blacks and women are like white male children, then they are living representatives of an ancestral stage in the evolution of white males" (114-15).

[9] Frederickson notes the concern for racial beliefs to remain in keeping with biblical truths, and he states that Samuel Cartwright, a physician from Louisiana and a proslavery writer, "is of particular significance in the Southern context because of his strenuous efforts to make pluralism jibe with the Bible." He wanted to "reconcile whatever scientific theory would most denigrate the Negro with a literal reading of Genesis" (87).

considered in relation to its immediate and practical consequences, soon became apparent," because there was still consensus about racial hierarchy even though disagreement existed about the origin of the races (82-3). According to Frederickson, "In a real sense the monogenesist view, as formulated and defended in the antebellum South, was, like the pluralist view, a form of biological racism and not a genuine revival of eighteenth-century environmentalism" (83). Despite debates about racial origins, the practical implications remained. Both monogeny and polygeny could be used to argue for slavery, for instance, as the racial hierarchy was not disputed.

In the 1840s, Dr. Samuel George Morton developed the science of craniometry in part, according to Frederickson, "to bring an end to loose speculation about racial origins and differences by opening an era of hardheaded empiricism." Morton measured differences in skull capacity for his *Crania Americana* in part by filling skulls with various matter, including millet, and, after reporting statistical similarities within racial groups, he "concluded that the races had always had the same physical characteristics and, by implication, the same mental qualities" (74). Such conclusions supported the doctrine of polygenesis by rejecting the theory of change over time that monogenesis required, and Dr. Josiah Nott was an early supporter of Morton's work. According to Frederickson, Nott's specific study of "mulattos" had led him to the conclusion that "the mulatto was a genuine hybrid, weaker and less fertile than either parent stock," further supposed evidence that "the Negro was not a blood brother to the whites" (75). Consistent with previous studies of racial difference, Nott's work suffered from circular logic and preconceived ideas, which Nott himself seemed unperturbed by, according to Frederickson, who notes that Nott admitted that his focus was "not so much in races in

general as in the Negro in particular" and suggested that he designed evidence to "attract attention and add support to an a priori assumption of innate Negro inferiority" (78). For many, these conclusions provided scientific justification for slavery and revealed that apparent black inferiority proved to be an overriding influence, regardless of where one stood in debates about racial origins, categories, or physiological features.

Empirical race science eventually extended beyond popular belief to inscribe racial difference in physiological terms, cultivating a discourse of pathological race identity. Contemporaneous with Morton and Nott, Samuel Cartwright attempted to connect blackness and mental pathologies in particular. In *Difference and Pathology*, Sander Gilman notes that Cartwright published a paper in 1851 to try to "substantiate the association of blackness and madness by specifically identifying psychopathologies to which blacks alone were prey" (138). Cartwright's inventions included "drapetomania," or the "diseases causing slaves to run away," and "dysaesthesia aethipis," more colloquially referred to as "rascality" by slave overseers. According to Gilman, "In both instances, manifestations of the blacks' rejection of the institution of slavery were fitted into the medical model of insanity" (138). Assumptions about black susceptibility to disease dominated nineteenth-century race discourse and, according to David McBride, had consequences into the twentieth century. In *From TB to AIDS: Epidemics Among Urban Blacks Since 1900*, McBride argues that early ideas about African Americans and disease, "combin[ed] biological and sociological notions that blacks were biologically most susceptible to primary infectious diseases, [and] reflect[ed] that mainstream American society through the World War I decade generally viewed black Americans more as a source of contagion than as fellow victims" (15). At

the same time, the completely opposite view could be held about race and disease. In *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power, and Imperialism*, Sheldon Watts demonstrates how colonialists used apparent disease susceptibility—for example, the idea that blacks were immune to yellow fever—"to demonstrate that the Christian God has specifically created them to serve as slaves in North, Meso- and South America" (xvi). The connection of disease with blackness further informed beliefs about racial inferiority after the Civil War when increased data collection emphasized deteriorating health conditions for freedmen. In "Race, Gender, and the Political Conflation of Biological and Social Issues," Dorothy Roberts observes that after emancipation scientists "blamed the deteriorating health of the American Negro on a biological incapacity to adjust to freedom." By ascribing inferiority to their supposed susceptibility to disease, white supremacists could justify their beliefs while "discrediting the need for radical social transformation" (239).

Established physiological difference prompted many nineteenth-century thinkers to surmise that behavior obeyed hereditary impulses as well. And in this way, according to these authors, blackness itself proved pathological. Haller notes that Dr. R. M. Cunningham, a former penitentiary physician, argued that "just as there were innate hereditary influences which prompted the Negro to acts of crime, so there were also anatomical and physiological differences between him and the Caucasian—differences which made him not only inferior to the white man but which predisposed him to disease, high mortality, and race deterioration" (48). Frederickson observes that Dr. Eugene Rollin Corson, author of "The Vital Equation of the Colored Race and Its Future in the United States," concluded that the "younger generation [of blacks],

deprived from birth of the paternalistic protection of slavery, were liable to succumb at an even greater rate to a variety of diseases which supposedly hit Negroes harder than whites" (248). In the "science" of racial hierarchy, the line between apparent physical difference and moral potential blurred to pathologize blackness. To be black was to be inferior, sick, and dangerous, and white supremacists took advantage of opportunities to naturalize these supposed facts about the hierarchy of the races.

Data collection worked to codify principles of racial hierarchy based on physiology and behavior and played an important role in post-emancipation policy and attitudes toward African Americans. According to Haller, the "watershed" moment for data collection and its importance to scientific racism was in the Civil War. The "wide-scale measurement of the soldier during the war years" produced "evidence" that applied in various ways beyond the turn of the century (19). Haller explains that the war served as the impetus for a focus on anthropometry and the creation of the United States Sanitary Commission charged with taking on this task for two primary reasons: the "embarrassing Union defeat in the first battle of Bull Run" and Lincoln's decision to allow black troops into the Union army (20). American scientists, as well as their European counterparts, saw this as "an opportune means of investigating race differences on a scale never before achieved" (21). A contained population of soldiers, especially of African American soldiers, allowed scientists to produce data that influenced social thought for decades.[10]

[10] Haller and Gould explain in detail the metric devices used to collect data regarding anatomical features, lung capacity, and intelligence.

The Census and Codified Black Pathology

The national census was especially useful as an instrument for codifying black pathology and white supremacy. Postwar census data stoked fear of a growing black population and the threat of the black birth rate, which appeared to outpace the white birth rate. Race scientists quickly attempted to find mitigating results, and they comforted their readers by focusing on black mortality rates and increased rates of disease as compared to whites. A dependence on faulty census data, as well as the Civil War studies, contributed to the idea in the late nineteenth century that African Americans faced extinction as a race (41). Studies and data supporting extinction and the idea that "a fundamental change was taking place in the physiological and pathological makeup of the Negro since the days of slavery" began to proliferate. According to Frederickson, the 1890 census countered what some saw as the paranoia engendered by the reports of the previous two decades, as "General Francis A. Walker, a leading northern economist and a former superintendent of the United States census" argued that the 1890 census "revealed that the blacks were in fact increasing at a rate substantially below that of the whites and were concentrating in a diminishing area of the deep South."[11] He argued that the data reported in the 1870 and 1880 censuses that caused so much alarm was faulty, as "the census takers had overlooked many blacks in 1870" (245). The decreased numbers of African Americans and their relative isolation

[11] According to Sander Gilman, the census had long served as a method for constructing racist ideology, and he points specifically to the debate engendered by the 1840 census, in which "it was the first time possible to obtain data concerning mental illness in the United States." Gilman notes that 3,000 of the 17,000 "reported to be insane and feeble-minded" were black. According to Gilman, "If these staggering census statistics were to be believed, free blacks had an incidence of mental illness eleven times higher than slaves and six times higher than the white population" (137).

provided comfort to many whites, and Frederickson sees the 1890 census as instrumental in galvanizing belief in black degeneracy and overall weakness, hardly a threat to the supposedly superior Caucasian. According to Frederickson, because the 1890 census "coincided with the full triumph of Darwinism in American thought," the supposed evidence that blacks were in decline "readily fitted into a thesis of 'the survival of the fittest' in an inevitable 'struggle for existence' among the human races." Consequently, the following decade "saw an unparalleled outburst of racist speculation on the impending disappearance of the American Negro" (246). A belief in diminished black capacity and cultural failure fueled attempts to deny black rights and further endangered the lives of African American citizens.

Black Pathology and Violence

Violence against African Americans directly resulted from these beliefs in degeneracy and black pathology and the anxieties they provoked. At the same time, the discourse of black pathology provided readymade justifications for acts of violence, as white supremacists rationalized violence with the excuse that they had to defend themselves against black pathology and deviance. The 1890s in particular represent a period of increased violence and important additions to black pathology discourse. In *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South*, Edward Ayers observes that a belief in the acute danger of black sexual violence likewise provoked media saturation of reports of black rapists. Ayers argues that this fear was spurred on in part by the ignorance born of the separation between the races resulting from de facto segregation, as well as the proliferation of news reports of

sexual crimes supposedly justifying lynchings. According to Ayers, "at no time did [white women] hear more about black rapists than in the early 1890s" (241). Ayers notes that "[t]hanks to the speed and thoroughness with which news of lynchings were spread by the press of the late nineteenth-century South, the crisis of one isolated county could soon fuel the fears and anger smoldering in a county hundreds of miles away" (243). These stories contributed to an environment of fear and paranoia that stoked additional violence, and when "white Southerners read of a widely publicized lynching, … they automatically assumed that a rape had indeed occurred and began to look for warnings of the crime in their own community." In this way, almost any supposed suspicious behavior "could be taken as evidence that an 'outrage' might be imminent" (243). As Trudier Harris explains, "[l]ynchings for alleged sex crimes became cover-ups for other suppressions whites wanted to effect, whether they admitted that or not" (18). In each of these cases, the sign of black sexual criminality, which black pathology created, motivated retributive violence.

Lynching as a technology of social control depended on assumptions of black criminality derived from beliefs in black physiological difference, biological determinism, and cultural and existential degeneration. Frederickson argues that lynching at the end of the nineteenth century was "symptomatic of a conviction that the legal mechanisms of repression that accompanied segregation and disfranchisement did not go far enough and that a satisfactory balance between separation and control had not yet been established" (275). According to Frederickson, part of this need for control was tied directly to the supposed criminal tendencies of black people. The image of the "black beast," based on the belief that African Americans, and men especially, were

unable to control animalistic sexual passions or "criminal natures stamped by heredity," proliferated to justify lynching. White supremacists argued that this apparent danger also justified the denial of political rights, which many saw as the root of a reversion to savagery in the African American population after emancipation.[12] According to Frederickson, "it was argued [that political dreams] … had led to dreams of 'social equality' and had encouraged blacks to expropriate white women by force." As a result, "the Negro's overpowering desire for white women was often described as the central fact legitimizing the whole program of legalized segregation and disfranchisment" (282). In this climate of fear and increased violence against African Americans, analysis of the 1890 census provided perhaps the most influential attempt to naturalize and codify black pathology, given the existence of a flexible and politically expedient discourse of race science that could justify white supremacist fears. Consequently, the 1896 publication of Frederick Hoffman's *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* represented an especially influential contribution to scientific racism and galvanized the discourse of black pathology.

Hoffman's *Race Traits* as a Black Pathology Text

Frederick Hoffman, an agent for the Prudential Insurance Company, produced his highly influential work of statistical analysis in part as a response to the heightened

[12] Frederickson also points to Philip Alexander Bruce's *The Plantation Negro as Freedman*, in which Bruce argues that an increase in sexual crime, most evident in an increased number of sexual assaults committed against white women, is a sign of black "degeneration" after Emancipation (259).

interest in statistical data inspired by the previous three censuses.[13] *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* targeted African Americans in attempt to explain the future possibilities for the race. According to Megan J. Wolff, it also had economic motivations, as the Prudential Company solicited the study "in response to a wave of state legislation banning discrimination against African Americans" (84).[14] As both a sign of structural racism and an opportunity to entrench a discourse of black pathology to support supposed white supremacist truisms, Hoffman's document represents a key moment in the history of white supremacist discourse. Building off the conclusions ratified by the discourse of scientific racism, Hoffman inscribed black pathology into this document based on his analysis of racial "degeneration," including black mortality rates, poor health numbers, and supposed immoral behaviors. Hoffman responded directly to the data that suggested a decreasing black population overall but an increasing population in large cities. According to Hoffman, this tendency could, "if not

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[13] Hoffman originally hailed from Germany, and Frederickson reports that "Hoffman's foreign origin allegedly made him unbiased." According to Frederickson, however, Hoffman "was not an objective outside observer," as he had spent years "as an immigrant trying to get ahead in the insurance business [and] had undoubtedly learned to conform to the racial beliefs of his clients and associates." Frederickson claims that Hoffman's "racist predispositions, coupled with his mastery of the currently fashionable statistic approach to social problems, made his book … the most influential discussion of the race question to appear in the late nineteenth century" (249).

[14] According to Wolff, Prudential argued that black clients "caused a drain on revenue" and the company was therefore smart to deny them coverage. These claims, however, were "spurious" because "the anticipated drain was not due to differential mortality but rather to the reduction of sales to white customers assumed to be unwilling to patronize a company that considered black lives worth insuring." As part of a "calculus of social worth," the company had considered "financial value, public opinion, and corporate profit" to direct their corporate strategies, and "[t]o sell insurance policies at equal rates or for equal benefits across racial lines would offend a predominant system of social beliefs about the worth of human lives" (86). Beatrix Hoffman confirms that racial discrimination in this field "was so widespread at the turn of the century that African Americans were forced to create their own institutions, making black insurance companies among the most successful 'race' business of their time" (170).

checked in a few decades, materially increase the colored population of all the large cities of the country" (13). Following the conclusions already available in the discourse of scientific racism, Hoffman averred that an "abundance of testimony" illustrated that "previous to emancipation the negro enjoyed health equal if not superior to that of the white race." Hoffman points to the higher death rate of African Americans in his research and in the 1890 census to argue that this rate "must be considered evidence of race deterioration, which in part will explain the gradual lowering of the rate of increase of the colored population brought out more distinctly than ever by the census of 1890" (55). According to Hoffman, the recent developments in black mortality and relatively low birth rate must be a sign of racial degeneration that puts the population at risk, echoing post-Reconstruction apologists for slavery as well as racial Darwinists and providing encouraging data for white supremacists that feared the proliferation of black people into white spaces.

In *Race Traits* Hoffman rejects claims that environmental influences, rather than biological determinism, might play a role in these apparent conditions for African Americans, in part by pointing to the Civil War statistical analysis conducted decades before. Hoffman believed that the supposed standardization of those tests on a putatively controlled population could be extrapolated to account for African Americans across the country, and he dismissed any challenges to the reliability of the data or the validity of his conclusions. He argued that it was "not in the *conditions of life*, but in the *race traits and tendencies* that we find the causes of the excessive mortality [in African Americans]." According to Hoffman, as long as "these tendencies are persisted in, so long as immorality and vice are a habit of life of the vast majority of the colored

population," the consequence for African Americans would be the increased "mortality by hereditary transmission of weak constitutions" and a lower "rate of natural increase, until the births fall below the deaths, and gradual extinction results" (95, italics in original). Hoffman speaks as a true believer in racial Darwinism, and he exploits the blurred line between physiological constitution and moral behavior evident in earlier texts of scientific racism. An ambiguous relationship between physiology and behavior allows him to pathologize black culture and hail racial liberals who might reject Darwinian biological determinism. A focus on culture instead of on biological determinism illustrates the adaptive nature of white supremacist discourse, as black pathology seamlessly connects biology and culture under the sign of black degeneracy.

Criminality represents perhaps the most influential sign of black cultural degeneration in white supremacist discourse, and it provides the justification for continued denial of political rights. In making his argument for black extinction, Hoffman advocates depriving African Americans of the rights of citizenship because, to him, criminality was inherent in black populations. Hoffman observes that "[a]ll the tables for various states and cities confirm the census data, and show without exception that the criminality of the negro exceeds that of any other race of any numerical importance in this country." He argues that "education has utterly failed to raise the negro to a higher level of citizenship, the first duty of which is to obey the laws and respect the lives and property of others" (228).[15] This essential criminality, according to Hoffman, also validated violent responses in the South, as lynchings "are not the result

[15] Hoffman's argument about education recalls post-Emancipation apologists for slavery who argued that Reconstruction attempts to support black education were futile because the supposed racial limitations African Americans faced were too great to overcome.

of race antipathy, but are due to crimes which meet with summary justice in cases of whites and blacks alike" (230). These crimes are most commonly the crime of rape, and the "rate of increase" of lynchings "may be accepted as representing fairly the increasing tendency of colored men to commit this most frightful of all crimes" (231). The responsibility for "the removal" of what Hoffman calls the "crime of lynching" lay with the African American population. In a moment that anticipates that language of black pathology as applied to culture, and also represents the most overt assertion of biological racism, Hoffman claims that until the African American "learns to respect life, property, and chastity, [and] until he learns to believe in the value of personal morality operating in his everyday life," his "criminal tendencies … will increase, and by so much the social and economic efficiency of the race will be decreased" (234-5).

Hoffman's warning hails avowed white supremacists as well as those supposedly more moderate, and even liberal, whites who felt concern for the supposed growing storm of pathological blackness. Hoffman comforts the former with an assertion of inevitable black extinction, and he responds to the latter by assuring them that any philanthropic attempts to lift the race out of despair will only fail if blacks fail to help themselves. According to Beatrix Hoffman, while the statistics in *Race Traits* "brought to light the serious discrepancies in black and white health conditions, the book's conclusions reassured complacent whites, encouraging political inaction by arguing for a racial, rather than a social, explanation" (167). Similarly, Frederickson notes that "Hoffman drew inspiration from the hardest school of social Darwinism and condemned philanthropists who would interfere with the struggle for existence by seeking what amounted to the artificial preservation of the unfit" (251). Hoffman's text

focused white supremacist arguments about black inferiority to deny African American social progress and to entrench structurally guaranteed gains in white wealth at the expense of black people.[16] The correlation of purported racial inferiority with criminality impeded social progress long before twentieth-century debates about poverty and employed the language of black pathology discourse in ways that would prove influential in later discussions of black culture.

In *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*, Khalil Gibran Muhammad also argues for the centrality of *Race Traits* and the 1890 census as significant texts in black pathology discourse, and he tracks the history of black criminality as a white supremacist assumption. Muhammad's work is

[16] African American responses to his ideas were swift, and a strong resistant response recognized the danger of allowing these specious assertions to go unchecked. Kelly Miller, a contemporary of Hoffman, was one of the latter's most vocal and convincing critics. In a review written just after Hoffman published *Race Traits*, Miller, an African American sociologist, got to the heart of the problem in Hoffman's article. According to Miller, rather than representing a legitimate work of science and statistical analysis, Hoffman's article featured problematic circular logic. Miller states that "it would seem that his conclusion was reached from a priori considerations and that facts have been collected in order to justify it" (3). Further, Miller attacked Hoffman's dubious use of "evidence," and he claimed that Hoffman's figures regarding "pure" or "mixed Negroes" taken from penitentiary records, a population that Hoffman saw as standardized much like in his military statistics, "cannot be relied upon since the census bureau acknowledges that it has no definite method of determining the different shades of color and grades of mixture among Negroes" (21). Regarding Hoffman's appeal to the supposed essential criminality of black people, Miller acknowledges high relative crime numbers but insists upon environmental explanations and rejects Hoffman's biological determinism as born of little evidence and bad science. According to Miller, "The social degradation of the Negro" represents "the greatest factor contributive to this high criminal record." Miller acknowledges as given that "poverty, ignorance, and crime" are "indissolubly connected" and claims that African Americans "represent the stratum of society which commits the bulk of crime the world over." But such social conditions, if applied to whites, would lead to similar results. According to Miller, "The census records nowhere show that there is any connection between crime and race, but between crime and condition" (28). As a result, any claimed "immorality" associated with blackness is certainly a "race trait," according to Miller, "but it is a human race trait, and is limited to no particular variety thereof" (33).

especially influential on my study because he insists on shifting the timeline of the origin and operation of black pathology discourse, placing it precisely in the decades—the 1890s and just after the turn of the century—in which resistant black literary voices proliferated. Muhammad explains that in the 1890 census, "prison statistics for the first time became the basis of a national discussion about blacks as a distinct and dangerous criminal population" (3). The scientific encoding of assumptions of black criminality into an extant discourse of black inferiority suggests that the Progressive era was "the founding moment for the emergence of an enduring statistical discourse of black dysfunctionality rather than the 1960s, as is commonly believed" (7). With Daniel Paul Moynihan's 1965 report in mind, Muhammad looks back to the Progressive decades of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to observe that the specific language of black criminality and cultural pathology reduces "the gap in the racial crime rhetoric between avowedly white supremacist writers and white progressives" (8).[17] In fact, the apparently racially liberal social workers of the first decade of the twentieth century, who began "to explain black criminality in terms of environment" rather than the biological determinism adhered to by avowed white supremacists, attempted "to defend the humanity of blacks and their right to fair play in American society, and at the same time to concede that blacks were still sufficiently inferior behaviorally or socially to

[17] Moynihan's *The Negro Family: the Case for National Action* argues that the African American population in the United States has "paid a fearful price" over three hundred years of oppression, which results in an ineffective matriarchal family structure, negligent black fathers, and a "tangle of pathology" that "retards the progress of the group as a whole." While this twentieth-century text represents an important reference point in the history of black pathology discourse, especially as it highlights the racist assumptions of well-intentioned liberals, my focus in this project is on the historical roots that influence a document such as the Moynihan Report, so I do not figure it as a source of analysis.

warrant special attention, but not necessarily special help" (113). These liberal reformers represent the consequences of a century of scientific racism and a subsequent shift to black cultural pathology written into the discourse of race.[18]

Frederick Hoffman is an especially important figure for Muhammad, as he is for Haller, Gould, and Frederickson, because of his success in proliferating racial statistical analyses into mainstream American public discourse. Most important to Muhammad is the way Hoffman focused on "setting the terms and shaping the frame of analysis." He did this by "combin[ing] crime statistics with a well-crafted white supremacist narrative to shape the reading of black criminality while trying to minimize the appearance of doing so" (51). In this way Hoffman's work represents the perfect sign of an opportunistic white supremacy focused on discursive intervention that occludes history and naturalized its motives. According to Muhammad, because Hoffman centered black criminality as an important measure of racial inferiority just as his forebears had focused on death rates and anatomical measurements, "Hoffman wrote crime into race and centered it at the heart of the Negro Problem" (51). While Muhammad's work focuses on the effects of criminalizing black populations in urban spaces, his notion of "writ[ing] crime into race" demonstrates that black pathology discourse serves a central role in white supremacy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, enduring to the

[18] In *Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement House Movement, 1890–1945*, Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn analyzes the history of leading settlement house reformers including Jane Addams, Frances Kellor, and John Daniels. She asserts that they "blamed the perpetuation of poor economic and social conditions among blacks partly on society but primarily on what they considered the weakness of the black family, the degradation of the black individual's psyche, and the annihilation of culture all resulting from the system of slavery" (13). She also argues that these reformers' "focus on environmental origins of varying capacities failed to contradict the portrayal of blacks as inferior," and as a result, their "stress on cultural deficiency created, in the minds of many whites, a new rationale for discrimination" (19).

present day. By focusing on four important authors from the turn of the century, I affirm Muhammad's revised timeline of black pathology and analyze the ways these authors theorize white supremacy. Consequently, I also address the broader theoretical implication of such attempts, as my work with black pathology reveals some commonality with recent work in biopolitical theory focused on racial history.

A Critical Vocabulary of Race and Racism

My analysis of white supremacy in this project depends on Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields's *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. Their critical vocabulary generally, including their coinage of "racecraft" and their stipulation that "[b]io-racism" represents "a more precise appellation for … nineteenth-century research…than the more usual term, 'race science,'" gets to the heart of my inquiry, which, in part, is to analyze the ways that white supremacist discourse became naturalized and applied in the nineteenth century through a discourse of black pathology (4). Fields and Fields define racism as "first and foremost a social practice, which means that it is an action and a rationale for action, or both at once" (17). Their use of "craft" in their definition joins the supposed fact of race with the ambiguity of superstition embodied by witchcraft, and they note that racecraft "occupies a middle ground … an invisible realm of collective understandings, a half-lit zone of the mind's eye" (23). According to the authors, racecraft is especially pernicious because it is disguised as nature: "This purposefully encoded, politically deployed racecraft serves as a reminder that what depends on imagination and action is more flexible than nature and has the power to create a quasi-nature more convincing than nature itself" (70). Finally,

Fields and Fields argue that race "as culture is only biological race in polite language: No one can seriously postulate cultural homogeneity among those whose racial homogeneity scholars nonetheless take for granted" (156). These assertions isolate as especially insidious our willful attempts to misunderstand race and to look past racism. Fields and Fields emphasize the flexible and therefore adaptable nature of white supremacy and its dependence on a discourse that equivocates biology and culture and disguises feeling as science. The authors in my study, with the exception of white supremacist Thomas Dixon, recognize these principles and mount resistant responses that intervene upon and subvert this discourse. At the same time, rejections of reductive "race as culture" assumptions in these responses illustrate the complexity generated by the central presence of white supremacy in American culture. Kendrick Lamar claims "loyalty" not to emphasize cultural continuity in an essentialist sense but to reject that white supremacist assumption of black cultural stasis by laying claim to a carefully considered resistant culture that identifies and destroys white supremacist assumptions.

Black Pathology, Biopolitics, and the Limits of Theory

To examine the way the authors I study theorize white supremacy, I particularly examine twentieth-century political theory and its relation to racist oppression and violence. I relied on contemporary biopolitics because of the ways it unpacks the relations between how the state uses the body and knowledge about it to control different populations. Consequently, the theoretical genealogy of my project begins with Foucault's concept of biopolitics and shifts to an application of some of its assumptions to the context of the nineteenth century and to the discourse of black

pathology. Because I engage Giorgio Agamben's work in two chapters of this project, and because Agamben's work follows Foucault, it is useful to gloss some of the most important principles of biopolitics as they apply to the development of a discourse of black pathology specifically and to the operation of racism and white supremacy more generally. Foucault defines biopolitics as a specifically modern conception of life and its political valence. In *The History of Sexuality* he observes: "For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question" (143). Foucault argues that the modern state makes its mission the administration of life, whether through sustaining it or killing it. Foucault notes that by killing he does "not mean simply murder as such, but also every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on" (256). Agamben's notion of the *homo sacer*, which I use as a sign of black abjection in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, derives from this definition of killing in Foucault's sense.

To the extent that racism in the American context represents complex dynamics of state-sponsored and capitalist oppression or complicity to cultural modes, Foucault's discussion of racism provides some useful concepts but also proves limited in its application. In *Race and the Education of Desire*, Ann Laura Stoler analyzes Foucault's theory of race as a technology of biopower. She calls Foucault's concept of racism "internal to the biopolitical state, woven into the weft of the social body, threaded through its fabric," and as such, Foucault's theory "is no scapegoat theory of race."

Stoler explains that scapegoat theories "posit that under economic and social duress, particular sub-populations are cordoned off as intruders, invented to deflect anxieties, and conjured up precisely to nail blame." Stoler states that for Foucault "racism is more than an ad hoc response to crisis; it is a manifestation of preserved possibilities, the expression of an underlying discourse of permanent social war, nurtured by the biopolitical technologies of 'incessant purification'" (69). While she does not address the context of the nineteenth-century United States, Stoler's emphasis on how racism inheres in the state invites comparison to the context of my project. Stoler points out that Foucault is focused on state racism as such, and not on its more "popular forms"; however, my project cannot make that distinction in the context of the late-nineteenth century. For instance, lynching in the United States represented the slippage between popular state-sponsored racial violence; it was authored through extra-legal means but benefitted from the complicity of the law. At the same time, the centrality of white supremacy to American politics at the time, including the writing into law of some of the most oppressive means by which to disenfranchise African Americans, demonstrates the importance of an analysis of racism and its relation to the modern state. Likewise, scapegoating is not an accurate descriptor of American white supremacists' attitudes toward black citizens, as it fails to recognize the fact that slavery, and its aftermath, had marked African Americans as "intruders" at least since the seventeenth century. As the politics of American race science and sociology demonstrate, a priori assumptions of black inferiority endure through American history and adapt to various historical circumstances. In fact, this pervasiveness and adaptability have proved to be constants of American white supremacy.

A second problem with Foucault's work and that of other biopolitical thinkers like Agamben is, as Alexand Weheliye argues, its tendency to avoid any extended analysis of racial thinking. In *Habeas Viscus*, Weheliye criticizes Foucault for "reinscrib[ing] racial difference as natural" in his analysis of biopower, and he makes important assertions about theory's limits. Weheliye states that Foucault "never interrogates the bare existence of racial difference and those hierarchies fabricated upon this primordial notion." For Weheliye, Foucault accepts as fact that racism derives from "preestablished variances among different ethnicities" and fails to analyze how such causation came about. Consequently, race for Foucault "emerges as a fixed category rather than as the biopolitical apparatus it actually is" (62). Weheliye furthermore criticizes Agamben's work for privileging an analysis of the law at the expense of the "life" supposedly at the heart of his concept of bare life. According to Weheliye, Agamben's bare life "leaves no room for alternate forms of life that elude the law's violent embrace," and as a result *homo sacer* "remains a thing," unable to act on its own. Agamben elevates the law of the sovereign to such power that no liberating possibilities apply. According to Weheliye, "Because alternatives do not exist in Agamben's generalized sphere of exception that constitutes bare life, the law denotes the only constituent power in the definition and adjudication of what it means to be human or dehumanized in the contemporary world" (131). Weheliye's work represents an important challenge to political theory that risks being blind to the human experiences behind its abstractions. Keeping this line of critique in mind, in these chapters I focus on attempts by resistant black voices to theorize white supremacy and

ground my attention in lived experience even as I consider the ways that political signs might reveal the more subtle operations of white supremacy.

In the chapters that follow, I analyze white supremacy in its turn-of-the-century American context to trace the contours of black pathology discourse and resistance to it. In Chapter One, I focus on the work of Thomas Dixon, an avowed white supremacist who wrote highly influential novels that glorified white supremacist violence and attempted to relitigate the Civil War and Reconstruction during the post-Reconstruction era. His work conceives citizenship as a biological imperative rather than a social construct, and he attempts to inscribe what I call biopolitical citizenship into history and the law. I use Giorgio Agamben's figure of the *homo sacer* to explore white supremacists' paranoia about black rights. Dixon connects the oppression of black people to white suffering, as his fear of federal overreach is supposedly the real story of racial politics in the United States. Dixon's white supremacist theorizing traffics in the language of rights in part to occlude its antidemocratic logic. In this chapter, I examine references to habeas corpus and other examples of rights discourse in his texts in the context of their complex histories to show how Dixon attempts to naturalize white supremacy into the history of American citizenship. Dixon's work fuels particular resistant black responses that challenge naturalized white supremacy and its assumptions and attack the discourse of black pathology that perpetuates and enables them.

In Chapter Two, I explore the ways Pauline Hopkins intervenes in black pathology discourse and rejects its assumptions about African American women and families while challenging other political discourses that attempt to silence their stories.

I focus on Sappho Clark as the central figure in Hopkins's novel *Contending Forces*, and I argue that Sappho exemplifies a compelling political identity in that she challenges insufficient political strategies and recognizes the family as a dynamic political unit rather than a referent for black suffering or cultural pathology. Hopkins focuses on lynching as a sign of white supremacist obsession with black women's sexuality, and she suggests that white supremacy represents an insidious pathology that claims moral superiority while it enables racist violence and manipulates the facts of history to support its assumption. For Hopkins, history itself is the political terrain on which to wage these battles that reclaim black agency and reveal the operation of white supremacy and black pathology discourse.

In Chapter Three, I focus on racist violence and pathology in more detail as I investigate the ways that Sutton Griggs emphasizes the horrors of white supremacy. Specifically, he depicts its medicalized and scientific history and reappropriates its language to sabotage black pathology discourse. In his two most popular novels, *Imperium in Imperio* and *The Hindered Hand*, Griggs connects a history of scientific racism to white supremacist violence committed against black victims. Griggs uses images of the dissection of black people to recall the long history of violence perpetrated by white supremacists obsessed with black bodies, and he uses the language of disease to illustrate how black pathology discourse operates to endanger African Americans. In the process, he subverts that discourse to put the responsibility for pathological racial thinking and violence back where it belongs, in the hands of white supremacists.

In Chapter Four, I show how Charles Chesnutt's use of lynching as a metaphor in his novel *The Marrow of Tradition* explains lynching's political motivations. For Chesnutt, there is an explicit cause-and-effect relationship between black disenfranchisement and racist violence. In this chapter, I return to Agamben's figure of the *homo sacer* to show how abject black political identity enables white supremacists to commit murder, and I illustrate the ideological slippage in the relationship between white supremacist violence and the law. Chesnutt's novel recognizes that black pathology discourse validates white supremacist resentment and violence, and he highlights how lynching's status as both within and without the law benefits from the proscription of black rights and the law's complicity in looking the other way when racist violence was necessary.

Finally, I demonstrate in the epilogue for this project that the discourse of black pathology continues to exhibit the complex status of white supremacy in a country that claims ideals of democratic equality. This contradiction at the heart of American democracy, however, did not seem to plague the black authors in my study, perhaps because lamenting the problem of white supremacy as a tragic aspect of American democracy occludes the lived experiences of its victims and participates in the historical work of white supremacy. For Hopkins, Griggs, and Chesnutt, white supremacy was an urgent part of everyday life that required an immediate resistant response. Each author struggled to find political strategies that offered hope while also recognizing the existential threat that white supremacy posed. The complexity of their literary contributions reflects their creativity and political commitment, while at the same time,

the persistence of white supremacy and black pathology discourse illustrates the continuing necessity and vitality of their work.

Thomas Dixon and Biopolitical Fantasies of National Citizenship

"Are they not citizens of the United States? Does not the Fourteenth Amendment apply to a white man as well as a Negro?"—Thomas Dixon[19]

The above quotation, from a climactic scene in Thomas Dixon's 1902 novel *The Leopard's Spots*, may strike the modern reader as strange. How could the Fourteenth Amendment—such a central part of Reconstruction and an important referent for the struggle for black civil rights—represent an appeal instead for white rights? Though it now embodies such a place of esteem at the center of guaranteed American rights, the Fourteenth Amendment is an essential Reconstruction text, and it represents a revolutionary reappraisal of some of the most important assumptions about the rights American citizenship guarantees.[20] Consequently, the Reconstruction legislation that surrounded it, including the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Amendments guaranteeing the end of slavery and the right to vote, respectively, proved to be especially provocative to Southerners and their sympathizers long after the Civil War ended. A constellation of civil rights ideals surrounding the Fourteenth Amendment depended on some of its

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[19] Thomas Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden—1865–1900*, p. 160.

[20] The genealogy of United States citizenship, specifically regarding race and Reconstruction, as embodied in the Fourteenth Amendment includes a set of important decisions and legislation, beginning with Chief Justice Roger Taney's ruling in *Scott v. Sanford* that African Americans were not citizens of the United States (19 How. 393, 404-407). In the *Slaughterhouse Cases*, the Supreme Court ruled that the state retained most of the rights of citizenship, and that the promises of the Fourteenth Amendment largely did not apply (Foner 531). In *U.S. v. Cruikshank*, the Court further solidified the power of the states in Enforcement Act cases, in which the federal government attempted to protect African Americans from racially motivated violence. According to Eric Foner, *Cruikshank* "rendered national prosecution of crimes committed against blacks virtually impossible, and gave a green light to acts of terror where local officials either could not or would not enforce the law" (531).

central assumptions, including the right of basic citizenship unencumbered by racial identity, a tenet that struck at the foundational assumptions of white supremacy. The perceived threat to rights and liberties of white American citizens that increasing African American freedoms represented animated much of the persistent disagreement about citizenship and civil rights in the nineteenth century even though actual freedoms for African Americans continued to be proscribed after Reconstruction.[21] At the heart of the conflict is a longstanding assumption held by the majority of white Americans of the time and of the present that citizenship and the ideologies and legal instruments that support it—including the rights of habeas corpus and its promise of basic civil liberties—are a biological imperative, not a social construct subject to the whims of progressive history. And Thomas Dixon is perhaps the author at the end of the nineteenth century most compelled to take up the cause of biologically defined citizenship. In a series of sermons delivered in the buildup to the Spanish American War and in his three novels, Dixon articulates a clear vision for an Anglo Saxon citizenship in the United States that conflates biological identity with political identity, and his work attempts to inscribe what I call his notion of biopolitical citizenship into history and the law.

Dixon's position at the turn of the twentieth century as a central voice for white supremacy has received important critical attention in the past two decades. Most

[21] In *Reconstruction*, Foner explains that like "the republicanism of the American Revolution, Reconstruction Radicalism was first and foremost a civic ideology, grounded in a definition of citizenship" (233). That definition, as embodied by the Fourteenth Amendment, sought "to conjure into being a new political leadership that would respect the principle of equality before the law" (259). As a result, citizenship continued to be an important litmus test for race issues in the nineteenth century and beyond.

notably, Brook Thomas has illuminated the implications of Dixon's work on nineteenth-century citizenship and legal history. Thomas's key intervention in critical works like *Civic Myths* and his article "*The Clansman*'s Raced-Based Anti-Imperialist Imperialism" is to demonstrate that Dixon's white supremacist rationale is coherent.[22] He argues that Dixon's argument is consistent given the two impulses that animate Dixon's work: a pro-imperialist attitude about U.S. intervention abroad and an anti-imperialist mistrust of federal power as applied to the American South. Additionally, Dixon's work illuminates the complex contradictions embodied in nineteenth-century texts about citizenship when racial identity motivated so many interpretations of rights and liberties, and legal decisions often amplified the fluidity of racial categories and the importance of racial thinking. Thomas's analysis of the relationship between rights and liberties in Dixon's work inspires my analysis in this chapter, and I extend Thomas's argument by acknowledging the importance of historicizing Dixon's work in the context of citizenship.[23] One of Thomas's most important conclusions, one that guides

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[22] Brook Thomas asserts that Dixon's novels, *The Clansman* in particular, reveal a "more complicated Dixon than the one we are so accustomed to dismissing." He notes that Dixon's novels "raise complex constitutional and historical dilemmas" and contends that it was Dixon's "inability to live with their paradoxical complexity that, in part, led [Dixon] to seek simplistic resolutions" ("*The Clansman*'s Race-Based Anti-Imperialist Imperialism" 307). Thomas traces his argument in "*The Clansman*'s Race-Based Anti-Imperialist Imperialism" through various explanations for Dixon's pro-imperialist attitude at the turn of the century at odds with Dixon's "anti-imperialism" applied to Reconstruction. Thomas's focus on citizenship and its high-profile nineteenth-century sources proves most useful for my analysis.

[23] Thomas contends that Dixon believes that African American equality can come only "at the expense of liberty" for white Americans. Thomas argues that *The Clansman* alludes to *Ex parte Milligan*, "the most famous civil liberties case to come out of the war," as representative of the relationship Dixon establishes between civil rights and civil liberties, terms once used "interchangeably" prior to the war but ultimately

my own inquiry, is that Dixon's anxiety about threats to white citizenship recognizes the extension of federal power represented by Reconstruction, as well as the ways that the denial or bestowal of citizenship enables or restricts violence against certain members of society.

But there are also limits to Thomas's arguments that create points of departure for my work. While Thomas wants to appreciate Dixon's complexities in considering constitutional issues, he does so by divesting them from their ethical context and implications. To avoid simply identifying Dixon's racism, Thomas treats Dixon as a constitutional interventionist. While it is important to recognize the instrumentality of the nineteenth-century legal context for Dixon's thinking, it is equally important to make clear that this context does not free Dixon from the ethical responsibilities of his own historical interventionism.[24] Dixon's racism must not reduce the instructive value of his work regarding nineteenth-century cultures of white supremacist thinking, but the tendency of his work to raise interesting questions about the legal history of the

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distinguished in the modern sense they now reflect by the Fourteenth Amendment ("*The Clansman*'s Race-Based Anti-Imperialist Imperialism" 309). Dixon's reference to *Milligan* also raises the issue of habeas corpus, which Thomas does not explore in detail but which identifies an important way Dixon dramatizes the relationship between Fourteenth Amendment citizenship and civil liberties, African American rights, and Anglo Saxon liberties. Further, as one of the representative cases of Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus during the Civil War, *Milligan* represents civil liberties prevailing over civil rights as a clear rejection of federal overreach. Thomas explains that "Dixon uses the fact that political and civil equality for African Americans could be sustained only by an imperialistic central authority as proof that such equality would come only at the expense of liberty" (308).

[24] In Dixon's case, his historical interventionism involved mapping turn-of-the-century anxieties about racial identity and expanding American borders—including its implications for citizenship and white supremacy—onto the history of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

nineteenth century must not occlude its insidious racist logic that had far-reaching consequences. Disagreement between my work and Brook Thomas's centers on this point.

Thomas insists that Dixon cannot be representative of white supremacist thinking because of his ability to support American international intervention while attacking federal power at home, a combination of ideas contrary to most white supremacists in the late-nineteenth century whom, according to Thomas, opposed American imperial intervention—most notably because of their fears of incorporating "lesser" races. But Dixon's popularity indicates that he touched a nerve and illuminated widely held beliefs. His work is interesting in part because it demonstrates both the insidiousness and opportunism of white supremacy. By considering Thomas's historicist approach to Dixon's work, specifically in the nineteenth-century context of rights and citizenship, I demonstrate in this chapter how the ethical implications of Dixon's work are imbued in its legal history. Dixon's version of white supremacy reveals a set of anxieties about rights and citizenship, as well as a strategy for displacing those anxieties onto African Americans. More specifically, this version of white supremacy utilizes a language of pathology that attempts to codify biological uncertainty into legal guarantees. Dixon reveals the interplay of biological thinking and political expediency in white supremacist ideology regarding the most defining issue in the nineteenth century: what it means to be American in a system of laws that supposedly enacts and protects liberal democratic ideals.

A logical manifestation of this anxiety is the belief in white victimhood, which Dixon attempts to codify in the assumed stability of the law. But as the legal history of

the nineteenth century demonstrates, this was an especially challenging endeavor. Amy Kaplan's work illustrates the ways that citizenship and the incorporation of racial others was a provocative issue at the turn of the century, just as it had been after the Civil War. Dixon used this historical analogue to articulate the importance of citizenship to a distinctly Anglo Saxon future for the United States. And that historical reference point allowed white supremacists to put their own citizenship status, in an existential sense, under specific threat. Walter Benn Michaels observes that "Reconstruction not only enables white men to imagine themselves as victims of imperialism, it enables them to imagine the imperial power as their own government" (187). And an opportunity for national reunion embodied by the imperial success of the United States at the turn of the century created an equal opportunity to couch that reunion in stabilized white identity defined against black suffering. In *Reconstructing the World*, Harilaos Stecopoulos states, "Although President McKinley imagined imperial reunion in exclusively fraternal terms," Thomas Dixon "seize[s] on the question of biological reproduction of the nation and use[s] that question to redefine the South as pivotal to the American future" (24). Michael Rogin points out that this moment inspired Dixon's new galvanized focus on African Americans, whereas before his sermons "had been more concerned with immigrant mobs than with Negroes" (194). Dixon's strategy to wed these historical events to the issues of race and citizenship, and the overwhelming response he received from his reading public, indicates the opportunism of white supremacist fervor at this moment in history.[25]

[25] David Blight's *Race and Reunion* is an essential source on the cultural consequences of Reconstruction history. Blight avers that Civil War memory became constituted on the issue of slavery as well as on the ways Reconstruction defined the Constitution;

According to Melvyn Stokes, Dixon's recognition that the American imperial war was a white supremacist war changed Dixon's mind about race relations at home and redirected his efforts from the dangers posed by new immigrants to the nation toward the threat of African American success (40). In his novels, Dixon expresses this anxiety by co-opting black suffering for white victimhood, and as Cathy Boeckmann explains in *A Question of Character*, Dixon believes that the inner life or "character" of a person is inextricably linked to their racial identity. Boeckmann argues that for Dixon, the "white character that suffering builds forms alongside a racial unity that would deny character to any other racial group, regardless of commensurate suffering" (77). A white identity forged this way—at a moment of national unity and through the suffering of African Americans—ties national identity to the suffering of the racial other.

Dixon and the Problem of Habeas Corpus

With this language in mind as a frame for my argument in this chapter about Dixon's notions of "biopolitical citizenship," a particular image from Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* brings together the issues of biological identity and political agency so important to Dixon. Agamben identifies habeas corpus as an ideological center for biopolitics, subverting assumptions about

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what the war, a *New York Herald* editorial had wondered, "had written into the Constitution" or "which Constitution" now obtained. As Reconstruction began to be litigated in cultural memory as soon as the 1868 Democratic Presidential campaign, a counter-narrative to Republican success emerged. According to Blight, "Republican misrule, went the argument, had stolen the rights of whites and disrupted the natural place of blacks in society" (101). Thus, from the beginning Reconstruction offered a narrative of white persecution grounded in political identity. White supremacists like Dixon would attempt to ensure that this identity was ensconced in one's biological identity.

modern democratic political theory and its purportedly virtuous roots. Agamben's theoretical formulation of "bare life"—life that has been stripped of its political agency and identity—as "the new political subject" of biopolitics in modernity finds a referent, in fact its "first recording," according to Agamben, in the 1679 writ of habeas corpus (123).[26] The "bearer of rights" in modern democracy, according to Agamben, can only be constructed as a subject when bare life—corpus—is isolated by the sovereign power of the state. Therefore, the vulnerability of life itself is at the heart of the notion of liberty enshrined in the sovereign subject. I explore Agamben's more detailed argument in *Homo Sacer* in a subsequent chapter. But the idea that life stripped of its political status potentially lies at the center of a symbol of democracy resonates in the history of the nineteenth century and is at the center of Dixon's white supremacist logic.[27] The doubleness of the subject, the supposed bearer of rights but always and already power's potential victim, perhaps explains a fear shared by Dixon and his African American targets. Of course, African Americans' lived experience of that fear invalidates Dixon's

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[26] *Black's Law Dictionary* defines habeas corpus (in Latin, "that you have the body") as "[a] writ employed to bring a person before a court, most frequently to ensure that the person's imprisonment or detention is not illegal (habeas corpus ad subjiciendum). In addition to being used to test the legality of an arrest or commitment, the writ may be used to obtain judicial review of (1) the regularity of the extradition process, (2) the right to or amount of bail, or (3) the jurisdiction of a court that has imposed a criminal sentence." In the entry, Charles Alan Wright, quoting *Secretary of State for Home Affairs v. O'Brien*, traces the codification of habeas corpus to the Habeas Corpus Act of 1679 (1923, A.C. 603, 609), just as Agamben does.

[27] It is also important to note that I am treating Agamben's assertion as a metaphor for the existence of democratic political life at the locus of contradiction. I am not suggesting that Agamben's formulation can withstand the full weight of the legal history of habeas corpus, not only because of the multiplicity of its applications in that legal history, but also because the writ of habeas corpus is as much a procedural act as a philosophical assertion in its modern usage.

exploitation of it, but a structural connection regarding the subject's relationship to the law remains. The vulnerability of life as the subject of politics is amplified when race is the designator of political identity, and in the nineteenth century, racial identity and the apparent rights of citizenship were often coterminous.

Agamben's work helps articulate a theory of citizenship as a vector of power that is grounded in Foucault's exploration of biopolitics. In "From Zoēpolitics to Biopolitics: Citizenship and the Construction of 'Society,'" Willem Schinkel explains the role of citizenship in creating bare life. He states that "formal citizenship"—as opposed to what he calls "moral citizenship," a judgment of one's engagement with their citizenship rights—"separates citizens from non-citizens who are thereby zoēpolitically reduced to bare life" (156).[28] Citizenship allows for the creation of a "social schizophrenic, a Janus-faced person who does and at the same time doesn't 'belong,'" rather than of Agamben's *homo sacer*. According to Schinkel, "Unlike the homo sacer, this person belongs to the nation/state, but he or she is biopolitically excluded from the *bios* of society" (164). For Schinkel, Agamben's work is instructive in the way it illustrates the state's primary control mechanisms, like citizenship, operating as social control, sorting citizens and non-citizens and creating bare life in the process. A central conclusion from Agamben that informs Schinkel's argument about the "zoēpolitical aspect of citizenship" is that "[e]ach citizen is *potentially* reduced to bare life" (166). Thomas Dixon's hysteria that white rights are under threat by the very

[28] For Schinkel, zoēpolitics is power directed "primarily externally … toward persons outside the state," while biopolitics "is internally directed and aims at the control of populations occupying the state's territory but which are discursively placed outside the domain of hegemony marked as 'society'" (156). Schinkel argues that citizenship reflects both of these aspects as a form of social control.

existence of black rights becomes even more provocative when we consider it in the context of nineteenth-century citizenship. For Dixon, all white citizens are potentially black citizens, slaves to their government and threatened by the overreach of federal power. The two-faced aspect of citizenship in a republican democracy—that it can create and deny subjectivity—gives Dixon's white supremacy fertile ground for exploitation.

Agamben's description of the "polar" character of democracy could describe Dixon's work, which is grounded in the ironies of the nineteenth-century legal history of citizenship.[29] Agamben states that the "ambiguous … character of democracy" exists in the concept of habeas corpus "if one considers the fact that the same legal procedure that was originally intended to assure the presence of the accused at the trial and, therefore, to keep the accused from avoiding judgment, turns—in its new and definitive form—into grounds for the sheriff to detain and exhibit the body of the accused." Agamben describes habeas corpus as "*a two-faced being, the bearer of both subjection to sovereign power and of individual liberties*" (125, italics in original). As Schinkel observes, the body as the basis for politics—for biopolitics—means that all men are potentially subject to the power of the sovereign.[30] In the context of African American

[29] Perhaps the central example is the persistence of the Fugitive Slave Law as a referent and precedent for increased federal power. After the Civil War, it persisted as an ironic justification or reference point for civil rights legislation. Charles Lofgren explains in *The Plessy Case* that initial Fourteenth Amendment appeals usually did not concern racial discrimination. Lofgren states, "between *Slaughter-house* and *Plessy*, of the 150 cases the United States Supreme Court decided under the Amendment, only fifteen involved discrimination against blacks" (70).

[30] In *The Power of Life: Agamben and the Coming Politics*, David Kishik explains, "The true political subject reveals itself for the first time to be neither a free man nor a citizen but just an anonymous body." Kishik notes that this body is both "the substance

rights and the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when black freedoms were proscribed and the black body was in constant danger, Dixon's allusions to habeas corpus and the Magna Carta as centers of Anglo Saxon citizenship that require its denial to African Americans are especially resonant.[31] As a center for Dixon's exploration of a biopolitical definition of citizenship, habeas corpus and the texts that codified it—most notably the 14th Amendment—serve as central signs in Dixon's fiction and sermons. His ideal Anglo Saxon citizen remains inextricably tied to the suffering of African Americans, and biopolitical citizenship illustrates the opportunism of white supremacy that seeks to unite political and biological identity in the law as a protection against both federal overreach and the intrusion of black Americans into white spaces.[32]

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that is the bearer of liberties and rights (and thus it is ordinarily cared for and protected from peril)" and "also the ultimate target of power and law (and thus it can potentially be forsaken and harmed)" (74). This is the body—and the subject—that is the object of habeas corpus.

[31] Two of the Habeas Corpus Acts and the Enforcement Acts, both of which tried to protect the rights of former slaves as articulated in the 14th Amendment by suspending the rights of white racists, are relevant to this chapter.

[32] The "fantasies" to which the title of this chapter refers recalls Lauren Berlant's *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*. Her analysis focuses on the ways that citizenship gets constructed and enacted in the national imaginary. According to Berlant, central to the American experience is a crisis of identity, one that pits the local and regional against the global and gets mapped onto the historical conflict between state citizenship and national citizenship. Given the centrality of the Civil War in this history, it is no surprise, and yet no less remarkable, that Berlant points to the nation's racial history as central to its notion of citizenship. She argues that "modern American citizenship is derived primarily not from Enlightenment Constitutional dicta but rather from the enfranchisement of African Americans" and, accordingly, "it is possible to see the history of the Constitution as a record of the nation's gradual recognition that it needs officially to theorize an ideal relation between its abstract 'citizens' and the person who lives, embodied, an everyday life" (13). If the benefit of hindsight allows such a conclusion now, Berlant does not contend that these ideas were not contested. The friction of these two political identities—the idealized citizen subject and the lived

Returning to the epigraph that began this chapter, the plea for white rights embodied in the character's appeal to the Fourteenth Amendment represents and dictates a specific ideology of racial thinking that structures various forms of political and cultural thought at the turn of the century. It reveals the racial anxiety of post-Reconstruction society in which the history of the Civil War and subsequent attempts to integrate black Americans into free society became the ideological battleground for the nation's hearts and minds. And the epigraph is grounded in nineteenth-century legal developments that theorized enduring questions about civil rights, individual liberties, and national identity. Dixon's sermons and speeches in the late 1890s motivated by a moment of patriotism evinced by the Spanish American War as well as his trilogy of hugely popular novels in the first decade of the twentieth century address these questions. In both genres he reflects an ideology of citizenship galvanized both by American imperialism and the legal and social consequences of Reconstruction, which continue to resonate through literary representation and public discourse long after the rights of African Americans have been proscribed. Dixon shows us that a fundamental fact of white supremacy is its commitment to occluding its antidemocratic logic. By shrouding his analysis and historical revisionism in the language of individual rights,

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experience of that construct (and, in the case of African Americans, a more poignant notion of subjection)—and the new attention to rights-based discourse that resulted from Emancipation—imbued the concept of citizenship with a new complexity. This conflict—between ideal, free citizen and embodied, lived reality most poignantly represented by the enduring presence of inequality for African Americans in the United States—comprises a series of literary images and philosophical and legal debates. Berlant's thesis also articulates the intimate relationship between exclusive and idealized American citizenship and the lived experience of the African American "other" that Dixon exploits in his fantasy of white supremacist national citizenship.

Dixon attempts to naturalize white supremacy into the history of American citizenship, and within the history of citizenship more broadly.[33]

In this chapter, I analyze some of Dixon's sermons from the Spanish American War and two novels from his Reconstruction Trilogy—*The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905)—to demonstrate how Dixon constructs a doctrine of American citizenship that excludes African Americans while defining the parameters of white citizenship against African American suffering.[34] A central strategy Dixon uses when theorizing citizenship in his novels is to cloak black suffering in white victimhood, making African Americans responsible for their own subjugation and for any supposed injustices visited upon white Americans. An unintended and ironic consequence is that this strategy prevents Dixon from writing African Americans out of both the United States and his works because his theory of citizenship fundamentally requires their presence to define Anglo Saxon citizenship. Nevertheless, Dixon conflates imperialism and Reconstruction to articulate a model of white supremacist American citizenship that

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[33] In *Civic Ideals*, Rogers Smith argues that the history of American citizenship is also the history of racial and gender oppression. He reads the history of American citizenship as an interaction of "liberal," "republican," and "ascriptive" structuring tendencies, especially through the experiences of African Americans, Native Americans, and women. According to Smith, his "multiple traditions thesis holds that American political actors have always promoted civic ideologies that blend liberal, democratic republican, and inegalitarian ascriptive elements in various combinations designed to be politically popular" (6). Smith states, "Citizenship laws also literally constitute—they create with legal words—a collective civic identity. They proclaim the existence of a political 'people' and designate who those persons are as a people, in ways that often become integral to individuals' senses of personal identity as well" (31). This complex identity of citizenship as both legal construct and personal identity, coupled with its history of egalitarian and inegalitarian principles and practices, creates a fertile if complicated object for Dixon's analysis.

[34] The third novel in the trilogy, *The Traitor*, was published in 1907.

rejects the Reconstruction Amendments' protections for African Americans and identifies the Amendments as threatening to white citizenship.[35] The roots of those anxieties are grounded in a particularly complex history of citizenship and white supremacy in the United States, and these historical antecedents and consequences inform Dixon's work.

Revising Reconstruction and Citizenship

The Fourteenth Amendment and the more forceful Civil Rights Act represent perhaps the most revolutionary legal developments in the aftermath of the Civil War.[36] In "To Begin the Nation Anew: Congress, Citizenship, and Civil Rights," Robert J. Kaczorowski explains the significance of changes in nineteenth-century federalism, specifically the fact that after the war Republicans "explained that sovereignty resided in the national government and included the primary authority to determine the status

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[35] Through the attempted exclusion of African Americans, Dixon defines a model of citizenship in line with what Brook Thomas has identified as a key paradox of citizenship in general, that "although citizenship as a concept helps to bring out the good in people, it is also defined by exclusions" ("*The Clansman*'s" 320). Dixon's "ethnic" rather than "civic" citizenship, to borrow Thomas's designations, represents in my project a locus of biopolitics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, specifically in terms of how the construct of citizenship attempts to manage racial pluralism in white supremacist terms. Dixonian citizenship ultimately reveals the ways white supremacist ideology incorporates possibilities for resistance by hijacking discourses of natural rights, national belonging, and individual freedom. In the process, however, white supremacist ideology creates new opportunities for resistance, which make up the focus of my remaining chapters.

[36] A close analysis of the Civil Rights Act is beyond the scope of this chapter. I mention it here because Kaczorowski takes it on in his article, and because it correlates with the Fourteenth Amendment in terms of the rights enumerated there. A more expansive project could take the fascinating history of the Civil Rights Act as another important aspect of the genealogy of nineteenth-century citizenship.

and secure the rights of all Americans, white as well as black" (47).[37] The Civil Rights Act of 1866 assumed that the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments "gave to all Americans the fundamental rights of citizenship and delegated to Congress the authority to protect citizens in their enjoyment of these rights" (49). Democrats rejected this constitutional theory because of its implication for states' rights, as they were concerned that national law could "supplant" state law (50). As an abiding site of conflict after the war, loss of sovereignty was a powerfully influential issue and metaphor for Southerners like Dixon. If natural rights are not only available to all, but are understood as "constitutionally recognized rights of American citizenship," they are independent of state law (54). They empower the federal government to enforce their protection at times in opposition to state government—a prospect that Dixon and other Southern Redeemers likened to an imperialistic power grab.

These anxieties were not completely unfounded. The Enforcement Acts, passed to ensure the Amendments and Civil Rights Act protected African Americans in the South, particularly by targeting the actions of the Ku Klux Klan, extended federal power in ways reminiscent of Lincoln's war powers.[38] In *The Colfax Massacre*, which

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[37] According to the Republicans that acted as framers for the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery was the "guarantee of the status and rights of citizenship" (48). The Fourteenth Amendment secured those rights through the instrument of the federal government. Deak Nabers further contends in *Victory of Law* that there is a "balance" in the Reconstruction Amendments between an appeal to "higher law" and positive law. The aim of the Amendments is to "locate higher law *within* the Constitution and to codify and enforce the higher law that already inhabits it" (17). Such a motive for the framers of the Fourteenth Amendment would, for Dixon, represent exactly the kind of moral and political agenda he saw as especially dangerous to Anglo Saxon political identity in the American future.

[38] The application of those powers included suspending habeas corpus, a symbol for Southerners that the Civil War was an imperialist war that first required the

describes the violent insurrection in Louisiana that resisted the Enforcement Act of 1871, LeeAnna Keith explains that what was known as the "Klan Act empowered the president to designate a state of insurrection in territory hostile to the government of the United States, to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, and to impose other elements of martial law" (75-6). In a further irony representative of much of the complexity of nineteenth-century legal theorizing about race, civil rights, and civil liberties, Keith also notes that the Enforcement Acts "took as their model the immense grant of power to federal officials in the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, which created special federal tribunals to investigate charges against African Americans outside the slave states" (74). Dixon's reappraisal of Reconstruction and its consequences at the turn of the century emphasized and exploited these anxieties and their historical roots by welding civil rights to civil liberties, as Thomas has argued, and by identifying habeas corpus as a theoretical center and particular vulnerability of that tension.[39]

If two emblematic pieces of legislation—the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act of 1863 and the Habeas Corpus Act of 1867—represent to Southerners like Dixon the dangers of federal overreach into the realm of nineteenth-century racial politics, an

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fundamental denial of individual rights. The Habeas Corpus Suspension Act of 1863 and the Habeas Corpus Act of 1867 both represent for Democrats like Dixon the gross overreach of federal power. In the first case, President Lincoln suspended the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus during the Civil War to expand executive power. In the second, Congress expanded federal jurisdiction for judicial review, in part to assure that litigants subject to unfair state laws had recourse to federal review (Foner 277). The Habeas Corpus Suspension Act of 1863 was a particular source of Southern ire because it allowed President Lincoln to subject suspected Confederate operatives and sympathizers to military tribunals, violating their right to due process in service of the extraordinary circumstances of the Civil War. In this way, it embodies Dixon's fears regarding federal overreach.

[39] See both Thomas's *Civic Myths* and "*The Clansman*'s Race-Based Anti-Imperialist Imperialism."

attempt to legislate against the abiding principles of what he saw as a divinely ordained Anglo Saxon state, habeas corpus and the Magna Carta represented the kind of stable and lasting concepts of individual freedom upon which the future must be built. Dixon memorializes both legal and cultural texts in his narratives as the operative signs of white supremacy. Further, the fundamental principle of habeas corpus is a levy to protect the Southern individual from the exact sort of federal overreach that granted African Americans citizenship, an exhibition of unchecked power that threatens the individual rights of Southerners. The symbolic status of habeas corpus as the center of individual liberty is a useful sign for white supremacist arguments like Dixon's, which are underwritten by beliefs in white persecution, including at the hands of the federal government. As perhaps the most valorized guarantee of citizenship—one's right to one's own body—habeas corpus also reveals the sovereign subject's vulnerability to the power of the state. In the narrative of the Civil War, Reconstruction represents the primary example of such an overreach, and Dixon suggests that unless Southern sympathizers are willing to reject the principles codified in legislation like the Fourteenth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act, and lay claim to the civil liberties and protections from executive overreach the Magna Carta and the writ of habeas corpus embodied, the threat to a white man's rights will continue.[40] Dixon seizes upon habeas corpus's complex and often contradictory history and then valorizes those principles in an historical document other than the Declaration of Independence to implement an

[40] In his defense of Homer Plessy, Albion Tourgee even argued that the first section of the Fourteenth Amendment was "the *magna carta* of the American citizen's rights" (Lofgren 156).

argument about biologically defined citizenship rights. This strategy reflects the irony embodied in the epigraph that began this chapter.

The Ironies of Habeas Corpus

Rather than embodying the ideological solid ground on which Dixon wishes to build a foundation for biopolitical citizenship, however, the history of habeas corpus reflects the complex relationship between race and citizenship in the United States. In *Habeas Corpus in America*, Justin Wert notes the use of the writ of habeas corpus "both to deprive and protect individual rights" (15). One notable initial use in the postbellum period was the protection of fugitive slaves from the newly broadened reach of federal power ensconced in the Fugitive Slave Act. In "Thinking About Habeas Corpus," Erwin Chemerinsky analyzes a passage from the Congressional Committee on Reconstruction Report that "concluded that former slaves were victims of 'cruelty, oppression and murder, which the local authorities are at no pains to prevent or punish'" (752-3).[41] In the original debate on the Senate floor in 1863, prior to Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus in the 1863 Act, Senator John Carlile from Virginia, a Unionist during the war, evoked the history of the fugitive slave in his opposition to Lincoln's plans:[42]

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[41] Immediately after the Civil War, criminal defendants were constrained in terms of how they could appeal to habeas corpus rights, and Chemerinsky notes that "the application of habeas corpus was limited to circumstances in which the defendant alleged that the sentencing court lacked jurisdiction" (754). Toward the end of the century, the Supreme Court gradually expanded these limitations, which coincided with the deteriorating legal and social conditions for African Americans.

[42] That this particular debate took place during a national insurrection gave the issue the "exceptional" context Lincoln needed to justify himself, and it guaranteed the fluidity of the concept of habeas corpus and its protections going forward. In a direct message to Congress on July 5, 1861, Lincoln justified his suspension of habeas corpus in

> And can it be that the Congress of the United States will deprive the loyal white citizen of those rights and those constitutional securities which the members of this Congress, or at least the controlling majority of it, has contended should be afforded to the fugitive slave, when claimed by virtue and authority of a constitutional law by his owner? Is the liberty of the white citizen of less value than that of the fugitive slave? (*Congressional Globe* 1091)

This is a complex reference that evokes Republican opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act, insists upon the ideological power of the Constitution and the rule of law, and ties the liberty of the "loyal white citizen" to the experience of soon-to-be former slaves. For Carlile, the "virtue and authority" of a constitutional law that enables a slaveowner to lay claim to his property serves as the foundation to, ironically, "those rights and those securities … afforded to the fugitive slave." The passage demonstrates the ways nineteenth-century notions of the rights of citizenship are complexly tied to the experiences of the races and, specifically, in the shadow cast upon that history by the fact of slavery and its aftermath.

The Habeas Corpus Act of 1867 also illustrates the ironies created by white supremacist citizenship, as the Democrats appealed to that sacred right in response to

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Maryland by pointing out the exceptional circumstances in which they lived: "as the provision was plainly made for a dangerous emergency, it cannot be believed the framers of the instrument intended that, in every case, the danger should run its course, until Congress could be called together…" (10).

Governor Holden's use of the state militia in North Carolina to investigate and put down the Klan. Holden declared martial law and refused to honor a writ of habeas corpus. Foner explains that the Act, "originally enacted to protect blacks and white Unionists," forced Holden to release the captives and the anti-Klan campaign ended (440-1). The legislative elections of 1870 seized on the "furor over habeas corpus," and Democrats "swept to victory" (441). The Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871, an additional measure to root out Klan activity to protect African Americans, also gave Congress the ability to suspend habeas corpus as a necessary power. Foner notes that even Republicans "were troubled by the provision authorizing the suspension of habeas corpus" to a degree that the clause "was subsequently amended so as to lapse the following year" (456). In October 1871, President Grant brought the Enforcement Acts to bear in South Carolina by proclaiming a "condition of lawlessness" and suspending the writ of habeas corpus (457). In each of these cases, Reconstruction and its aims were saved through what Albert T. Morgan called "*steady, unswerving power from without*," and as Foner traces in his book, the issue of federal enforcement and overreach continued to be a key issue going forward for the United States and for Dixon's work at the turn of the century (459, italics in original). For Dixon, the historical moment of the Spanish American War proved to be the opportunistic event that brought nationalistic power to bear on racial identity in ways reminiscent of Reconstruction, distilling the complexities of nineteenth-century history into an existential conflict about racial identity.

Critics agree that the Spanish American War motivated Dixon to reappraise Reconstruction, providing him with the opportunity to consider the "white man's

burden" abroad in terms of the unique racial scene of the United States. In *Reconstructing the World*, Harilaos Stecopoulos notes that Dixon understood that white Southerners "wanted both to claim a part of the nation's imperial success and to accuse the North of colonization—both to revel in Anglo-Saxon triumphalism and to indulge in white sectional ressentiment" (26). Jeremy Wells states that Dixon worried "that the spirit of white reunion and sectional reconciliation that had exploded at the outset of the Spanish-American War might already be passing away" (139). Amy Kaplan's work on this period and its consequences is crucial, and in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U. S. Culture* she explains how the American imperial mission abroad affected racial feeling at home. She argues that "[t]he pursuit of imperial desire risked absorbing aliens into the domestic sphere, and the resulting racial and cultural intermixing threatened ultimately to make the United States internally foreign to itself" (6). For Dixon, according to Kaplan, this anxiety targets African Americans as "the medium of exchange to pay the cost of national reunion" (124). Through their "expulsion and subordination," African Americans in Dixon's works ensure national unity around the issue of threatened white American identity, either through race war or imperial war. Dixon exploits this patriotic fervor as an opportunity to relitigate the Civil War and Reconstruction in his novels, but he first prepares for that process in the sermons he delivered at the height of the American imperial moment. Less popular to critics than Dixon's novels, these sermons provide the pretext for Dixon's fantasies about white persecution and center citizenship as the idea through which to figure white supremacist ideology.

Dixon's sermons articulate a notion of American citizenship derived from his ideas about Anglo Saxonism and white supremacy. In this way, Dixon articulates the views common to many Americans at the turn of the century. Though it reached a crescendo in the final decades, Anglo Saxonism enjoyed popularity throughout the nineteenth century. According to Reginald Horsman's *Race and Manifest Destiny*, "Anglo Saxon" proved to be an especially imprecise term, particularly in the United States. In the early decades of the century, a "new Romantic image of the past was beginning to emerge, and the idea of the Anglo-Saxons as adventurous, brave, and respectful toward women took its place alongside that of the Anglo-Saxons as originators of trial by jury and parliamentary institutions" (30). Both ideas appealed to Dixon. Further, Horsman argues that the "acceptance of 'Anglo-Saxon' as the prevailing type in America" near the end of the nineteenth century was "made easier by the continuing confusion over race, language, culture, and nationality" regarding what Anglo Saxonism was and who belonged (302).[43] Dixon's sermons are historical indices

[43] In *Shadowing the White Man's Burden*, Gretchen Murphy attributes a "newly felt Anglo-Saxonism" to this nationalist moment, which further primed an already receptive audience (65). In *The Romance of Reunion*, Nina Silber observes that a persistent discourse of sentimentalism and sympathy for the South present since the end of the Civil War proved useful for Dixon. Further, a resurgence of the popularity of Anglo Saxonism at the end of the century motivated white Americans, who, in the 1890s, "often define their sense of national will, no longer seen as a legalistic entity, as the working out of the Anglo-Saxon destiny" (137). Dana Nelson argues in *National Manhood* that utilizing the difference of Others by "recognizing, diagnosing, and managing ... 'difference' ... promised white men a unifying standpoint for national identity." According to Nelson, "[t]his rationalist model promised men an experience of citizenship as fraternity in the abstracted spaces of universalizing authority over others" (11). In a moment of resurgence for Anglo Saxonism and an opportunity for national expansion and all of the implications it entailed in a society that increasingly saw citizenship as a matter of national belonging in racial terms, Dixon's sermons

of the progression of these ideas and are a literary record of how they spread. During the Spanish American War and its aftermath, Dixon seized a newly revitalized but persistent presence of Anglo Saxon energy and contributed to that history through his sermons the he delivered before capacity crowds in New York City.

Dixon's sermon "The Battle Cry of Freedom" is indicative of the triumphant tone and nationalist ideological content of many of his other sermons, and it expresses the importance of biopolitical citizenship to the American imperial mission. Dixon imbues this national project with the language of divine destiny and Christian charity that echoes the redemption narrative of the post-Reconstruction South. His rhetoric, directed eventually at the Civil War and Reconstruction, suggests a divine moment but laments a missed opportunity. His justification of American imperialism proceeds from his claim to citizenship and his insistence that American citizenship enjoys special status. It differs from what a character in *The Leopard's Spots* calls "the dish-water of modern world citizenship," which Dixon associates with Europe (445). The imperial roots of Dixonian citizenship are important insofar as they define his biopolitical logic of exclusion and demonstrate the opportunism of white supremacy. For these reasons, my analysis of his sermons focuses on their status as ideological proving grounds for Dixon, as he sorts through the vicissitudes of rights and citizenship in order to posit a biopolitical citizenship grounded in the law and entitled to the language and guarantees of rights at the expense of racial others.

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articulated a vision for biopolitical citizenship that defined itself against African Americans. His language of rights, as well as divine inspiration, claimed legitimacy for his white supremacist positions, both ideologically and legally, in language that would prove useful for his immensely popular novels.

In "The Battle Cry of Freedom," Dixon lays out the genealogy of a "new nation," which relies upon a particular reading of American history that would have resonated with many of his readers. These principles later served as the structuring logic for his novels; therefore, his most powerful metaphor is worth quoting in full:

> We are in fact witnessing the birth pangs of a new giant nation. The conception of this new nation was accomplished at Appomattox, in 1865, when General Lee surrendered to General Grant. The South fought for the old Constitution. The South's interpretation of that Constitution is now acknowledged to be absolutely correct. But we had outgrown the Constitution, and we had to write a new one in the blood of heroes. The South fought for the principles of State Sovereignty, Individualism, Local Government. The North fought for the greater, newer principles of Nationality, Solidarity, Unity. The South collided with the sweep of the Nineteenth Century and was crushed … The new Constitution proclaimed in the fall of Lee's army at Appomattox found its first logical act of life in the order for our fleet to sail against Spain. We have entered our new life. (5)

This complex, if convoluted, explanation of the Civil War and its aftermath articulates the logic of a Dixonian conception of American political identity, a unifying idea in

Dixon's estimation based on a national destiny grounded in white supremacy. This national allegory redeems the South, and advocates the policies consistent with "New South" principles of national unity and Southern acceptance of a new industrialized economic order. Economic success will be defined by the new American imperial mission, and new subjects will be incorporated by the inevitable spread of American business and culture.[44] Dixon's claim about the "South's interpretation of [the old]

[44] Dixon's view of the American future allows for the incorporation of new foreign citizens, but he dismisses any notion that African Americans could or should be considered for this inclusion. Such a belief is not unique to Dixon. But the startling disparity between Dixon's ideals of citizenship and his rhetoric is almost comical at times. For instance, in "The New Thanksgiving Day," Dixon lauds "the Anglo-Saxon federation" to come, noting that the "great nations who have the same blood, read the same Bible, worship the same God and hold the same ideals, henceforth in spirit, will be one people, with one divine purpose" (52). Here Dixon exhibits his commitment to 1890s Anglo Saxonism as national destiny. Silber notes that by the 1890s, this particular connection was a popular one for white Americans, as they "define[d] their sense of national will, no longer seen as a legalistic entity, as the working out of the Anglo-Saxon national destiny." Further, the "equation of nationalism and international greatness with Anglo-Saxonism thus made it difficult to define any non-white group, whether Filipino or Mexican or southern black, as anything but 'foreign'" (137). Dixon's choice to focus his ire almost entirely on African Americans denotes a unique obsession with American identity through American history, and it leaves behind his previous (relative) racial conservatism when it came to African Americans in the United States. The passage also demonstrates the utility of inclusive language, no matter how ironic, to Dixon, as his beliefs about national destiny remain entrenched in fantasies about retaining a commitment to individual liberty and freedom defined against its denial to others. In a most egregious example in his sermon "Destiny of America," Dixon announces, "Personally, I count myself free from the prejudices and hatreds of races and nationalities. I recognize as an Anglo-Saxon what I owe to the Latin; I recognize my debt to the Chinaman, whose cunningly devised toys bring to my children the joys of the Fourth of July and Christmas holidays; to the 'unspeakable Turk' I concede my obligations for the patterns of my carpets and rugs; and, to the naked African, who bears from the interior his treasures of ivory, I likewise acknowledge my debt" (76). In Dixon's version of a cosmopolitan world, all other races exist in support

Constitution ... now acknowledged to be absolutely correct" illustrates the Southern Redeemer narrative by critiquing the constitutional interpretation created by the Civil Rights Amendments and insisting that the Civil War was justified.[45] Dixon tries to revise and recover what he sees as the most important moment of nineteenth-century history and a logical precursor to the moment of American imperial power he celebrates in 1898 in order to inscribe his fantasy about citizenship, the law, and white persecution. Dixon recognizes the moment of national pride surrounding the Spanish American War as an opportunity to refocus and articulate an ideology of American citizenship that would bury the principles of Reconstruction once and for all and usher in a new American century of white supremacy rooted in the story of America itself. The power of historical events as reference points for ideological work found special resonance in Lost Cause narratives such as Dixon's at the turn of the century. According to Blight, former Confederates saw the Civil War as "merely the continuation of [the revolution] of 1776." By tapping into this nationalist revolutionary spirit, Southerners like Dixon could further entrench their perceptions of themselves as

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of the Anglo Saxon, and therefore he can utter these lines without any hesitation provoked by irony.

[45] Dixon also participates in the Southern Redeemers' task of revising the history of the Civil War, specifically its causes, by shifting attention toward states' rights and away from slavery. At the same time, these approaches were committed to a white supremacist message of Republican "misrule." As Foner explains, the work of history scholars like Burgess, Dunning, and their protégés at Columbia University early in the twentieth century rewrote Reconstruction history by casting African Americans as "children" that were "utterly incapable of appreciating the freedom that had been thrust upon them" (609).

national romantic (Anglo Saxon) heroes. It was an ideology that appealed to moderates who were intent on putting the tragedy of the war behind them.[46]

Central to the message of national healing was an opportunity to solidify racial identity. The "new life" of the nation was to be an Anglo Saxon life. Nevertheless, an American citizenship defined by blood isolates a central tension of blood identity, and socially constructed ideals purportedly based on consensus and legally defined political identity. At times Dixon tries to circumvent this problem by appealing to the imperial power of Anglo Saxon blood as a way to conflate biology and politics. In "The Anglo-Saxon Alliance," Dixon even employs a scriptural allusion commonly associated with turn of the century antiracist activists and supporters of monogenesis.[47] He claims that he and his fellow white citizens across the globe "are of one blood." He claims that the "Anglo-Saxon race has the peculiar power of absorbing into consistent unity all races that flow into its life." So-called "foreign streams" of blood "disappear in the second generation and emerge with scarcely a trace of their national origin" (11).

[46] Blight explains, "By the 1890s, secession had become a sacred act, even to many who had opposed it at the moment of truth" (257).

[47] The belief in monogenesis—that the peoples of the world are descended from one genetic source—as opposed to polygenesis, which allows for multiple sources of origin and therefore underwrites arguments about essential racial difference, became an important political identifier for nineteenth-century arguments about race and anthropology. For more about monogenesis and polygenesis in the context of scientific racism, see Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club*. The scriptural allusion concerns the phrase "of one blood" and refers to Acts 17:26: "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation."

In this passage while Dixon evokes the notion of "one blood," he does so in service to the idea of the imperial domination of Anglo Saxon blood itself.[48] Regardless of the racial origins of its targets, Anglo Saxon blood will inevitably assimilate new immigrants. Dixon seems to allow for racial amalgamation and national inclusion regarding the Anglo Saxon imperial mission, but African Americans remain his one exception, despite the inclusive "we" in the above passage.[49] At various times in his career, Dixon advocated deportation for African Americans, eventually deciding that if African Americans were to coexist with white Americans they would need to defer to white southern "expertise" about white Southerners' national destiny. He saw African Americans as "a vanishing quantity in our national life" (114).[50] Dixon's fantasy of an Anglo Saxon future relies appropriately on the supposed imperial power of Anglo Saxon blood. He articulates an ideological vision in conflict with the politics of the nineteenth century and Reconstruction, which Dixon believed too often tried to ignore

[48] Also of note is Pauline Hopkins's usage of the trope in her most famous novel, *Of One Blood*. The reference in both Hopkins and Dixon recalls the ubiquity of the theory of hypodescence in the nineteenth century, and its attendant assumptions about the "imperializing" quality of so-called "black blood." In a stark reversal of Dixon's triumphant imperialism, this anxiety about black dominance and white race suicide through miscegenation find reference through Dixon's passage, acting as a kind of specter behind the surface of Dixon's proclamations.

[49] What stands out especially is that this is a sexless fantasy of genetic racial assimilation, allowing incorporation into the national body without the politically problematic issue of race mixing.

[50] Part of this "vanishing" thesis was literal. Victor Thompson explains the "black disappearance hypothesis" as well as the blending of racial science and social science in the 1890 Census in "The Strange Career of Racial Science, Racial Categories, and African American Identity" (142). Additionally, Ralph Luker notes in *The Social Gospel in Black and White* that "Dixon's logic suggested that the only alternative to race war and black extermination was to send all black Americans back to Africa" (300). In both cases, Dixon sought black disappearance as the goal to social and national harmony for the future.

biological identity in favor of socially defined identity embodied in the notion of citizenship. For Dixon, despite liberal Northerners' efforts in their civil rights legislation that would bestow citizenship onto benighted others, citizenship is a birthright, biologically defined and ordained by God.[51]

Dixon's novels provide a frightening picture of the turn-of-the-century United States. The racist ideas Dixon espoused, the gross inaccuracies in his portrayal of historical events, and the terrible caricatures of African Americans that he helped perpetuate are perhaps even overshadowed by the zeal with which a hungry American public consumed these works. For historians and literary scholars, Dixon's novels are a convenient litmus test for thinking about race at the turn of the twentieth century because they register the white supremacist ideas characteristic at the "nadir" of race relations. Dixon's overgeneralizations, his hypermasculine characters and his tin ear for their development, and his preposterous plot devices suggest an author both committed to the political project of his work and intent on expressing the anxiety his audience felt through a medium that required dramatic expression. The results were often light on literary merit and heavy on dramatic passion and hysteria.[52]

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[51] In *Shadowing the White Man's Burden*, Gretchen Murphy explains that for Dixon, liberty becomes a sacred trust to be hoarded by whites, not a light unto the benighted world. In her analysis of his sermons, she contends that Dixon's notion of liberty at the heart of the white man's burden must be protected from the "savagery" of racial others (71).

[52] Attempts at managing complex discourses of history, politics, racial identity and suspicion result in polarized renderings that eschew nuanced thinking. In fact, critics agree that much of Dixon's thinking seemed to be distinctly "Manichean" (Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, 33). Scott Romine affirms this belief in "Thomas Dixon and the Literary Production of Whiteness," though he notes that Dixon's novels are more in line with the epic or historical romance, as the melodrama—the form many critics ascribe to Dixon's trilogy—depicts radical polarities with an attempt at some sort of reconciliation

In *Race, Rape and Lynching*, Sandra Gunning sees Dixon's novels as "less a register of popular white supremacy's triumph over African Americans, than an expression of a profound anxiety over the maintenance of a stable white identity" (28). Susan Gillman expresses a similar position in *Blood Talk*, but she highlights Dixon's chosen literary form of what she calls the "racial melodrama" and positions his works among examples of black literary resistance to his racist ideas. According to Gillman, "the melodramatic Manichaeism exposes much of what is unsettling, and unsettled, about race relations in the post-Reconstruction period" (20). Yet these anxieties result not only from nebulous definitions of racial identity and paranoia about miscegenation and black "domination"—though they certainly do register these concerns. They are also anxieties grounded in the law. The legal machinations of the nineteenth century regarding attempts to litigate a stable notion of racial identity through citizenship and its protections underwrite his dramatic renderings of white persecution and black threat, and the resulting tension between the promised stability of the law and the lived experience of racial uncertainty animates works like *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman*.

In both novels, politics and the "right to life" itself are at issue (*The Leopard's Spots* 96). Both novels share common anxieties about false imprisonment, unfair trials, and the loss of due process associated with a denial of habeas corpus, dramatizations of the intrusion of the state that also imposed supposed black rule on the South. Uncertain

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that Dixon never attempts. For Romine, most important in Dixon's fiction is an image of whiteness constantly under threat and therefore necessarily performed and produced as the novel moves forward. Common among scholarship focused on Dixon's novels is the observation that his novels function, on the surface at least, as ideology—vehicles to promote his visions of the American future.

and shifting notions of race identity, codified in decisions like *Plessy* and enacted in the "one-drop rule," indicate for Dixon the problematic conditions and the moment of urgency into which his work must intervene. While Dixon makes unsurprising accusations of black inferiority, criminality, and overall unfitness for citizenship, his continued appeals to legal principles represent an attempt to manage contingent issues of identity with the supposedly enduring truths of the law, and he conflates Anglo Saxon biological identity with American political identity to do so.

One particularly provocative example occurs near the beginning of *The Leopard's Spots*. As the novel opens, Dixon's narrator describes the beginning of radical Reconstruction in 1867 when "Thaddeus Stevens passed through Congress his famous bill destroying the governments of the Southern states and dividing them into military districts, enfranchising the whole Negro race and disfranchising one-fourth of the whites," and Dixon notes, "the spirit of anarchy was in the air" (91, 94).[53] Crime immediately increases, and the fictional town of Hambright is terrorized by roving gangs of black men who are now "backed by a million bayonets" (93).[54] The Reverend John Durham, making his usual "rounds among the poor," notices a young African American boy who has been abandoned by his drunken and indolent parents. The

[53] Here Dixon alludes directly to the Reconstruction Acts as symbols of federal overreach.

[54] The name of the town certainly refers to Col. Frederick Hambright, a hero of the Revolutionary War and the Battle of King's Mountain and an ancestor of Thomas Dixon on his mother's side. A particular record of this genealogy is found in *Register of the Empire State Society of the Sons of the American Revolution* (1899). The reference to "bayonets" as a metonymy for Reconstruction is an enduring symbol. Blight cites this language in an 1870 editorial from the *Louisville Courier-Journal* that is "taking stock of the decade of the 1860s." According to Blight, "The suffering South, [the editor] said, was ruled by bayonets and 'obnoxious constitutional amendments'" (106).

Freedmen's Bureau, a central target of Dixon's anger in this and other works, orders that the boy be given to his mother and her sister so that they can care for him. The following day the child disappears, and a search reveals "the charred bones … found in an old ash-heap in the woods" (93). The mother committed the murder "in a drunken orgy with dissolute companions" (93). While this terrifying scene illustrates Dixon's beliefs about black criminality and dissolution without the "civilizing" influence of slavery, it also traffics in the imagery of lynching through the burning of the black body. Here, the "lynching" is committed by black citizens of Hambright, despite the attempts of the white Reverend and his search party to save the child. The spectacle of this tragedy reveals Dixon's central justification for the denial of black rights. According to Dixon, African Americans are undeserving of the rights of citizenship because they are incapable of embracing the responsibilities of citizenship. Ironically, the right to due process enshrined in the concept of habeas corpus and denied by Dixon to African Americans is embodied in the imagery of lynching in this scene, which is the ultimate act of annihilation of the Fourteenth Amendment as its victims are executed without facing trial by their peers.

On the one hand, this scene embodies a simplistic argument about citizenship that dehumanizes African Americans. On the other, Dixon's choice to stage a lynching with African Americans as perpetrators and victim implicates African Americans as responsible for their own destruction and makes them complicit in white suffering. As witnesses to this tragedy, Reverend Durham and Dixon's white readers are made to feel the fear of the "impending disaster" of federal rule in the South. According to the narrator, after the body was found the "thoughtful and serious" white citizens spent the

day in fasting and prayer for their deliverance, and it as "a memorable day in the history of the people." The churches were filled with "white-faced women and sorrowful men" (94). Dixon hijacks the language of lynching and racist violence and uses it to establish a unified white community suffering directly as a consequence of black freedom, as he claims the violence only occurs because the African American citizens are not capable of the responsibilities of freedom. In highlighting and then co-opting black suffering as evidence of black inferiority and white vulnerability, and therefore the threat of the black menace, Dixon articulates his strategy for all his novels, which grounds a fantasy of Anglo Saxon citizenship in a discourse of rights and liberties.

In *The Clansman*, habeas corpus, including its suspension during the Civil War and the threat of its subsequent suspension during Reconstruction, signifies what is at stake in the battle for hearts and minds concerning race relations in the United States at the turn of the century. As in *The Leopard's Spots*, Dixon imagines the threat to white male citizenship supposedly created by black empowerment through the foundational requirement of liberty for the individual versus the state, the right to due process as signified by one's own literal body. The political rights of fair trial and freedom from state harassment are the central tenets of Dixon's Anglo Saxon political identity. And, to Dixon, the history of the nineteenth century indicates that it is constantly under threat. Because habeas corpus appeals were used as the basis to expand federal power in service to African Americans, the continued presence of African Americans represents the risk of a return to that state of affairs. African Americans and Anglo Saxons represent two poles in an existential battle for survival, and it becomes Dixon's central obsession and the way he understands citizenship and its stakes. In both the lynching

episode from *The Leopard's Spots* and in repeated appeals to basic liberties for white citizens in *The Clansman*, Dixon positions two historical texts at the center of his narratives—the Fourteenth Amendment and the Magna Carta—in order to deny the notion that the protections of American citizenship belong to black Americans as well as white. If the Fourteenth Amendment is an example of federal intrusion and the attempt to subvert the natural fact of biological citizenship through the imposition of legal constructs like equal citizenship and protection, the Magna Carta represents enshrined Anglo Saxon identity that endures through history. As a distillation of the Anglo Saxon ideology laid out in his sermons, Dixon's strategy in his novels exploits emotional and legal uncertainty to attempt to solidify biopolitical citizenship as a historical fact.

In *The Clansman*, Dixon articulates the threat to (white) American citizenship through the mouthpiece of Lincoln himself, a clear allusion to Lincoln's problematic history regarding civil liberties. The reference also proves useful as a way for Dixon to authorize his view of white civil liberties under threat. The President states that there "is no room for two distinct races of white men in America, much less for two distinct races of whites and blacks." He argues that the United States "can have no inferior servile class, peon or peasant" and therefore "must assimilate or expel" African Americans. The President says, "The American is a citizen king or nothing. I can conceive of no greater calamity than the assimilation of the Negro into our social and political life as our equal. A mulatto citizenship would be too dear a price to pay even for emancipation" (46). Dixon's Lincoln makes white American citizenship dependent on the denial of black American citizenship, and he embodies Dixon's fears of racial

mixing in the construct of the citizen. This is perhaps the most powerful ultimatum possible, as the President of the United States expresses a desire for a racially defined citizenship that Dixon sees as shared by all Anglo Saxon citizens. In this scenario, freedom for African Americans means a "mulatto citizenship," an obvious reference to the supposed threat embodied by African American men to the innocence of white womanhood and, by extension, to the purity of the white race. Further, Dixon's Lincoln insists on the embodied sovereignty of each American citizen—the "citizen king"—who can only exist through the denial of the other. Returning to Agamben's ideas, Dixon's citizenship defines itself as sovereign and free through an act of denial. In a reversal of his previous insistence on the imperialistic quality of Anglo Saxon blood, able to absorb and assimilate other races, Dixon chooses in this instance to emphasize the relationship between the "two distinct races" in America. National citizenship requires national unity, which can only be expressed for Dixon through biological identity. Dixon's reversal illustrates the logical inconsistency of securing racial identity along uncertain lines, but it also reveals that even in his attempted denial of black existence to cement white identity, Dixon requires the threat of black agency. And that threat in part exists, ironically, because of the risk, and not only security, that citizenship imposes on the body of the subject. Threat and danger are for Dixonian citizenship as important as idealized security, as the mark of citizenship is not only the power to include the similar but the power to exclude the other.

Lincoln's words in *The Clansman* have a metaphorical and instructive quality, as Dixon constructs them nearly a half century after their fictional context, and they continue to warn Dixon's audience of the dangers to citizenship of a racially plural

society. Further, in Dixon's fantasy of citizenship, these dangers are not merely theoretical. Because they bridge the apparent divide between biological (racial) identity and civil rights and liberties, the threats to white Americans that African Americans and their supporters posed represent nothing short of an existential and legal crisis. Dixon's Lincoln makes clear that even nineteenth-century anxieties about social equality following from the bestowal of political rights do not apply, as the disaster that results from Reconstruction is not merely a threat to white political rights or white racial identity. Social and political anxieties are intertwined, and the Republican mistake was to believe they could be undone and differentiated. Only by convincing his audience of the particular character of this threat can Dixon face down the enemy while shoring up white identity for the future.

A few key scenes in *The Clansman* reveal these dangers and Dixon's claim to white victimhood and find further resonance given the history of habeas corpus and the rights of citizenship. The most dramatic scene takes place when Dr. Cameron, Ben's and Margaret's father and a representative of the Old South, is arrested.[55] A gang of henchmen, former slaves now endowed with the political rights of citizens and the power to make arrests, has entered Dr. Cameron's office, and when they begin to put iron shackles on him, he exhorts them to consider his rights and liberties: "'I appeal to the Magna Charta [sic] rights of every man who speaks the English tongue—no man shall be arrested or imprisoned or deprived of his own household, or of his liberties,

[55] Dixon usually employs at least one older character to represent the generational divide between antebellum and postbellum politics. This is designed to signify the change in the South from an agrarian to an industrial economy, a change that Dixon welcomes, while still retaining the romantic attachments to the aristocracy of the old South. In *The Leopard's Spots*, General Worth and Rev. John Durham play this role to varying degrees.

unless by the legal judgment of his peers or by the law of the land!'" (230).[56] Cameron actually makes two appeals here, an explicit appeal to the Magna Carta and an implicit appeal to habeas corpus by claiming his unlawful detention. Given the nineteenth-century history of Anglo Saxonism rehearsed here, Dixon's allusions attempt to confirm white citizenship's special status as uniquely representative of democratic principles as well as to ground American citizenship in that specific racial identity. His references to the Magna Carta and habeas corpus also implicitly work to undermine Reconstruction and the Fourteenth Amendment, as Dixon's fantasy of Anglo Saxon citizenship responds to the Reconstruction-era assertion of federal power. By doing so, Dixon can claim both white supremacy and victimhood and attempt to ground both in the security of law.

Dixon's direct citation of the Magna Carta deserves more attention given the context of his ideological work on citizenship that privileges the principles of habeas corpus and the individual liberties guaranteed by that foundational document. In "Slavery and the Magna Carta in the Development of Anglo-American Constitutionalism," Justin Buckley Dyer examines the relationship between the Magna Carta and habeas corpus in the context of American slavery. The Magna Carta represents the limitation of executive power in the interest of individual liberty, and habeas corpus enshrines this principle, allowing an individual through the writ of habeas corpus the chance to "challenge the grounds of his detention or molestation"

[56] In other words, these men are now empowered to manage the rights of white men. It is the nightmare scenario for Dixon. They can acknowledge his rights to habeas corpus and due process, or they can enslave him the way he had formerly enslaved them. It is white *ressentiment* brought to life.

(479). In this scene, Dr. Cameron quotes Article 39 of the Magna Carta directly. Article 39 reads:

> No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgment of his equals or by the law of the land.[57]

The African American henchmen and their white Republican enablers represent for Dixon an illegitimate exertion of power that challenges the document at the root of American democracy. It is notably not the Constitution. Cameron's individual liberties are enshrined, he claims, in the Magna Carta, and he elects to appeal to that document rather than the Constitution. For Dixon, the Constitution as revised by Reconstruction no longer has legitimacy, and his character is forced to circumvent that document to retain any hope of securing his rights. Further, the iron shackles, representative of the slave regime, are now being put on Cameron by the very men he formerly enslaved. For Dixon, Reconstruction represents the enslavement of white men. And Dr. Cameron appeals to the supposed universal applicability of the most famous political document while retaining a belief that African Americans should not enjoy the same rights.

Cameron's appeal to "every man who speaks the English tongue" signals such an Anglo Saxon political history. Returning briefly to Reginald Horsman's *Race and Manifest Destiny*, nineteenth-century white supremacists advocated a version of European history popularized by seventeenth-century British historians resistant to the

[57] "Magna Carta." The British Library, 28 July 2014. http://www.bl.uk/magna-carta/articles/magna-carta-english-translation

English monarchy. According to Horsman, in their version of history, the Anglo Saxons, prior to their corruption by the Norman invasion, enjoyed a society devoted to the principles of individual liberty and good, efficient government. This unique talent for political success comprised a narrative of Anglo Saxonism that appealed to nineteenth-century Americans tasked with the justification for westward expansion and slavery.[58] As Dixon says in his sermon "The Battle Cry of Freedom," "God has endowed the Anglo-Saxon with the supreme genius for self-government" (5). If Anglo Saxons possessed a unique gift and talent for fairness and political equality, nineteenth-century race "science" could fill the gaps created by the existence of African Americans and Native Americans in terms of their individual rights. The distinct race of Anglo Saxons reserved their rights of citizenship and individual liberty as their own, and deficient races, those behind on the scale of racial progress, need not apply.[59]

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[58] Cameron's later appeal for the greatness of the white nation sounds like it could have been lifted directly from one of Horsman's examples: "'This Republic is great, not by reason of the amount of dirt we possess, the size of our census roll, or our voting register—we are great because of the genius of the race of pioneer white freemen who settled this continent, dared the might of kings, and made a wilderness the home of Freedom. Our future depends on the purity of this racial stock. The grant of the ballot to these millions of semi-savages and the riot of debauchery which has followed are crimes against human progress'" (291).

[59] According to Cathy Boeckmann, Dixon figured his rationale for white supremacy through popular notions of social Darwinism, though he rejected the notion of deterministic natural selection without the benefit of Anglo Saxon will. Boeckmann states, "According to Dixon, survival of the fittest is only possible with human participation in the selection process. In this sense, man makes himself 'fit' and thereby creates himself and his race through self-guided evolution" (75). Such an insistence on human intervention through the force of what Boeckmann describes as racially defined "character" supports Dixon's larger struggle to assert a political identity grounded in racial identity.

Additionally, Dr. Cameron appeals to habeas corpus, locating it at the heart of individual liberty as codified by the sacrosanct Magna Carta. For Cameron and Dixon, the Magna Carta is a distinctly Anglo Saxon document, and by shrouding this appeal in the imagery of both slavery—as represented by the shackles—and Reconstruction, Dixon enshrines white dependence on black suffering within the sacred texts of republicanism. Doing so takes a legal claim and conflates it with the biological assumptions of Anglo Saxonism. This scene represents Dixon's recognition that the nineteenth-century discourse on rights as reflected in its legal history often found meaning through issues of race. Legal arguments about rights and constitutional interpretation frequently turned on issues of African American personhood and citizenship. Racial discourses raise fundamental questions about political identity and individual liberty and illustrate the flexibility of legal arguments in this context. Dixon exploits this fact by making fundamental questions about racism—the denial of the franchise to African Americans, the denial of citizenship in *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, the limitation of rights enumerated in *Slaughterhouse* and *Cruikshank*, the denial of the privileges of citizenship in *Plessy v. Ferguson*—into questions about white rights. Mirroring this legal history, Dixon's texts pose legal questions in terms of race and animate the relationship between black and white in his works, as the more African American rights seem to be the subject of reform, the more white characters shriek about their own persecution.

If it is true that Dixon's work "said in a total way what his audience had been thinking in fragments," as Joel Williamson writes, then Dixon's work and its reception should have very specific things to tell us about race in America, especially for Dixon's

assumed white audience (141). At risk of considering white supremacist thought as an aberration disconnected from the idea of American citizenship, careful attention must be paid to both the parallels between popularized racist assumptions about citizenship and the ways white supremacy rejected or reified the construct of citizenship.[60] As Dixon's popular work demonstrates, white supremacist thought is endemic to a broader white American population via the visible contradictions of habeas corpus in liberal democracies, but as particularly illuminated in relation to the history of slavery in the United States, which in and of itself contradicts the founding ideals of liberal democracy. Additionally, the legal history of the nineteenth century and the ways it influenced discourses of rights explains Dixon's interest in citizenship and his interpretation of the turn-of-the-century moment as consonant with the struggles of racial politics after the Civil War.

The broader theoretical implications of Dixon's biopolitical model of white supremacist citizenship illustrate his influence on racist thinking at the turn of the century, as well as his ability to focus various strands of racial thinking into a coherent whole backed by popular discourses of the nineteenth century. His focus on the

[60] That this reception also included concerned black readers is too often ignored by those analyzing Dixon's cultural impact, and the responses of African American writers, either specifically to Thomas Dixon or more broadly to his persistent and popular ideas, comprises my focus in the remaining chapters. As one example of a direct contemporary response to Dixon's work, Kelly Miller, the African American sociologist and intellectual, responded multiple times in print. His most notable response is his "Open Letter to Thomas Dixon," published in 1905. In this document, Miller responds directly to Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots*, as well as to an article Dixon had written that year for the *Saturday Evening Post*. I should also take this moment to point out that these responses foment in a period of dynamic African American activism and resistance to every attempt at proscribing African American rights. See R. Volney Riser's *Defying Disfranchisement: Black Voting Rights Activism in the Jim Crow South, 1890–1908*.

importance of citizenship as an intersection of political and biological life invites direct, resistant responses. Discourses on citizenship at the turn of the twentieth century indicate the importance of race—a biopolitical construct that orders societies and serves as justification for social conflict—to the construction of the ostensibly free citizen. Dixon's fantasy of an Anglo Saxon American citizenship free from the adulteration of blackness contributes to assumptions about black pathology, which structures much racist belief about African Americans, by opposing white worthiness for freedom through citizenship to black criminality and incapacity. African American responses to these assumptions both precede and follow Dixon, and by seizing on the foundational white supremacist beliefs about black pathology that are embodied in beliefs about hierarchical races and biological citizenship, these authors provide convincing resistant responses.

The African American authors I analyze in the following chapters respond directly to Dixon's fantasies of white supremacist citizenship and white victimization in important and consistent ways. They seize on the conventions of white supremacy that naturalize its contours and the extent of its reach and target black people of pathological examples of racial inferiority. They note the opportunism of white supremacist ideology that takes advantage of the historical moment of the "nadir" and the danger it creates for African Americans through technologies of violence including lynching, and they bring to the surface those instances of discursive as well as physical violence against African Americans to illustrate the ways pervasive white supremacist discourse enables and emboldens violence. These authors often express ambivalence about appropriate political responses in such a world, and the remainder of my project examines the ways

that literature serves as a vehicle for targeting and subverting white supremacist ideology and rejecting a discourse of black pathology that endangers black lives.

The "heart of the home life": Critical Histories and Black Pathology in Pauline Hopkins's *Contending Forces*

In an important scene from Pauline Hopkins's 1900 novel *Contending Forces*, Will Smith, the ostensible hero, responds to a range of political speeches at a meeting of the "Colored American League" after a brutal lynching. He reminds his audience of the danger African Americans faced at the turn of the century. He proclaims,

> "Lynching was instituted to crush the manhood of the enfranchised black. Rape is the crime which appeals most strongly to the heart of the home life. Merciful God! Irony of ironies! *The men who created the mulatto race, who recruit its ranks year after year by the very means which they invoked lynch law to suppress,* bewailing the sorrows of violated womanhood!" (270-1, italics in original).

Smith's thoughts embody Hopkins's central concern in the novel: the sources of racist violence and the consequences for its African American victims. Smith articulates the logic of lynching and white supremacy in the clearest possible terms. While white supremacists justified lynching by alleging sexual violence, in fact they used it as a technology to intimidate and terrorize African Americans. Lynching was a technology of power, moreover, explicitly expressed in gendered terms and focused on the potential threats of African American "manhood": economic success, interracial relationships, and any perceived form of social equality. African American men are victims, but, as Will Smith explains, the targets of white violence also include African American women, and their "violated womanhood" destroys families and perpetuates a social ill.

In that regard lynching, like white supremacy, targets the home life as the nexus of moral and political ideology. Moreover, the relationship between lynching and rape that Smith describes represents the largely occluded history of its victims.

Hopkins uses the domestic novel to explore how white supremacist thought targets the "home life" in a racist discourse of black pathology. As another instance of the opportunism and adaptability I describe in my analysis of Thomas Dixon, white supremacist ideology focuses in the late nineteenth century on the character and domestic lives of African Americans to sustain racial hierarchy. Hopkins responds by challenging increasingly naturalized assumptions of white supremacist thought, identifying its historical adaptability, and putting Sappho Clark, a "fallen woman" and victim of white supremacist violence, at the forefront of her novel. Francesca Sawaya explains that Sappho "is the book's heroine because she decides to insist upon her history despite the powerfully silencing and ahistorical myths of nationalism" that pervade turn-of-the-century political culture (53). I argue in this chapter that white supremacist myths of racial identity as evident in a discourse of black pathology serve as a focus for Hopkins's resistant response precisely because they attempt to occlude history. Hopkins systematically rejects assumptions of black pathology that enable racist violence, and she challenges political discourses that fail to acknowledge the individual suffering of African American women.[61]

[61] I use "black pathology" to mean a focused site of white supremacist discourse that channels belief about supposed black racial identity and weakness through stereotypes about sexual lasciviousness and violence, dissipation and susceptibility to disease, and consequent racial "degeneration." These threats to the "white race" are supposedly innate aspects of black physiology and identity, and are therefore pathologized. A notable contemporaneous historical example of this sort of thinking can be found in Frederick Hoffman's *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, which I

In *Contending Forces*, Hopkins analyzes the discourse of black pathology specifically focused on black women. Hopkins scrutinizes various political discourses, both supremacist and resistant, that fail to explain Sappho's presence in the text. And as Sappho navigates her way through the political cultures and social circles of turn-of-the-century Boston, her personal identity and her relationship to history evolve. As a kind of *bildungsroman* of political identity for Sappho, *Contending Forces* depicts Sappho as she changes her relation to the fixed identities of prefabricated political positions and ideologies and comes to a nuanced understanding of why history matters.

In Hopkins's novel, inheritance signifies white supremacist assumptions about white racial superiority and the perpetuation of racist power as well as an opportunity for a counter-discourse that challenges those assumptions. Specifically, Hopkins offers a counter-politicization of the family as a site of resistance that is not constrained by white supremacist domestic economies, and she uses inheritance to challenge these assumptions by insisting on self-selected affiliations outside the white supremacist system of inheritance. Additionally, Hopkins challenges the reductive nature of conventional political categories like progressive, accommodationist, radical, and supremacist by privileging Sappho's voice and insisting upon the importance of history over the ahistoricism and abstraction in which staid political discourses thrive. In particular, provocative and supposedly politically representative characters like Mrs. Willis and the speakers at the Colored American League allow Hopkins to explore the ways that political ideologies are blind to the needs of individuals.

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discussed in the Introduction to this project, and I return to an analysis of this discourse in subsequent chapters.

Black Pathology and Turn-of-the-Century Domestic Fiction

In *Contending Forces* white supremacy claims black pathology as the putative center of black inferiority, and in this way the novel reflects its historical context. Similar to how white supremacist thought exploited turn-of-the-century nationalism to revise Reconstruction and its influence on citizenship, as I discussed in my analysis of Thomas Dixon, domestic politics at the turn of the century allowed white supremacists opportunities to target black families and further a discourse of racial inferiority. In each instance, white supremacist thought inscribes identity in racial terms on open signifiers like "citizen" and "family" and thus entrenches white supremacist assumptions. In *To Wake the Nations*, Eric Sundquist explains turn-of-the-century race discourse in terms of fears of black pathology, arguing that the black family, "a nebulous, overly politicized concept," was proclaimed by both academic and popular sociology to be "inherently and environmentally corrupt." The "failure" of the black family became "a sign of racial degradation," and this perception still persists. According to Sundquist, assumptions about the consequences of slavery, "the archetype of the black rapist," the supposed licentiousness of black women, "and the charge that black families were 'naturally' at home in squalor and filth were all common pronouncements in the post-Reconstruction interpretation of so-called black family pathology" (394). Sundquist identifies this depiction of the black family as a product of white supremacist anxiety about racial boundaries, and he characterizes the family as a central site on which white supremacists projected fears about changing national demographics and economic challenge. Within the overdetermined signifier of the black family, Sundquist observes

the collision of racial discourses of whiteness, black criminality, slavery, and the supposed immorality of African Americans, especially women.

Domestic fiction presented one avenue for black-authored resistance to white supremacists' account of the pathological black family, and critics observe that African American female authors rejected such accounts and the assumptions that undergirded them that specifically targeted women. For instance, in *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire*, Claudia Tate argues that post-Reconstruction texts by African American women "offered the recently emancipated an occasion for exercising political self-definition in fiction at a time when the civil rights of African Americans were constitutionally sanctioned but socially prohibited" (7). These responses took the form of sentimental and domestic novels of the period, but they also strained at those conventions by drawing attention to the political implications of the "Cult of True Womanhood" for black women. Hazel Carby identifies the ways True Womanhood, both in lived reality and in African American authored fiction, interpolated African American women according to their perceived differences from white women. African American women authors reckoned with representations of black women as property and as victims in mid nineteenth-century texts but their exclusion from the class of "women" (38). Later in the century, African American women authors would respond to attacks on black women's morality.

Carby argues that, because the ideological work of the Cult of True Womanhood involves "resolv[ing] contradictions" and attempting to "bring coherence and order to the contradictory material circumstances of the lives of women," careful readers must recognize "the dialectical relationship with the alternative sexual code associated with

the black woman" (24, 30). While this sexual code assigned African American women no agency over their bodies, and despite their actual exclusion from the Cult of True Womanhood, African American women's sexuality—monolithic and based on racist stereotyping—was used to define its boundaries (30). Carby illustrates how this history of representation relies on the codependence of white and black experiences of the domestic, and she charts the codification of white supremacy from slavery to Jim Crow. According to Carby, "Ideologies of white womanhood coalesced and became more rigid at the same historical moment that the miscegenation laws were extended, laws which, in practice, were primarily directed towards relationships between black men and white women" (30). In other words, ideologies like those essential to nineteenth-century domestic fiction regarding white women had at their core an anxiety about black women's sexuality. They were ideologies of black pathology.

Patricia Hill Collins traces nineteenth-century power dynamics that provide particular opportunities for resistance, and her analysis both parallels and extends Carby's analysis in important ways. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins explains the centrality of the family in white supremacist discourse of the period. She examines the fundamental features of racism focused on black pathology in the nineteenth century and how they migrate from biological to "cultural" spheres and are frequently figured through the image of the African American family. Collins shows how the history of black female resistance locates the family as a central site of power in response to white supremacist oppression that isolates black female sexuality. She focuses on resistance grounded in cultural values that reject white supremacist bourgeois assumptions because the domestic conventions of the Cult of True Womanhood define them. What

Collins calls "Black female spheres of influence," including but not limited to domestic economies, "constitute political sanctuaries where individual Black women and men are nurtured in order to confront oppressive social institutions." According to Collins, "Power from this perspective is a creative power used for the good of the community, whether that community is conceptualized as one's family, church community, or the next generation of the community's children" (223). She calls this female-authored power an alternative to power-as-domination, and she asserts that it is "based on a humanist vision of self-actualization, self-definition, and self-determination" (224). By prioritizing power-as-resistance in the context of domestic economies of black cultural values, Collins challenges assumptions about black pathology directly by reclaiming authorship of the black family. Collins's "humanist vision" encompasses Hopkins's attempts to transcend political divisions in *Contending Forces* and ascribe particular community values to the family. For Hopkins, the family is not a static structure for encapsulating moral values. It is a dynamic political unit meant to enact and perpetuate political values, and it often works against the premise that the family must be defined biologically. Furthermore, the family as political unit stands in stark contrast to the predetermined political ideologies that Sappho encounters throughout the novel.

Both Collins and Hopkins recognize that assumptions about the pathologized black family lead to racial violence. Consequently, they contextualize its nineteenth-century history to counter white supremacist attempts to erase or ignore this history. Collins sees sexual violence particularly as a logical and inevitable consequence of nineteenth-century biological racism and gender inequality, when "the animalistic icon of Black female sexuality [is] joined by the appearance of a racist biology incorporating

the concept of degeneracy" (171). Parallel cultural images of black male violence contribute to the emergence of lynching as politicized sexual violence against black men and women, "with the myth of the Black rapist as its ideological justification" (177). According to Collins, resistance in this context requires intervention upon the "controlling images" that create and justify these conditions of black pathology (71). By placing Sappho's story at the center of the novel, Hopkins ensures that the subject of the novel is an illustration of the destructive effects of white racial obsession, an insidious pathology itself. This white pathology projects onto African Americans the responsibility for the continuing violence of racism, no matter how incoherent that logic is. For Hopkins, the operative question is how white supremacy can claim moral superiority despite its need to manipulate the facts of history to serve its ends, not whether African Americans can or have assimilated bourgeois cultural values.

Contending Forces and Hopkins's Critical Histories

Hopkins's nuanced portrayal of Sappho and her attention to the relationship between sexual violence and lynching, as well as to the conventions of the domestic novel, have prompted varied critical responses to her work. Early critics like Robert Bone emphasized the political nature of Hopkins's novels, and, in the process, committed to reductive assessments of her work and her politics. In *The Negro Novel in America*, Bone describes black-authored responses to stereotypes as "characteristically ambivalent." According to Bone, early African American authors, including Hopkins, "simultaneously accommodated to the stereotype" embodied by minstrel-like

exaggerated depictions of African Americans in popular literature and culture "(assimilationism) and attempted to refute it (Negro nationalism)" (26).

More recent responses recognize Hopkins's radical potential and reject such politically reductive readings. Elizabeth Ammons cites the "diversity of Hopkins's literary production," noting that "in particular the volatile, unstable, long fiction that she wrote as a consciously political, marginalized, experimental author stand as crucially important paradigms" ("Afterword" 214). Kristina Brooks echoes Ammons on the resistant potential of Hopkins but observes that Hopkins's radical identification of the constructed nature of racial borders "is a strategy that, nearly one hundred years later, ironically leaves her open to charges of elitism and accommodation" ("Mammies" 124-5). Nellie McKay warns that some modern readers might label Hopkins's mission to illustrate African American literary merit while editor of *Colored American Magazine* as "emblematic of the effects of racism and white paternalism," but McKay insists that Hopkins "employed [her editorial position] subversively by grounding the literature [published in *Colored American Magazine*] in a radical black nationalism that promoted the superiority of people of African descent" ("Introduction" 5).[62] These more recent critics illustrate the complexity of Hopkins's work and the centrality of political discourse itself as a subject of her fiction while also justifying the need for analysis that further illuminates her examination of politics.

Historically focused critics like Sundquist, Carby, and Tate attempt nonreductive readings, but they neglect to explore in detail the ways Hopkins renders

[62] Thomas Cassidy argues that Hopkins develops a frequently "self-contradictory" narrator in her fictional works to construct a double-voiced position that can reach black and white audiences (661).

political agency as nonstatic. Hopkins focuses her novel on Sappho's story in part to illustrate a specific danger in occluding the past, which is dangerous in part because it is a strategy of white supremacist thought. And Sappho's journey to political agency and empowerment succeeds only insofar as she is able to reckon with and ultimately lay claim to her past. My argument extends the historically focused work of these critics by addressing Sappho's central role in the novel and the way her journey to political understanding challenges principles of white supremacist thought, most notably its desire to erase history in order to perpetuate white power structures. Hopkins rewrites inheritance as a sign resistant to white supremacy that extends beyond a biological definition to encompass a created community.[63] Hopkins's affiliative politics links her concern with history to her efforts to move Sappho toward political agency and responds directly to white supremacist assumptions about black pathology.

By first calling attention to the ways history informs a critical worldview, Hopkins demonstrates in *Contending Forces* that those opposed to white supremacy can avoid reductive political categories or ideologies only if they recognize the ways the past informs the present.[64] Because white supremacy operates in part by refusing to

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[63] In "'So Strangely Interwoven': The Property of Inheritance, Race, and Sexual Morality in Pauline E. Hopkins's *Contending Forces*," Julie Cary Nerad analyzes Hopkins's use of inheritance to problematize racial and sexual discourses through the sign of property. Similarly, I claim that inheritance in the novel ecompasses multiple significations, including racial identity and character, because Hopkins seeks to challenge pervading discourses of race and gender. I focus specifically on how Hopkins challenges white supremacist discourses regarding black pathology and rejects simplistic political categories. Nerad's essay explores whiteness as a heritable property in ways that extend Hopkins's work beyond the limits of the Washington-DuBois debate, which benefits my analysis as well (361).

[64] In *Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the Occult*, Susan Gillman notes the centrality of history as a site for Hopkins's inquiry and as a generic

acknowledge responsibility for the past, or for the fact that the past creates conditions of structural racism that persist in the present, history in *Contending Forces* is a political tool. In particular, Sappho's past and the larger history of white supremacist violence against black women haunts the novel as an example of what cannot be spoken: the fact of white supremacist sexual violence in a society that frantically polices racial borders and obsesses over miscegenation, refusing to speak of sexuality generally and claiming the moral high ground in a hierarchy of racial difference. Sappho's initial inability to find a political voice for her suffering represents Hopkins's desire to draw attention to these silenced experiences and put further pressure on political ideology that avoids reckoning with this past.[65] To draw attention to this fact, Hopkins employs a double structure in *Contending Forces* that makes the present inseparable from the past, and as a result, romanticized notions of racial progress and political abstraction cannot survive the real scrutiny of history.

As a result, *Contending Forces* reflects the complex way race discourse structures lived experience through a plot that absorbs the key political issues of the day while refusing the useful fiction of social progress and reconciliation, insisting instead that the turn of the century showed little progress regarding racism and white

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convention for turn-of-the-century race novels. She explains that many "post-Reconstruction texts focus more on constructing comparative histories of slavery and freedom that analyze and assess present race relations in the context of the past, condensing those temporal relations in the locus of the family" (36).

[65] In her biography of Hopkins, Lois Brown notes the importance of silence in *Contending Forces*. She says that Hopkins "uses naming and an evident investment in confessional discourse to call her readers' attention to the enduring issues of silence and articulation, exile and inclusion, which so often are at the heart of women's experiences" (207). While my argument does not focus on Hopkins's use of the confessional mode, Brown's observations about the relationship between silenced voices and the gender politics of the novel are useful.

supremacy. The novel relates the multigenerational story of a turn-of-the-century mixed-race family in Boston first by tracing their lineage to their white forbears in North Carolina in the eighteenth century. Part one of the novel focuses on the white Montfort family, originally Bermudan and later North Carolina planters, whom the Pollock family terrorizes in part for their liberal attitudes about race. In the second part of the novel, John Langley visits the consequences of this historical conflict on the Smith family in his pursuit of Sappho Clark, and she is the animating force that brings the intergenerational conflict of the novel to a head.[66] This double structure, coupled with the narrator's overt statements on American racial politics, invites readers to connect slavery and its post-emancipation consequences directly. Moreover, within a context of conflicting and contradictory political ideologies that often privilege the abstract over the concrete, Hopkins's refusal to adhere to comfortable categories for political thought is a constant.

In *Contending Forces*, Hopkins immediately introduces history as a contested space. She explains in the preface the historical sources for key scenes in her novel. She uses the alleged texts of a speech by the governor of Georgia in 1899 and, for another character's speech, "a combination of the best points made by well-known public speakers in the United States—white and black—in defense of the Negro" to emphasize historical accuracy. Hopkins observes, "I feel my own deficiencies too strongly to attempt original composition on this subject at this crisis in the history of the Negro in the United States" (16). Her deference reflects a generic convention as well as a more

[66] The origins of their mixed-race family represents another often silenced story, and when a character late in the novel observes the "strangely tangled threads" of the black family in America, she alludes to this occluded past (373).

subtle indictment of politicized history, as she implies that at a moment of historical crisis, the truth is in high demand. She indicates outright that her novel reflects material realities, specifically the white supremacist views of a state governor, and she emphasizes the novel's importance in tracking this history. She claims urgency in addressing the historical conditions of 1900 in terms of its eighteenth-century history, countering common conciliatory narratives regarding national progress, and she insists that African Americans face increasing threats of violence. She warns her readers of the continued threat of mob violence because "lynch law is raising its head like a venomous monster," and she says that "the retrospective mind will dwell upon the history of the past, seeking there a solution of these monstrous outbreaks under a government founded upon the greatest and brightest of principles for the elevation of mankind." Hopkins continues that, while "we ponder the philosophy of cause and effect, the world is horrified by a fresh outbreak, and the shocked mind wonders that in this—the brightest epoch of the Christian era—*such things are*" (14, italics in original). This passage emphasizes the importance of a historically focused "retrospective" mind. And in this way, the novel's preface anticipates that her attention will be on the practical analysis of the motivating features of lynching, which will lead her to a nuanced understanding of white supremacy and a focused critique of political ideologies that lack explanatory power and concrete application necessary to oppose white supremacy. Her approach will privilege the revelatory power of connecting the past and the present as she counters white supremacist attempts to ignore the past.

Inheritance, White Supremacy, and Black Pathology

To exercise her own practical analysis of white supremacy and lynching, Hopkins focuses on a specific sign of race discourse: inheritance and its relationship to black pathology. Ordering the complex discourses of white supremacy and racial politics through the sign of inheritance allows Hopkins to claim and subvert a white supremacist logic that identifies black pathology with African Americans and perpetuates white power, and it allows her to emphasize the importance of an historicist point of view. Inheritance in *Contending Forces* has at least three forms: the biological, the legal-historical, and the economic. On the surface, inheritance signifies the transfer of traits across generations, whether genetic/physiological, character or moral qualities, or the consequences of past actions (either by the individual or the "sins of the father"). Inheritance also means the transfer of property to bona fide descendants, a process that cements identity and family legacy. Both iterations open a range of possible applications and contexts, and neither represents distinct or discrete meanings. More often than not, meaning crosses the apparent line of distinction, as metaphors and other examples of figurative language bring multiple meanings into conversation with one another. The consequences of the sins of the father, for example, result in a lasting negative legacy for his child, and that child is the recipient of the very character flaws that made the sin possible in the first place. In *Contending Forces*, inheritance represents the propagation of power through the structures of white supremacy, including definitions of racial identity and beliefs about how that identity transfers across generations. It also represents the threat of the contamination of race and the danger such contamination poses to white power as represented by miscegenation.

Inheritance is also the means by which economic power, another structure of white supremacy, transfers to the future. Finally, inheritance represents an opportunity for resistance, as political ideologies and strategies become the birthright of future generations of activists. Inheritance resonates as a signifier for Hopkins because it connects history-as-resistance to white supremacist power structures insistent on ignoring that history.

Hopkins's eighteenth-century origin story for the more lengthy turn-of-the-century plot in part two of the novel signifies on the theme of inheritance as a center of white supremacist power. By tracing white supremacist assumptions about racial difference to the slave trade in Bermuda, Hopkins draws a direct line between the violence in the second part of the novel and the horrors of slavery. As *Contending Forces* opens, Charles Montfort, head of a wealthy planter family in Bermuda, decides he will free his slaves gradually, granting each a parcel of land when he moves to Newbern, North Carolina, but only as a result of his morally vacant motivation to flee recently imposed British anti-slavery laws. When the Montforts—Charles, his wife Grace, and their two sons, Charles Jr. and Jesse—arrive in Newbern, they immediately come under the suspicion of the community, represented by Anson Pollock, a rival plantation owner, and his henchmen, Bill Sampson and Hank Davis. As Pollock's men watch the family's arrival from the dock, Sampson immediately suspects that Grace Montfort is not white, based solely on her appearance. The men argue about her beauty, as Hank Davis says he had "never seed" such a beautiful woman, and Bill Sampson argues that she has "got a black streak in her somewhar." Sampson begins to catalogue her anatomical features and notes that there is "too much cream color in the face and too

little blud seen under the skin fer a genooine white 'ooman" (41). Sampson and Davis target Charles Montfort for his progressive stance on slavery and for his wife's questionable identity, which represents—whether in the 1790s or 1890s—the ultimate sin, miscegenation, and embodies paranoid race fantasies. While Pollock fears the effect of emancipation on his own slaves, reflecting a historically persistent anti-abolitionist anxiety, he also sexually desires Montfort's wife and wants to claim Montfort's children as his own.[67] By taking Montfort's patriarchal power and position by force, Pollock effectively neuters the "liberal" slave owner's abolitionist attitude. After killing Charles and confronting Grace, Pollock stands by as his men whip her in front of her children.

Hazel Carby likens this violation to a rape, and this sexualized conquest signals Hopkins's desire to connect white sexual desire and violence to white supremacy generally.[68] It also draws a parallel between the sexual violence Pollock and his men perpetrate and the threat of lynching that Hopkins emphasizes in the novel's preface, because both acts rely on assumptions about racial identity and consequent beliefs about black pathology.[69] Grace is targeted for her supposed blackness and her representation

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[67] Pollock's anti-abolitionism anticipates his descendant John Langley's racial conservatism, establishing the interdependence of slavery and Jim Crow and structuring the coming resistant responses in abolitionist terms. It also emphasizes conservatism's complicity with white supremacy.

[68] Carby states: "In a graphic and tortured two-page scene, Hopkins represents the brutal rape of Grace in the displaced form of a whipping by two of the vigilantes" (132).

[69] While Pollock does not whip Grace or order it directly, the novel implies he is culpable for the attack. When the narrator first describes Pollock's desire for Grace, she takes pains to point out Pollock's propensity for violence and his henchmen's role in acting out his desires. Pollock's late wife "had died mysteriously," and "[r]umor said his ill treatment and infidelity had driven her to suicide." The rumors also suggested that Pollock "had not hesitated to whip her by proxy through his overseer, Bill Sampson, in the same way he did his slaves" (50). These conditions inform Grace's whipping and eventual suicide, figuring Pollock as primarily, if indirectly, responsible.

of the contaminant of miscegenation and porous racial borders. The irony in her beating echoes the concern introduced at the beginning of this chapter. The "men who created the mulatto race, who recruit its ranks year after year by the very means which they invoked lynch law to suppress … [bewail] the sorrows of violated womanhood" (270-1). When the novel shifts to the late-nineteenth century in the second part, the characters, who are descendants of Pollock and Montfort, experience the consequences of this primal scene. Their experience parallels the abandonment of African Americans after Reconstruction and the entrenchment of Jim Crow and racial terrorism, including sexual violence. This trauma also sets the stage for the violence Sappho suffers because the sexualized violence of slavery and that of Reconstruction, most represented by lynching, share no clear distinction, and the present inherits the past.

Hopkins also uses the sign of inheritance to subvert reader expectations and challenge assumptions of racial thinking. In the second part of the novel, Pollock's sins manifest in his descendant, John Langley, defined as African American by Jim Crow ideas of racial identity. As the chief antagonist in the second part of the novel, Langley tries to undermine Sappho and siblings Will and Dora Smith at every step. In fact, Langley's pursuit of Sappho despite her protests recalls the sexual predation of his ancestor.[70] Hopkins implicates Langley and his white supremacist assumptions by using a deterministic notion of character as inherited by blood to demonstrate the generational consequences of slavery and to subvert the already unstable discourse of racial identity.

[70] The evil foil to Sappho's suitor and eventual fiancé Will Smith, John Langley is the direct descendant of Anson Pollock. The Smiths—Will, Dora, and Ma—are descendants of Charles Montfort. Further, John Langley is the offspring of Lucy, the Montfort's slave whom Anson Pollock raped. John Langley therefore represents the family's original sin, and he suffers the consequences of this shame.

Regarding John Langley, the narrator explains that a "[n]atural instinct for good had been perverted by a mixture of 'cracker' blood of the lowest type on his father's side with whatever God-saving quality that might have been loaned the Negro by pitying nature." His blood "vitiated his moral nature and left it stranded high and dry on the shore of blind ignorance" (221). Moral inheritance challenges the advantages supposedly attributable to his whiteness. Hopkins directly counters white supremacist assumptions of black pathology that assert moral failure to African Americans as a product of their supposedly biological race identity. By suggesting the lighter skinned man's moral failures to the presence of "cracker blood," she disrupts the usual operation of the sign of racial inheritance to attack white supremacy.

As the novel progresses and Langley's quest for political power and possession of Dora and then Sappho falls apart, he becomes more and more dissolute, eventually dying penniless and alone. Again the behaviors stereotypically associated by white supremacy with his "Negro blood"—sexual predation and a general lack of morality—reflect Langley's "cracker blood," and Hopkins overturns common assumptions of black pathology. Further, Hopkins centers violence in both parts of the novel as an obvious outcome of racial thinking and positions the black family as its target. Black women are targets for white resentment and ironically become signs of white pathology because their mixed-race presence represents white racial anxiety. Their mixed-race children serve as a constant reminder of that original sin. This literal example solidifies the connection in racial discourse between beliefs about black pathology and white supremacy as white anxiety and accountability is displaced onto black people. Further,

investigating the construction of black pathology allows Hopkins to explore the ineffectiveness of abstract political philosophies disconnected from victims like Sappho.

Sappho Clark and Affiliative Politics

Sappho's status as a "fallen woman" challenges the credibility of mere political ideology by confronting it with her real lived experience as a single mother directly harmed by white supremacist violence. She navigates the liberal political culture of Boston and learns the limits of readymade political categories and the importance of her own self-definition. Upon her initial introduction in the novel, her beauty and the mystery associated with her past inspire reaction.[71] While Sappho's introduction results for Will Smith in the attraction familiar to the genre conventions—their meeting ignites the subplot of conflict and resolution that ends in their marriage—Sappho also represents something more. Dora is immediately fascinated when she meets Sappho. The narrator notes Dora's general hesitance regarding "girl friendships," as Dora believed that a "close intimacy between two of the same sex was more than likely to end disastrously for one or the other." But Sappho is different, and from the beginning she "seemed to fill a long-felt want in [Dora's] life, and [Dora] had from the first a perfect trust in the beautiful girl" (97-8). This idea of affiliation, in this case through friendship, subverts cultural expectations about female relationships and provides the precepts for a more overt political strategy that Hopkins depicts later in the novel. Dora implies that friendships with women might traditionally end in competition over male

[71] Sappho's absent past further emphasizes the dangers of an ahistorical political ideology. As will be clear, it is only through making a personal connection with others and by claiming the past that an affiliative politics is possible. Avoiding or occluding the past results in isolation and disempowerment.

suitors, for example, or any other stereotypical expectations for young women as reflected through bourgeois family conventions. Her change of heart regarding Sappho anticipates Hopkins's challenge to the conventions of the bourgeois family by presenting the possibility for a female-authored, same-sex friendship that does not "end disastrously." At the same time, this challenge does not represent an outright rejection of the family. In fact, the family eventually proves to be the ground from which Hopkins situates a resistant response to white supremacy, but the definition and identity of family is key to her challenge to conventional assumptions regarding both political strategies and the construction of the family. Sappho's relative isolation as a stranger in a new community means that she has to create her own relationships, at least initially, outside of the determinism of the biological family.

The novel indicates that familial and platonic relationships are potential sources of political empowerment, and the possibilities of political engagement quickly occupy Sappho and her friends. In a chapter titled "Friendship," the narrator begins by describing Sappho's new experience with a society of African Americans in the North, noting that "truth demanded her to recognize the superiority of the vigorous activity in the life all about her" (114). Sappho is an outsider in multiple ways, including the fact that she comes from the South, so Hopkins suggests she has a different, if perhaps naive, perspective from which to witness the political culture of Boston. At this point in the novel, Dora does not know that Sappho has been a victim of sexual violence, and the tension in the chapter manifests through this dramatic irony. Emboldened by the freedom and sense of community she observes in others, Sappho also recognizes that Boston society is likely to reject her. At the same time, Dora and Sappho's friendship

provides Sappho the opportunity to explore her own political views. Dora shares a number of surprising opinions with Sappho, inspiring Sappho in her own political thinking, and Dora proves trustworthy to Sappho by refusing to assign blame to the victims of sexual violence. Dora notes that she is "sick of loud professions and constant hypocrisy" from religious people who claim moral superiority and create the conditions of judgment for the less fortunate, an assertion that comforts Sappho and indicates Dora's willingness to eschew the popular in favor of a principled stand (100). Consequently, the women's relationship becomes the ground for their informed political positions that do not eschew personal relationships in favor of political abstractions. They stay grounded in the world.

Sappho eventually prods Dora to test whether she can assimilate Sappho's story into her political outlook, and the scene combines Hopkins's strategy of affiliation with her critique of inheritance as a white supremacist power strategy. In response to Sappho's asking if Dora would hold a "fallen woman" responsible for her own fate, Dora states, "I believe we would hang our heads in shame at having the temerity to judge a fallen sister, could we but know the circumstances attending many such cases" (101). The last clause of her response alludes to the actual cause of many of these cases, white sexual violence, and not the character of African American women. Sappho recognizes Dora for the independence of her thinking and observes, "You are like a dear little preacher…and if our race ever amounts to anything in this world, it will be because such women as you are raised up to save us" (101). Likewise, Sappho fulfills a "long-felt want" in Dora's life by providing her with an equal partner with whom to pursue solutions to these social conditions, and this friendship therefore initiates an

affiliation of like-minded people who will ultimately create a family outside the bounds of biological inheritance, focused instead on the principles of empathy and compassion that unite them. These traits must be passed down to future generations of activists, and Hopkins emphasizes this theme of inheritance throughout the novel to distinguish inheritance as an oppressive force—it is the primary metaphor for race identity—from inheritance as a political act. In the latter case, African American parents and their children transmit political virtues, both to biological family members and beyond, to resist white supremacy. Moreover, these interactions between Sappho and Dora reveal the unstable nature of political categories or ideologies when brought into contact with lived experience, highlighting the need for careful consideration of what kinds of political ideologies are worth perpetuating.

Part of the purpose of Sappho's journey through the novel is to show that political agency is not static, while the political strategies to assure it often are. Because political agency cannot be reduced to the static postures of reified political positions, Hopkins appeals to applied family traits that supersede political clichés. These traits can be inherited or acquired, but they must be actively cultivated. And if they are inherited, Hopkins suggests, we must not lose sight that this occurred through the active efforts of forebears, not through passive biological transfer of features. After Sappho comes to view Dora as an ally, she finds new challenges among the sewing circles in Boston, which are ostensibly domestic gatherings that actually serve as important spaces of political activism. Mrs. Willis, an African American suffragist, lecturer, and popular political voice around Boston, explains to an audience of young women the responsibility they bear: "Shortly, you must fill the positions now occupied by your

mothers, and it will rest with you and your children to refute the charges brought against us as to our moral irresponsibility, and the low moral standard maintained by us in comparison with other races" (148). Mrs. Willis urges these potential activists to recognize the debt they owe their own mothers—their literal mothers as well as their political forbears—whose activism created the opportunity for their current contributions. It is an activism focused in part on resisting white supremacist assumptions about black pathology, the lasciviousness of African American women and their responsibility for miscegenation. By joining these two notions—intergenerational black activism in contrast to the belief in the sexual immorality of African American women—Hopkins revises the trope of deterministic racial inheritance expressed in the one-drop rule and other racist technologies of power in favor of an activist politics of affiliation modeled on the family. Moreover, if bourgeois family values are not available to African Americans, as white supremacy insists, Hopkins will reclaim these values, in part by dissolving the claim to a deterministic family identity. Mrs. Willis's statement can be read literally and metaphorically, as these women will ally themselves as family both within and without its biological strictures. In the process, they reject the racial determinism that underwrites white supremacy. The fact that Mrs. Willis advocates such a position within a discourse of relative conservatism—uplift ideology in the Boston sewing circles—suggests a complex character and even more complex political positions.

Mrs. Willis's role in *Contending Forces* has been the source of much critical disagreement, and a close analysis of the character and the responses she engenders solidifies the importance of Hopkins's attention to the white supremacist discourse of

black pathology and her insistence on a complex political critique. At their first meeting, Sappho asks Mrs. Willis the same question she asked Dora, and Mrs. Willis's response suggests that she might be sympathetic to Sappho and her story. Sappho asks, "Do you think, then, that Negro women will be held responsible for all the lack of virtue that is being laid to their charge today? I mean, do you think that God will hold us responsible for the *illegitimacy* with which our race has been obliged, as it were, to flood the world?" (149, italics in original). The question illustrates the ways African Americans—specifically African American women—are forced to shoulder the burden of institutional and social inequality and racism as well as the moral and physical consequences of sexual violence. The question also speaks to Sappho's assumption that her illegitimate child defines the possibilities for her future. At least initially, Mrs. Willis represents Sappho's chance to be embraced by the sewing circle and the larger community of Boston, and Sappho has the chance to break from her past and take her opinions beyond conversations with Dora into the activist community.

But Mrs. Willis's potentially supportive position coexists with the narrator's suggestion that her motivations might not be sincere. This juxtaposition highlights dramatic irony in the scene that increases the pressure on Sappho to make the right choice about whether she can trust Mrs. Willis. On a small scale, this scene dramatizes Sappho's central problem of inclusion: Will this activist community accept or reject her, thereby freeing her from the political consequences of her past trauma or demonstrating that this trauma is inescapable and will continue to represent a blind spot in black political action? The narrator describes Mrs. Willis's history and explains that she was largely without financial standing after her husband's death. After taking stock of her

situation, Mrs. Willis assessed that "[t]he best opening … was in the great cause of the evolution of true womanhood in the work of the 'Woman Question' as embodied in marriage and suffrage." Mrs. Willis recognizes the opportunity afforded by this now-popular political concern, and she sees that it "should float her upon its tide into the prosperity she desired" (146-7). She seems to be the embodiment of venality and political expediency, and yet Hopkins insists on making her character more complex. Because she possesses multiple contradictory registers, Mrs. Willis plays the perfect foil for Sappho's journey to political identity.

In her conversation with Sappho and Dora about sexual illegitimacy, Mrs. Willis seems to embody a more progressive and politically passionate stance. Dora asks Mrs. Willis if fallen women should be held responsible for their victimization. Mrs. Willis says African American women "shall not be held responsible for wrongs which we have *unconsciously* committed, or which we have committed under *compulsion*." She explains, "We are virtuous or non-virtuous only when we have a *choice* under temptation" (149, italics in original). Mrs. Willis says that for the "African brought to these shores against his will—the state of morality which implies will-power on his part does not exist, therefore he is not a responsible being," and consequently the women in Sappho's hypothetical cannot be held responsible for their fate. In this formulation, women are passive agents and victims of their circumstances—the perpetrators, in these passive voice constructions, are noticeably absent. And yet the italicized portions of Mrs. Willis's statement hail these perpetrators. The "compulsion" she speaks of was often white men compelling African American women and exploiting a power differential, a reversal of the white supremacist argument that the supposed

lasciviousness of black women was to blame. Mrs. Willis effectively accuses these absent white men of rape and the propagation of illegitimate children.

At the same time Mrs. Willis's response must seem repugnant to Sappho, if not at least confusing. It is unclear exactly what wrongs might be "unconsciously" committed by victims of sexual violence, and in this moment Mrs. Willis risks perpetuating the very white supremacist assumptions about black pathology that Sappho seeks to escape. Further, with the narrator's initial description of Mrs. Willis in mind, the reader recoils at this qualification in her argument. Sappho responds by rejecting Mrs. Willis's offer of a potentially sympathetic ear. The narrator explains that "[j]ust as the barriers of Sappho's reserve seemed about to be swept away, there followed, almost instantly, a wave of repulsion toward this woman and her effectiveness, so forced and insincere." Sappho then "drew back as from an abyss suddenly beheld stretching before her" (155). Whereas Dora and Sappho established an immediate connection, Mrs. Willis's political opportunism and her inconsistent logic regarding Sappho's culpability for her own suffering are an impassable barrier. At the same time, this scene spans multiple pages and walks through Mrs. Willis's ostensibly sympathetic position so carefully that it suggests her position and Sappho's response might not be so simple. Instead, this scene between Sappho and Mrs. Willis represents a crucial point for reading Hopkins's novel. Consistent with the complex narrative position that Hopkins cultivates throughout the novel, this scene creates multiple opportunities for interpretation and resists scripted readings within political or generic conventions.

Mrs. Willis plays an important role in Sappho's empowerment, and her complex character reveals Hopkins's valuable critique of political ideology. While Mrs. Willis

unwittingly helps move Sappho toward an awakened political identity, Sappho's rejection of her suggests more than a rejection of a particular political philosophy and instead asserts an affiliative politics grounded in community. Lois Lamphere Brown reads Mrs. Willis as representative of an uplift ideology that cannot incorporate Sappho and her story because it is propagated by a community figured as "highly autocratic, militaristic, and disinclined to debate the moral issues facing its young women" (60). Brown's analysis of the scene between Sappho and Mrs. Willis derives from Claudia Tate's notion of "mother's law," a term that asserts a model of virtue not based solely on overdetermined notions of sexual chastity and purity often articulated in the sentimental genre. Mrs. Willis fails to reach Sappho, however, and "it seems that this new mother's law, through a radical replacement of patriarchal law, is limited and not necessarily its accommodating, liberating antithesis" (60). Further, "[t]he way in which Mrs. Willis answers Sappho thrusts the onus of self-examination upon Sappho" (60). This moment illustrates the importance Hopkins places on Sappho's development through the novel as well as how Sappho's disagreement with Mrs. Willis demonstrates the dangers of the temptation to be politically reductive of historical circumstance. At the same time, Mrs. Willis represents a liberatory potential in Hopkins's larger critique of political opportunism, ahistoricism, and family as a site of resistance. Mrs. Willis is more than a mere a cypher for uplift ideology or racial conservatism.

Hopkins announces the central importance of Mrs. Willis's complex character, as her narrator notes that "[t]here was evidently more in this woman than appeared upon the surface" (157). The narrator opposes Mrs. Willis's more problematic aspects—her appeal to gradualism, for instance (152) or her "effusiveness, so forced and insincere"

(155)—to her apparent sympathetic stance toward Sappho and her progressive ideas regarding African American women's suffering in a racist society. The narrator privileges this complexity while emphasizing Sappho's difficult task of negotiating this confusing political terrain. The narrator points to the difficulty of "trac[ing] the windings of God's inscrutable ways." Characters like Mrs. Willis represent those "men and women whose seeming uselessness fits perfectly into the warp and woof of Destiny's web" (157). Both the reader and Sappho, then, should reject the urge to dismiss Mrs. Willis.

Sappho's response to Mrs. Willis represents a thoughtful and measured reply to a complex character and circumstances. Sappho primarily rejects Mrs. Willis because she is insincere and venal, and Sappho refuses the opportunity to confess her secret when she suddenly realizes that she has almost been bewitched by Mrs. Willis's force of personality. When male characters in the novel give their speeches at the meeting of the Colored American League, Hopkins brings leadership itself under analysis. Mrs. Willis may enjoy success and command respect as leader of the sewing circle, but if she is driven by self-advancement over community advancement, she can only fail. Beyond this conclusion, Sappho also realizes that Mrs. Willis is intelligent, informed, and, most importantly, complicated. Her ideology is not one of simple moral uplift that rejects Sappho's experience or that labels her complicit in her abuse. This is not to deny the problematic aspects of Mrs. Willis's position, as her moral politics seem to both liberate and constrain possibilities for Sappho's agency, often in the same moment. But Mrs. Willis's complexity also indicates that Hopkins is interested in more than a critique of one political philosophy and instead draws all political abstraction under her critical

lens. Furthermore, to oversimplify Sappho's encounter with Mrs. Willis is to miss the ways Hopkins lays the groundwork for a resistant position. A reductive reading of Mrs. Willis also scripts a reading of the conclusion of the novel that finds Sappho unable or unwilling to serve her own leadership role and agitate for freedom and opportunities for African Americans. To do so, Sappho must continue to sort through questions of her own agency, even while witnessing those ideologies that might try to silence her.

In the scene involving a meeting of the Colored American League after a lynching, Sappho witnesses a tableau of the pervading arguments about race activism, and each position fails to integrate her experiences. Her silent presence in this scene and her eventual absence emphasize her apparent lack of agency when a group of men discuss in general terms the white supremacist violence that victimized her.[72] The speakers offer various short-and long-term strategies for an African American response going forward. Dr. Lewis presents an accommodationist position that resembles the strategies of Booker T. Washington, an activist whom Hopkins herself had been at odds with at various points in her career.[73] The speaker points to the importance of an institutional intervention to rescue the children of African American drunkards and

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[72] Luke Sawyer tells the audience about his experiences, including the story of Mabelle Beaubean, whom her uncle sold into sexual slavery. No one realizes Mabelle is actually Sappho Clark. And as the direct correlation between lynching and sexual violence has been established throughout the novel, it is clear that by discussing one the men must discuss the other.

[73] Jennie Kassanoff draws a connection between Hopkins's literary subject matter and her ouster from *Colored American Magazine* and Booker T. Washington's eventual takeover (158). Elizabeth Ammons explains that "certain of [Hopkins's] literary practices, such as the portrayal of racially mixed marriages, were too radical for white readers and, even more instrumental, because her refusal to endorse Booker T. Washington's accommodationist policies drew the opposition of the powerful Tuskegeean…" (85).

spendthrifts. Lewis states: "If we cannot reach these men individually, we hope to reach their children. Thus we have planned that with the aid of our universities we shall at length root out evil and ignorance, and in the future give our race a clean, pure citizenship" (250). Lewis explains that if African Americans are "patient, docile, harmless," they might achieve "that prosperity for which we long, in the years to come, if not for ourselves then for our children" (250). His lack of urgency makes his position a non-starter, but he still retains a commitment to intergenerational action and provides another example of Hopkins's attention to the sign of inheritance. But Lewis insists that "if we give them time and do not hurry them, they will grow gradually accustomed to the new era," solidifying the impossibility of this position for the spirit of the novel (251).[74] John Langley speaks next and echoes this plea for gradualism, asking the audience to "await the issue of events with patience, trusting in the fealty of our party leaders" (253). Langley takes a bribe from white leadership in exchange for quelling any potentially effective black response, so his appeal to faith in "our party leaders" rings especially hollow. This appeal to gradualism aligns with the Washingtonian position and should not be confused with Hopkins's insistence on an intergenerational, enduring activism that can also respond to the urgency of the moment. At the same

[74] Dr. Lewis goes on to present an opinion popularly ascribed to Washington: "We should strive to obtain the education of the industrial school, seeking there our level, content to abide there, leaving to the white man the superiority of brain and intellect which hundreds of years have developed" (251). This passage undermines any notion that Hopkins herself might be complicit with any accepted belief of white supremacy, even one contrived from a model of progressive history and civilization. Her critiques are too pointed, and the subject position of her narrator is too clear, for such a supposition to hold true.

time, by juxtaposing these two approaches, Hopkins assigns Washingtonian gradualism the venality and ineffectiveness of Langley's position.

Next, Luke Sawyer's response insists on proactive and even revolutionary action, enough that Will Smith will need to temper it as the evening's final speaker.[75] But Sawyer also identifies problems with white supremacy generally, in particular the divide-and-conquer strategy used to entrench power, which does not limit itself only to conventional racism of the color line. In doing so, he articulates the possibilities for resistance that, ironically, will ultimately eschew revolutionary violence. It is a strategy consistent with Hopkins's appeal to affiliation and intergenerational activism, and the strategy affirms Hopkins's reclamation of the family as a site of resistance. Sawyer tells the other speakers and the crowd that "conservatism, lack of brotherly affiliation, lack of energy for the right and the power of the almighty dollar" are the "*contending forces that are dooming this race to despair!*" (255-6, italics in original). The economic motivations here stand at odds with the notion of affiliation that Hopkins's character asserts; they also reveal another shade to white supremacy. It finds expression in venality, which John Langley's appeal for trust in black and white politicians represents. It also finds expression in the lack of empathy that a predatory capitalist economy champions. Such an economy can find racism useful insofar as it keeps power entrenched and consistent. "[L]ack of brotherly affiliation" is equated with "conservatism," and both are charged with isolating and elevating individual goals above those of the community. Sawyer's attack on conservatism provokes a fascinating

[75] Will Smith clearly represents the Du Boisian position. His early description in the novel notes his concern with the possibility of a liberal arts education for African Americans. For Smith, "Latin and Greek represented the tools which he used to unlock the storehouse of knowledge" (167).

response from Will Smith, who anticipates the endgame of Sawyer's appeal to a revolutionary spirit and unwittingly uses Sappho's secret past as evidence of white supremacy's strategy to target the family.

Will Smith explicates lynching as a sign of white supremacist violence dependent on assumptions of black pathology, and in doing so he galvanizes Sappho's role as the political center of the novel. Smith uses Sappho's story to illuminate the true motivations of lynching, and, broadly, white supremacy, for his audience. In short, lynching is about white resentment and sexual desire, and for the reader Sappho's story is the perfect embodiment of this notorious crime of white supremacy. Smith explains that miscegenation in particular is a uniquely white obsession, as "[t]he Negro dwells less on such a social cataclysm than any other race among us" (264). There is white anxiety about the potential for "Negro domination," the other side of a pervading fear of race suicide—similarly projected at times on the black race, as miscegenation purportedly spelled race extinction for African Americans—and this resentment is ultimately a product of emancipation and potential black empowerment. While Smith is willing, only "for the sake of argument," to allow that "in one case out of a hundred" the accused might be guilty of the crime, the evidence suggests that in the other ninety-nine cases "the white man gratifies his lust, either of passion or vengeance" (269). As a projection of white resentment, lynching represents for white supremacists a justified response to the threat of purported black criminality in the form of sexual predation on white womanhood. Indeed, in the lynching story Luke Sawyer relates, Sawyer's father was a target for violence due to his economic success only (256). Ultimately, Will Smith focuses his analysis on rape because it is the locus of white resentment and

sexual obsession as applied to black womanhood (virtue) and male empowerment, which are also the subjects of Sappho's story.

Sappho, in her former life as Mabelle Beaubean, embodied the features of this white sexual obsession. She was the daughter of "a quadroon woman of great beauty" and a target for her white uncle's desires (258-9). For Smith, her victimization represents the central example of his political call to action, a reminder that white supremacy targets the "heart of the home life." Lynching as punishment for rape is an especially resonant signifier because it simultaneously defines black pathology in the past and utilizes it in the present to perpetuate itself. In this way, the theme repeats the double historical structure of Hopkins's novel, reaching into the past of slavery to show that little has changed in the Jim Crow era. But when Smith relays this argument, Sappho is absent; she had been "borne from the auditorium in a fainting condition" when Luke Sawyer explained the Beaubean tragedy. She never hears Smith speak. Her absence restricts her role as an example for Smith. She is an anecdote, not a political actor, and the narrator's unimpassioned tone at the end of this section suggests this fact. The narrator reports that the "papers said next day that a very interesting meeting occurred the night before at the church on X Street" (273). The paper's passive description, that events merely "occurred," suggests that because of Sappho's absence, these debates had no real effect. Thus, Hopkins reorients the novel around Sappho's story. With the exception of Luke Sawyer, whose story introduces Sappho's past without naming it as such, the men's political arguments failed in part because they focused on the "philosophy" of white supremacy while failing to recognize its concrete

consequences. Sappho's story rejects political abstractions in favor of a politics of affiliation derived through direct human engagement.

The fact that Sappho's suffering originates in family betrayal challenges the premise that deterministic family inheritance defines her prospects. This conflict connects the notion of black pathology and its focus on family to Sappho's story. When she first meets Dora and the Smiths, they immediately take her in, and with them she thrives in the love and protection of the family and in the way it empowers her to learn from politically active matriarchs. In a key scene with Sappho, Will Smith explains how powerful this connection is: "I have family enough for both of us ... [m]y mother loves you, my sister adores you; what more is there to be desired?" (311-2).[76] Even when John Langley deceives her, he appeals to Will Smith's family as the wedge that will isolate her. He explains, "Will Smith is a very proud man as well as a very just man. His pride of family is his besetting sin. Do you think that it will be for his best interest to marry you?" (317). Finally, when Sappho flees and isolates herself from the Smiths, she finds and creates adjunct family relationships in the the Smiths' absence. She finds solace in the Sisters of the Holy Family, who represent the perfect holy family and model for all others. They place Sappho with Monsieur Louis of Opelausas: "a man of color [who] has lost all of his family but … [his] two children" (352). Monsieur Louis feels "this beautiful girl-widow will bring peace and joy to my poor motherless girls" (353). Sappho is both beneficiary and provider of family until the novel's final

[76] In this same moment, as Sappho warns Will that there are details from her personal history that might impede their relationship, he again silences her by declaring that he "does not care for the past" (312). It is a moment of attempted understanding from Will, but it reminds Sappho, much like in her encounter with Mrs. Willis, that her past can only impede her future.

resolution, when she officially joins the Smiths. An appeal to family unites the theme of inheritance with the critical histories of the novel's structure, and Sappho's story illustrates how a response focused on the dominant strategies of white supremacy resonates more effectively than rehearsed political conventions.

At the end of the novel when Sappho finally confronts her secret "shame" directly, she realizes that connection with another, in this case her own child, is an ultimate step toward empowerment. She came to her political identity through suffering and decides to reclaim her life by reclaiming her child. In *Contending Forces*, motherhood is powerful enough to respond to white supremacist lies and to overcome disagreement about effective political strategies. Motherhood transcends the domestic realm and lives firmly in the world of political activism. Given Hopkins's careful development of the traditional political themes in the novel, the novel values domestic ideologies only in service to larger political principles without dismissing the political implications of the domestic or drawing a distinction from the domestic and the political.[77] When Sappho finally claims her child and her own independence and rejects the judgment of the society that assigns her shame for her past and deems her unworthy for marriage to Will Smith, Sappho recognizes "mother-love" as transcendent: "She held him closely folded against her throbbing heart, and something holy passed from the sweet contact of the soft, warm body into the cold chilliness of her broken heart. The mother-love chased out all the anguish that she had felt over his birth" (346). Her "pride

[77] Sawaya observes the complex depiction of home in *Contending Forces* as not merely a domestic space but as a place "involved in the very conflicts that structure the public sphere" (48). Sawaya's description of the political valence of Ma Smith's boarding house can extend across the novel, as Hopkins complicates domestic spaces so that they serve political functions.

of possession in her child" sweeps away the "feeling of degradation [that] had made her ashamed of the joys of motherhood" (345). Sappho's son, Alphonse, is no longer representative of her secret shame as victim of racist violence and now represents possibilities for her future.

Motherhood and the power of affiliation enacted through family—whether through biological inheritance or by choice and circumstance—assuages shame by countering a system of morality laden with hypocrisy, racism, and lies. In fact, a key aspect to the family that completes the novel is its self-selected, not inherited, feature. Although Alphonse is Sappho's biological inheritance, she must choose him as her son and acknowledge him by reclaiming him from her aunt.[78] The end of the novel draws to a close the persistent theme of inheritance that at once haunts the text as representative of racial identity and white supremacist obsession and represents a resistant way forward as new activists are created through passed-down knowledge. And in the novel's final movement, Hopkins makes this emphasis on family apparent as she reveals to the reader that Sappho has been searching for the empowerment of family—not merely security—all along.

The end of the novel focuses on family as an opportunity for political empowerment and represents the final stage of Sappho's political development. As opposed to critics like Tate and Carby, Brown observes that the end of the novel does not seem promising for Sappho's possibilities for integrating into African American

[78] Allison Berg argues that Sappho's suffering in the novel enables "her future as a race mother" and her ability to claim her son. Sappho's expression of her ultimately "inviolable" maternal rights allow Sappho to gain "a measure of self-possession that allows her to own her child" (143-4). Berg suggests that Hopkins emphasizes this power in the context of the history of denied maternal rights for slave mothers.

political culture or for serving as an activist for the cause. After being blackmailed by John Langley, Sappho admits her past to Will Smith and enters self-imposed exile. When the couple reunites in the final pages of the novel, Will Smith accepts Sappho and her child, and they are married, bringing closure to Sappho's history and the novel. Brown states, "As *Contending Forces* comes to a close, Sappho does not embrace the African American condition and move on to perform the type of mediatory functions that critics such as Hazel Carby have outlined as one of the traditional routes for female mulatto characters in sentimental fiction" (63).[79] The suffering that Sappho has experienced, according to this reading, is distinctly individual, and the resulting redemption she experiences is also individual. Brown's reading acknowledges Hopkins's diverse representations of race in the novel—specifically her desire to make the supposed borders between racial identities ambiguous—but it does so in service to the idea that the suffering Hopkins's characters face provides escape but not redemption and results in further alienation. Cut off from the community in Boston, Sappho can do nothing but escape to Europe with the Smith family.

According to Brown, these characters, via their "flexible racial histories and personas," are able "to escape America's rigid racial codes and avoid being constrained within the limited sociopolitical and educational circles of the American Negro" (68). For Brown, geography mirrors the distance created by Sappho's rejection by the "black

[79] Carby explains the mediating function of the mulatto character in literature as an historical consequence of race conditions after Reconstruction, when whites institutionalized racial segregation through Jim Crow. According to Carby, "In response, the mulatto figure in literature became a more frequently used literary convention for an exploration and expression of what was increasingly socially proscribed" (89). See also Werner Sollor's *Neither Black nor White yet Both* for an analysis of the "tragic mulatto" character in American fiction.

community," Smith's white Montfort heritage, and Will Smith's supposed refusal to play the role of black leader as evidenced by his desire to leave the country. According to Brown, as a result of the Montfort-Smith family identity, "the whiteness and the promise of renewed family bonds begin to overwhelm the already tenuous links that Will Smith has had with the African American community, as well as temper the central roles that Ma Smith and Dora have played in the community" (68).[80] But these family bonds are precisely the point—endurance through racist violence and social oppression is inseparable from the ideals of community; they help define that community. After Sappho claims Alphonse, the narrator makes clear that her suffering will enable her political activity in the future, "fitting her perfectly for the place she was to occupy in carrying comfort and hope to the women of her race" (347). Mrs. Willis recognizes the importance of affiliative community when she appeals to "fill the positions now occupied by [their] mothers," and this sentiment returns at the end of the novel. The affiliation this family finds is in shared suffering and effort and not necessarily through the accident of biology. Far from ending in a rejection of community, *Contending Forces* revises the notion of family that defines itself through community.

Ultimately, resistance operates in this text through the female-authored power of affiliation that rejects the deterministic limits of inheritance and their origins in white

[80] Brown argues that the revelation of the Smiths' European ancestry as descendants of Charles Montfort undercuts much of the work Hopkins accomplishes in her novel. The move abroad—a literary device common to literature of this period—is certainly an indictment of racist America, but it is not evidence of a rejection of black activism or outright abandonment of the black community. In fact, the narrator lays out Sappho's and Will's plans quite clearly in the final chapter: "United by love, chastened by sorrow and self-sacrifice, he and she planned to work together to bring joy to hearts crushed by despair" (401).

supremacist beliefs about black pathology. By rescuing the sign of the black family from racist assumptions but refusing to limit that response to an insistence upon black virtue, Hopkins rejects the premises of white supremacy and articulates in greater detail how it operates. Hopkins guides her inquiry through the subject of history as political intervention, and connecting her work to historically focused scholars like Patricia Hill Collins reveals how persistent beliefs about black pathology must be recognized as central to white supremacist assumptions in present-day conditions. In Hopkins's case, the sign of inheritance, coupled with the relationship between lynching and domestic economies of black women's sexuality and the black family, signifies the ways that the racial past structures the present.

Ultimately, white supremacy's endgame is violence that reinscribes economic and legal power, and Hopkins and other black authors at the turn of the century like Sutton Griggs and Charles Chesnutt recognize that responses must exceed the limits of political abstraction to try to face that danger. Because these authors recognize that discourses of racial pathology enable white supremacist violence, their privileging of that violence as a subject for literary inquiry resists white supremacy by drawing attention to white supremacy as its own insidious pathology. Hopkins illuminates the adaptive and opportunistic nature of white supremacy I described in my analysis of Thomas Dixon in part by challenging its naturalized assumptions. In the next chapter, Sutton Griggs's work indicates both the discursive and especially the material effects of racial pathology, as he seeks to return the responsibility for black pathology and racist violence where it belongs.

"The Virus of Race Prejudice": Violence and White Pathology in Sutton Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* and *The Hindered Hand*

A frightening scene takes place in Sutton Griggs's 1899 novel *Imperium in Imperio*. Belton Piedmont, one of the two African American protagonists, is laid out on a dissecting table, unconscious and vulnerable to the whims of Dr. Zackland, a white doctor intent on taking advantage of what could be "one of the greatest boons of his medical career" (106). Dr. Zackland had appealed to the men who kidnapped Belton to take care of his body. He asks them to avoid "any burning or riddling with bullets" because Dr. Zackland wants Belton "whole in the interest of society" (105). Belton somehow survives the ordeal and kills Dr. Zackland, and before he leaves, Belton places Dr. Zackland "on the dissecting board and cover[s] him over with a sheet" (107). The scene is unusual because of the modern medical horror it describes and Belton's resistance to it. This image of medicalized violence draws from a long history of scientific racism directed at African Americans that benefits from the discourse of black pathology, which communicates white supremacist beliefs about black inferiority.[81] This discourse obsessively depicts black physiology and depends on the purported objectivity of scientific racism to legitimize its conclusions about black inferiority. In

[81] Characterizations of black people throughout the nineteenth century contribute to this discourse. In *Exorcising Blackness*, Trudier Harris describes the extreme depictions of African Americans in the literary imagination specifically. According to Harris, "The black man became the harmless eunuch who could be tolerated if he accepted that role, or the raging beast who could be killed without conscience if he did not." Likewise, African American women "became the lascivious slut when her sexual favors were desired and the matronly mammy when whites needed someone to care for their children" (29). These polarized caricatures contributed to a discourse of racial pathology that described black people as dangerous, whether in terms of their susceptibility to disease, potential for violence, or uncivilizing moral turpitude.

Imperium in Imperio Griggs connects black pathology and the history of dissection, medical experimentation, and other threats to black people because contemporary assumptions and conclusions about black inferiority enable the violence and exploitation depicted in this scene. In this moment, however, Griggs also replaces the black body with the white body, symbolically supplanting black pathology with white pathology. According to Griggs, the object of inquiry in this scene should not be the purported disease at the heart of blackness but the motivating influences and real disease of white supremacy.

In this chapter, I examine the ways Griggs explores a discourse of racial pathology to define the essential connection between white supremacist beliefs about black physiology and violence committed against African Americans and to resist that discourse by appropriating its language. I define "racial pathology" as a broader discourse of racial thinking that includes attitudes and assumptions about pathological blackness as well as Griggs's counter-discourse of white pathology that resists white supremacist thinking and rejects its assumptions and conclusions.[82] Specifically, I

[82] I am focused on the metaphorical usage of pathology that makes comparisons between ideologies and disease in terms of the dangers they pose, their communicability, and their explanatory power regarding the complex abstractions of race. Black pathology discourse posits that black people suffer from physiological deficiencies derived from their distinct racial identity, and the assumptions attendant to this idea underwrite white supremacy and justify violence against black people. Conversely, pathological white supremacy locates an insidious pathology at the heart of white supremacist racial thinking. In this chapter, I am offering a critical usage of pathology that describes what might more accurately be called the discursive formation of racial pathology—a set of ideas, assumptions, images, and language that makes unfounded or dubiously conceived statements about black physiology, racial identity, and the violence supposedly justified by these conclusions, as well as a set of parallel assumptions used to describe white supremacy. This parallelism results not from any ethical or logical equivalency between the two discourses, but through Griggs's

analyze Griggs's use of the language of disease in two of his most important novels, *Imperium in Imperio* and *The Hindered Hand*, and I contextualize the image of the black man on the dissection board within a history of white supremacist violence that relies on beliefs in pathological blackness.[83] Most notably in *The Hindered Hand* and the "supplement" that accompanies it, Griggs describes the "virus of race prejudice" white supremacy represents. He depicts the pathological nature of race hatred through white supremacists' paranoid fantasies, which threaten an all-out race war, as well as the pathological nature of white supremacist racial thinking—its circular logic and appeals to the authority of science mark it as particularly dangerous. In both of these novels, white supremacy and race hatred lie dormant in all whites, no matter their political leanings, waiting to be activated and to wreak destruction. In addition to the "disease" of blackness, black pathology discourse in Griggs's novels targets black political empowerment that threatens white supremacist power and fuels paranoia, and Griggs explores the limitations of violent resistance in this context.

The ideology of white supremacy locates black political agency as particularly dangerous. For white characters in *Imperium*, potential black political empowerment is a disease that even the most politically conservative African Americans might catch. In addition, blackness as disease diminishes supposed differences between political attitudes among blacks and emphasizes their common racial identity. For white

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insistence to analyze white supremacy by way of a kind of immanent critique; by using the language of racial pathology discourse, Griggs hopes to subvert it.

[83] Dickson Bruce explains that while white supremacy's "message" of assumed black pathology "was not entirely new," it "undoubtedly came into its own during the 1890s, when it was used to great effect in support of disfranchisement and Jim Crow" (4). The prevalence of this discourse and the violence it encouraged required an urgent resistant response.

supremacists in the novel, blackness is a pathogen that evacuates the potential for political identity, leaving only biological identity, which is incapable of reasoned political discourse and prone to violence. Associations of blackness with violence and criminality likewise infect the thinking of liberal whites in Griggs's novels and drive paranoid fears of black political success, impeding any political progress Griggs and his readers might wish for. Accordingly, white characters in both novels view blackness as a potentially contagious pathogen borne by the blood that represents a menacing threat to white racial identity.[84] All of these tropes and assumptions contribute to a discourse of racial pathology that demands Griggs's scrutiny. For Griggs, in a world defined by racial thinking in these paranoid terms, all are potential victims of "the virus," either of blackness or of race prejudice. As a result, even well-intentioned white liberals think in pathological terms and are limited in the help they can offer African Americans. Griggs therefore suggests instead that African Americans must offer their own resistant response.

Griggs's use of metaphors of pathology is a discursive intervention with two direct effects. First, the metaphors indicate Griggs's political strategy to prevent violent resistance. Frequently in both novels, black characters struggle to morally justify revolutionary violence in response to genocidal white supremacist violence. For many critics, this impossible choice between violence and passive resistance, between

[84] In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Saidiya Hartman observes the ways that relations of power changed after Emancipation to enable "the control and domination of the free black population, and the persistent production of blackness as abject, threatening, servile, dangerous, dependent, irrational, and infectious" (116). See specifically chapter 6, "Instinct and Injury: Bodily Integrity, Natural Affinities, and the Constitution of Equality," to see how she examines in part the trope of blackness as contagion that supports oppression.

militancy and accommodationism, represents the political center of the novels. I argue, however, that focusing on Griggs's notion of white supremacist racial pathology reveals his struggle between viewing the problem optimistically or hopelessly and avoids the trap of trying to divine a particular political identity for Griggs or his protagonists. Griggs's ambivalence is apparent in the debates he sets up between opposed characters about resistance strategies, which are always situated within this larger context of pathological white supremacy. If white supremacy proves to be incurable, genocidal or self-annihilating violence is the only outcome for blacks. If it is curable, Griggs's discursive intervention could represent hope for the future. Ironically, reading Griggs's novels according to a binary logic that attempts to pin down his political position, as critics often do, enacts the very phenomenon that Griggs criticizes. Labels like "conservative" or "liberal" matter little when white supremacists are intent on black genocide and when white supremacist ideology targets language to validate and naturalize itself.[85]

Second, Griggs's use of the language of pathology represents another resistant strategy by creating the opportunity to subvert this discourse. He ultimately casts white supremacy, rather than blackness, as the dangerous virus. He taps into a history of racial

[85] I use the term "genocide" to refer to white supremacists' attempts to exterminate African Americans in Griggs's novels. These moments coincide with apocalyptic imagery and warnings from white characters about the survival of the black race. I distinguish this usage from other pervasive acts of violence against black people that are not explicitly directed toward the destruction of the future of the race. Other acts of violence of course coincide with attempts at genocide, and there is an expansive theoretical literature about the implications of genocide in African American literature, but for my purposes in this chapter I limit my usage to this particular way of distinguishing discrete acts of violence from a large-scale strategy by white supremacists to exterminate the black race.

pathology discourse through the language of disease and contagion, as well as through his use of the image of dissection, to delineate the ways this discourse justifies violence against black people and to hold white supremacy accountable. He rejects both the logic and the conclusions of racial thinking, and in his novels he dramatizes its immediate and long-term effects, as well as its abstract and more concrete consequences. In exploring all of the ways that Griggs casts both race and racism as threatening, contagious, and deadly, I note the complexity of his thinking as he considers different possibilities and often comes to necessarily contrary conclusions.

Like the scientific discourse from which it often borrows, racial pathology discourse is both theoretical and clinical, and its history reveals attempts to concretize irrational beliefs about racial identity. In *Difference and Pathology* Sander Gilman explains the function and consequences of a discourse of race-based pathology. He argues "disorder" and "loss of control" are characteristically associated with "pathology," and he asserts that designations of the other as pathological "are an efficient way of displacing the consciousness that the self, as a biological entity subject to the inexorable rules of aging and decay, ultimately cannot be controlled" (24). Consequently, the pathological becomes a site onto which to cathect social anxieties and to label others "as potentially corrupting the body politic" (131).[86] Furthermore, in

[86] Nancy Tomes echoes these observations in *The Gospel of Germs*. In a concerted movement of "aggressive health campaigns" around the turn of the century, a wide variety of Americans were acculturated to the scientific development around the spread of disease and contagions. Social conditions as cause, as well as supposedly risky behaviors and cultural practices, contributed to prejudices toward others in terms of class, race, and ethnicity. According to Tomes, "For many middle-class Americans in the early 1900s, the association of poor, immigrant, and non-white citizens with disease germs only deepened their feelings of class prejudice, nativism, and racism." Further,

Race: The History of an Idea in America, Thomas Gossett explores the variable and surprising ways racial discourse developed in the United States through clinical attempts to justify racist assumptions. He explains that Benjamin Rush, "the friend of [Thomas] Jefferson and one of the eminent scientists and philanthropists of his time," who also believed in the "innate equality of the races," saw "Blackness in Negroes" as "a mild and apparently uncontagious form of a disease." According to Gossett, Rush saw the disease as "derived" from leprosy (41).[87] Even innate racial equality, in Rush's case, did not have to ignore the supposed fact of racial difference, and these differences fueled assumptions about their causes and consequences. These assumptions, supposedly verified by the objectivity of science in some cases, contributed to a discourse of black racial pathology that persistently denigrated black people in terms of their physiology and supported white supremacist justifications for racial categories and the violence used to manage them.

The metaphor of dissection in the Zackland scene illustrates the clinical application of racial pathology by spotlighting a long history of medicalized violence on the part of white supremacists, spurred on by the supposed objectivity of scientific racism. It is a discourse that attempts to justify violence against black bodies by clinical observation and in some cases enacts that violence by clinical means. As Harriet Washington explains in *Medical Apartheid*, medical experimentation in the nineteenth century affirmed the expendability of black bodies and retroactively justified oppression

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the "specter of infection served nativists and racists well in their efforts to legitimate immigration restriction and racial segregation" (11).

[87] In *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power, and Imperialism*, Sheldon Watts observes that in "the antebellum American South, plantation doctors tended to regard leprosy as yet another disease of black people" (43).

by observing supposed black physiological inferiority. For instance, revelations about poor health for free blacks as compared to slaves in the 1840 census, including higher rates of disease, higher rates of miscarriage and infant mortality, and worse mental health served to cast African Americans as helpless and to emphasize the particular dangers freedmen faced.[88] Slave owners argued that slavery provided health protections for slaves that, when removed, would contribute to the health crisis for freedmen. Specifically, slave owners explained to northerners the dangers freedom posed for "the 'sickly freedmen' of the North, who sank into debilitating insanity when faced with having to provide for themselves or indeed to undergo any of the pressures of daily life that whites managed as a matter of course" (146). Defenders of slavery further attributed the "probable doom" of African Americans to insanity, lower intelligence, and to other physiological dangers "because their profoundly defective bodies were prey to a host of diseases that never plagued whites" (147). Washington notes that slavery "was also thought necessary to protect whites, because freely roaming sick blacks were perceived as vectors of infectious disease." This belief justified slavery and "draconian public-health methods such as racial segregation to contain the contagion of freed blacks" (147).[89] Much like earlier accusations that freedom after emancipation would prove untenable for freedmen, who continued to face economic and social

[88] As I explain in the Introduction with the example of the 1890 census, the data supporting these claims were flawed and, according to Washington, "a mixture of accidental and intentional falsehoods" (148).

[89] In "Race, Gender, and the Political Conflation of Biological and Social Issues," Dorothy E. Roberts parallels Washington's analysis and notes the postbellum tendency for scientists to blame "the deteriorating health of the American Negro on a biological incapacity to adjust to freedom," and she observes that "[l]ocating Blacks' inferior status in their diseased bodies provided a reason for retaining White supremacy and discredited the need for radical social transformation" (239).

oppression, Reconstruction-era white supremacist logic utilized assumptions of black inferiority to guide conclusions about black inferiority, supported by a discourse of black physiological and mental pathology.

Additionally, the historical record of the objectification, analysis, and exploitation of black bodies through dissection demonstrates how a particularly medicalized violence like the scene in Dr. Zackland's laboratory might resonate with Griggs's readers, especially African American ones.[90] In *Race and Medicine*, Todd Savitt examines the use of black cadavers especially for dissection and medical experimentation performed on African Americans in the nineteenth century. Savitt notes that there was "extensive use" of black bodies—both living and dead—"in Southern medical schools and in research activities" (77). Both slaves and "free persons of color" were vulnerable targets "in a society sensitive to and separated by race" (77).[91] Such an environment provoked fear of medical schools and hospitals, as both African Americans and vulnerable poor whites feared that "experiments might be performed on them and that they would be permitted to die so autopsies could be undertaken" (80).[92]

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[90] The editors of the Modern Library edition of *Imperium in Imperio* affirm in the Introduction that Griggs self-published the novel and sold it door to door in part to target black readers.

[91] David Humphrey makes similar claims in "Dissection and Discrimination: the Social Origins of Cadavers in America, 1760–1915." He observes that "[m]any Americans considered dissection a degrading and sacrilegious practice, an act to be inflicted on an outcast as punishment—much like the medieval rite of drawing and quartering a criminal" (819). Consequently, "dissection remained a humiliation imposed on social outcasts" (824).

[92] Washington draws a parallel between this particular medical racial history and the history of lynching, and she echoes Savitt's analysis of the centrality of medical dissection to this history. She traces a history of medicalized terror and fear over three centuries, and she notes that in the nineteenth century an increased need for cadavers, coupled with the general cultural abhorrence of dissection, influenced the exploitation

Savitt further observes that these instances extended into the postbellum period, galvanized by the proliferation of the Ku Klux Klan and white rumors of "night-doctors" who "stole, killed, and then dissected African Americans" (83). Much like lynching, both the murders and the environment of fear and terror they perpetuated made clear to African American citizens that their lives were expendable and under constant threat. And while the true motives of lynching often receded behind claims of divine justice or appeals to atavistic human drives, this history of medical violence was enacted with the legitimacy of science.[93]

Griggs's novels join the theoretical aspect of racial pathology to this history of its clinical execution. Dr. Zackland observes the utility of Belton's anatomy and notes that Belton was "a fine specimen of physical manhood" and that his "limbs were well

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of black bodies (121). Moreover, Washington asserts this exploitation in terms of slavery, as "anatomical dissection … represented a profound level of control over [black] bodies, illustrating that [African Americans] were not even free in death" (125). She describes rare cases of legalized "execution and dissection" sentences for violent criminals, and she points out that the description of a black man first hanged and then dissected around 1800 "evokes an appallingly circus-like atmosphere, one hard to distinguish from that characterizing a lynching" (124). Whether through these rare legal cases or from the illegal traffic of bodies stolen by grave robbers—ironically dubbed "resurrectionists"—white fascination with and abuse of black bodies contributed to and depended on a discourse of racial pathology. For Washington, this context of medicalized exploitation and violence, extending well beyond the twentieth century, animates persistent fears about medical intervention in African American communities. In Griggs's novels, this history of exploitation and fear provides the ground from which Griggs launches his critique of pathological white supremacy and racist violence.

[93] Savitt cites Gladys-Marie Fry's *Night Riders in Black Folk History*, which devotes a chapter to the Ku Klux Klan's exploitation of these fears. As Savitt and Washington note, these claims of legitimacy increased as wanton acts of violence became less acceptable in the broader society. Slave owners saw no problem with treating their property as they pleased, which often included medical experimentation. See chapter 2 of Washington's *Medical Apartheid*.

formed, well proportioned and seemed as strong as oak" (99). Dr. Zackland's fascination with Belton's physique and his appeal to a higher purpose for this torture and murder—for the betterment of society through scientific research—belie his true motivations, which mirror those of lynching. According to Dr. Zackland and his men, Belton looked "a little tony" and was "getting too high" (100, 104). While Dr. Zackland claims that Belton's dissection will benefit the interest of society, no reader, especially one familiar with the nineteenth-century history of dissection of African Americans, believes that this act will result in anything but the destruction of a black body in another instance of white supremacist violence. Examples from dissection history reflect the ways that objectification and exploitation of black bodies and their assumed pathologies perpetuated the genocidal violence of white supremacy and demonstrate how these acts are interdependent with the discourse of racial pathology. In *Imperium* and *The Hindered Hand*, as well as in the "supplement" he appends to his novel, Griggs explores the ways that white supremacist thinking enacts violence, and he cautions readers about the limits of violent resistance.

Critics register a relatively wide range of readings of Griggs's novels, due to their expansiveness and complexity but also to Griggs's commitment to exploring the contours of what Tess Chakkalakal and Kenneth Warren call "his political present" (12). As a black writer at the "nadir of African American race relations," as Rayford Logan has famously labeled the period in which Griggs was writing, Griggs depicts a complex and urgent political and social environment for African Americans.[94] His novels often create the expectation of a coherent political strategy in response to such

[94] See Rayford Logan's *The Negro in American life and thought: the nadir, 1877–1901*.

conditions by exploring the relationship between the two ends of a polarized approach—one suggesting violent resistance and the other passive accommodation.[95] In many cases, though, critical responses derive first from this seemingly binary structure, if only to result in critics rejecting it, with a preference for "a dualism rather than a binary" in Robert Levine's case, or observing, in the case of John Ernest, "the middle ground" Griggs occupies between "the opposing poles of militancy and moderation" (189). Dickson Bruce sees Griggs as "unable to come to grips with the ambiguities that were so strong in black ideas and concerns during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (156). Further, Bruce argues that in the two novels I address in this chapter, Griggs "did not clearly endorse either position" in a choice between moderation and militancy (162). Roger Whitlow ascribes the polarity in Griggs's texts to a pervading sense of "ambivalence" in black resistance. John Gruesser observes that Griggs's use of double characters, and the "idiosyncrasies, ambivalences, and ambiguities" that accompany it, lead to "widely diverse and in some cases starkly discrepant responses to the author" (50-1).[96] These critics seek to move beyond reductive readings, as the apparent polarity of the political options in Griggs's novels often prove to be much more nuanced than such readings allow. And they are right that Griggs does not provide a clear solution; in the two novels I address here, solutions are simply not available. To examine Griggs's ambivalence and his complex analysis of resistance, I provide a careful analysis of the pathologies of white supremacist ideology

[95] In "Literary Garveyism: The Novels of Reverend Sutton E. Griggs," Wilson J. Moses claims that the two protagonists of *Imperium in Imperio* "represent two antagonistic sets of traits commonly associated with the personalities of Afro-Americans" (208).

[96] Harris sees a lack of thematic coherence on Griggs's part, and she claims that he "has too many pieces of stories straining the novel to be able to make one thematic thrust" (184-5).

and its seemingly intractable and irreducible status among all whites—liberal, conservative, radical, Northern as well as Southern. These conditions make resistance difficult to theorize because white supremacy is so ubiquitous and genocide is such a real possibility.

Consequently, the extreme violence Griggs so graphically depicts in his novels forces one to examine its causes. In his novels, according to Andrea Williams, "Black Americans seldom die from old age of proverbial 'natural causes'" and "nothing could be more unnatural than how his characters perish or experience loss" (92). In *Remapping Citizenship and the Nation in African-American Literature*, Stephen Knadler notes the "shocking spectacles of sensational violence" in Griggs's novels and argues that "what readers remember about his thrillers are less their convoluted stories than particular moments of psychological and emotional shock, or spectacles of horror…" (152).[97] At times his characters are hopeful and, whether conservative or radical, they believe they can effect meaningful change. At other times they are pessimistic, as if failure is guaranteed, no matter the political strategy. A white character in *Imperium* implores a black protagonist to remember that "there is a good side to the

[97] The most discussed spectacle of violence is the graphic description of the lynching of Bud and Foresta Harper in *The Hindered Hand*. They are tortured for three hours, including having their bodies bored through with a kind of corkscrew. They are finally burned alive, as one of the perpetrators "stood near his mutilated victims until the photographer present could take a picture of the scene" (134). For Harris, these moments are particularly important for how they reveal historical realities. Through his depictions of violence Griggs attempts to "convince his audience of the need for better laws and equal justice" (80). Revolutionary violence in this case must be avoided through an appeal to institutional protections. In this chapter I avoid the most shocking spectacles of violence and focus on Griggs's investigation of the discourse of racial pathology. While examples of physical violence pervade his novels, Griggs's intervention on this discourse illustrates the kinship between language and physical violence, including the ways discourse and violence can subsume political rationality.

character of the worst class" (37). That same character later defends a gradualist position, asserting that if civil rights "had all come when they first belonged" to them, African Americans "would have been unprepared" (157). At the same time, this position coexists with numerous examples of racist violence driven by white fears and racial pathology that show discursive change and gradualism are foolish and ineffectual. Characters advocate for violent revolution as a response to the imminent existential threat of white supremacy, and in these moments a catastrophic race war seems certain. As a result, in both novels Griggs tracks conflicting political positions and their relation to realities of racist violence, and he emphasizes the complexity of black resistance in this context.

In *Imperium in Imperio*, Griggs maps possibilities for black political resistance onto a coming-of-age story, and in the process he analyzes how violence imbues racial thinking and proscribes possibilities for resistance. Instead of merely tracing the political development of the two main characters, Griggs shows them reckoning with violence at every step, illustrating how white supremacist fear and paranoia influence their lives. *Imperium* follows the lives of Belton Piedmont and Bernard Belgrave from their youth in nineteenth-century Texas, and their beginnings in school together prelude different political trajectories for the two men. Belton, who is dark skinned, grows up poor with a single mother and represents a gradualist position regarding African American political rights and social equality. Bernard, who is light skinned, represents a more militant position and eventually becomes president of the "Imperium," the underground political organization committed to establishing an independent African American state within Texas. Griggs illustrates the ways that racial thinking and its

relationship to violence affects political outcomes particularly by focusing on their childhood as a crucible for their political development and by examining the ways that both characters are guilty of romanticizing violence.

Griggs demonstrates the extreme nature of white supremacist violence first by elucidating the temptation of a violent resistant response. According to Griggs, because of the ways white supremacists see the world in terms of racial pathology—with blackness cast as a contagion and black empowerment an essential danger and a communicative disease itself—resistant responses cannot romanticize revolutionary violence. Doing so will only lead to death, not an effective revolution. As both boys attend the same high school, Griggs uses their parallel development to show their common ideological origins. Both boys romanticize and lay claim to an American revolutionary spirit as the part of history "that charmed them most was the story of rebellion against the yoke of England" (25). But as the novel progresses and the boys begin to experience the realities of living in the United States as black men in the 1890s, their strategies for survival begin to diverge. Griggs does not, however, allow the reader to forget their common roots.

Griggs's references to their origins suggest a nostalgia for childhood innocence isolated from racist violence and prejudice and united with a common national history that illustrates the productive use of violence to make political gains. But the romanticized revolutionary violence the boys idolize in their youth shares no similarity with what they will have to endure as black men in America, despite the different paths their lives take, because pathological white supremacy is committed to ensuring that black men cannot resist in the same way white men resisted other white men in the

Revolutionary War. Further, white supremacist violence against black men lacks the moral clarity of revolutionary violence, and Griggs emphasizes an apparent disease at the heart of white supremacist thinking as a result. While Belton endures an attempted "scientific" dissection/murder by Dr. Zackland and more scrutiny due to his complexion, Bernard is rejected by Viola, his love interest, because she has inculcated white supremacist beliefs about the dangers of the mulatto to race "vitality."[98] Though Bernard experiences class privilege because of his father, a white senator, and Belton has fewer opportunities because of his humble roots, both of their opportunities are limited by their racial identities in a white supremacist world. They both must face the realities of white supremacist violence and its pathological nature, regardless of the tenor of their political strategies.

The men's paths first diverge after high school graduation, as Bernard's connections in the white world gain him admission to Harvard while Belton attends a black college in the South, but both men continue their education about the pervasiveness of pathological racial thinking. Both men witness how white supremacy operates during their collegiate experience, and Belton in particular recognizes the threat he poses to whites, regardless of what he believes or what actions he takes. Mr. King, Belton's white benefactor, whose views on "the Negro problem" are "regarded by the white people of the South as ultraliberal," fears the dangers Belton will face because

[98] This strain of my argument will become clear later in this chapter when I focus on a character in *The Hindered Hand* who is similarly affected by white supremacist thought. In *Imperium*, Viola Martin reads a book titled "White Supremacy and Negro Subordination" that argues against the "intermingling of races" and warns against race suicide. A common critique of miscegenation, this argument also privileges the "vitality" of Anglo Saxon blood as being a threat to "Negro blood," overtaking it and diluting "the vitality of the Negro race" (118-9).

he is black, and Mr. King has the same concerns about all educated African American men, regardless of their backgrounds or political affiliations (33). King's fear is grounded in his belief that educated black men, specifically those with a notion of liberty, agitate the fears of white supremacists. Thus, his assumptions of black racial pathology militate against any "liberal" attitudes he might hold. King is particularly upset by educated African Americans' access to the history of revolutionary accomplishments—the opportunity "to read history and learn what real liberty was"—, and King "foresaw that the rising, educated negro would allow his eye to linger long on this bloody but glorious page until *that most contagious of diseases*, devotion to liberty, infected his soul" (33, italics mine). In this moment, the reader recalls the description of both boys' primary education, and their attraction to the history of the Revolution. According to King's formulation, both boys have already contracted the disease.[99] In this context, the metaphor of liberty as disease or infection articulates the fear of African American men as dangerous, with a propensity for revolutionary violence. But the metaphor also engages broader fears of African American men as social contagion and threat.

The "disease of liberty" threatens political action represented by white fear of black revolution, the outcome of which King sees as a "foregone conclusion in favor of his own race." King "shuddered at the awful carnage that would of necessity ensue if

[99] King's name suggests the problematic nature of his status as "ultraliberal." In the context of the American Revolution, King represents the Old World that justifies a revolutionary break toward freedom and individual sovereignty. Ironically, the revolutionary spirit that identifies King's problematic position is available to both white supremacists and African Americans, which runs counter to white supremacists' beliefs. There is no black-authored violence that could possess the moral backing of the Revolution.

two races … equally disdainful of life, fighting with the rancor always attendant upon a struggle between two races that mutually despise and detest each other," came into violent conflict (34). The narrator's designation of liberty as a contagion, the broader context of the belief in the sexual and criminal threat African American men posed that the discourse of black pathology codifies, and the description of the violence resulting from two races "disdainful of life" and the "rancor" that always attends the struggle between two such races suggests a catastrophic race war instead of a politically motivated rebellion.[100] And the language of pathology enables that vision. In this moment, Belton's white benefactor is both liberal pragmatist and unwitting white supremacist. King simultaneously fears a clash between the races that must end terribly for African Americans. But as is also evident through the metaphor of the "disease of liberty," he is equally fearful that the African American desire for freedom poses an existential threat to whites. These metaphors of disease and contagion, when considered alongside the central threat to whites that animates the novel—the existence of a secret black state lying in wait—manifest the white anxiety at the heart of white supremacy. Furthermore, King paints the conservative character of the conservative/radical dyad in terms usually reserved for the obvious radical threat because he sees Belton's existence itself as representative of violence and danger, regardless of Belton's particular politics. In the context of white supremacist discourses of black pathology, any black man is only one decision (or action) away from violence.

[100] Griggs addresses this fear in more detail in *The Hindered Hand*. Anxiety about a final conflict between the races, one in which the Anglo Saxon will prevail, brings together white supremacist anxiety about social equality with turn-of-the-century fascination with Anglo Saxonism. See Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace*.

Griggs follows this instance with another example of the metaphor of black political activity as disease, but this time he complicates the metaphor by including the white supremacist fear of miscegenation more explicitly. In this example, black political empowerment is particularly dangerous because any notion of social equality leads to race mixing. Belton creates a skirmish at his university when he notices that the sole black teacher does not eat lunch with the white teachers. He proposes to his classmates that he aims to "coerce" the white teachers into "allowing the colored teacher to eat with them." The classmates agree, as this had been a persistent conversation among them, and are surprised that in the past "no one dared to suggest a combination." The narrator explains, "During slavery all combinations of slaves were sedulously guarded against, and a fear of combinations seems to have been injected into the Negro's very blood" (44-5). Griggs's pun on "combinations"—as both political organizing and racial mixing—conflates fear of black political action with fear of social equality and calls attention to the way white supremacy animates African American "fear of combinations" in pathological terms. The narrator's image of inoculation conveys white fears about black political activity. Much like King's reference to the disease of "devotion to liberty," whites must be protected from black political activity and the risk of insurrection. Additionally, in terms contemporaneous to the novel's post-slavery plot, the new "fear of combinations" finds its form in attempts at social equality, including miscegenation.

Griggs seizes on this white anxiety as a recurring motif in this novel and in *The Hindered Hand*, as miscegenation represents the ultimate violation of racial borders and is likely to provoke white supremacist violence. In the case of the teachers' dining

arrangements, even Belton's most innocuous actions are revolutionary because of his racial identity. Further, Griggs's use of metaphors of disease demonstrates that white supremacy depends on a discourse of racial pathology to operate. And he exploits white anxiety by depicting its paranoid and disordered nature. The more he investigates this discourse, the more its grounding in fear and violence alarms him. At the same time, Belton's strategy ultimately works, and the teachers "felt like hens who had lost their broods." For them, the "cringing, fawning, sniffling, cowardly Negro which slavery left, had disappeared, and a New Negro, self-respecting, fearless, and determined in the assertion of his rights was at hand" (46). The moment allows the "future leaders of their race" to learn "the power of combinations, and that white men could be made to capitulate to colored men under certain circumstances" (47).[101] The "certain circumstances" in this case are unclear—they are, after all, at a black university committed to educating future race leaders—which qualifies their success. While the event motivates Belton's continued political activity, it is also cautionary. Griggs reminds readers that there are circumstances in which resistance will not be tolerated.

Eventually, these variable applications of pathological language come together in a white character's bizarre speech. Belton attends Stowe University, named after the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and therefore suggestive of non-radical politics. Upon

[101] Eric Curry highlights this moment of success in "'The Power of Combinations': Sutton Griggs' *Imperium in Imperio* and the Science of Collective Efficiency." He couples Griggs's novel with a later sociological work by Griggs to argue that this scene, as well as the novel's "ambiguous ending," presents "combinations" as productive of a collective strategy for resistance. As a result, the ending of *Imperium* "should be read as a call to collective action on the part of the audience and an abdication of authorial control" (24). As I make clear in this chapter, I agree that the novel advocates a resistant position, but focusing on Griggs's pathological language complicates that strategy.

Belton's graduation, the university president, Dr. Lovejoy, "a venerable white minister from the North," addresses the graduates. While his overall message is about black leadership and humility, which greatly influences Belton, the metaphors in the speech draw from the discourse of racial pathology, and they risk delivering problematic and conflicting messages.[102] Dr. Lovejoy expresses white supremacist anxiety about blackness as contagion in an effort to protect black students from a racially defined world. In the process, he unwittingly reveals that he can only understand the world in pathological terms, and he, a white liberal, is therefore complicit in the construction and maintenance of the racial caste system. As the rest of the novel explores strategies of resistance, Griggs implores his audience in this section to know their enemy. White supremacy is inherent even in supposedly liberal white allies. All whites, in the end, think in terms of racial pathology.

In his speech, Dr. Lovejoy refers to the graduates as "surgeons" who must navigate the "body" of the world carefully to advance their lives and avoid falling victim to its dangers. Griggs brings together blackness as disease, black physiological deficiency, and a view of the racial caste system expressed in pathological terms to assert a white supremacist view of the world and to identify white supremacist pathology. As this complex metaphor is the central subject of this section, it is worth quoting in full:

> "The world is like unto a wounded animal that has run a long way and now lies stretched upon the ground, the

[102] Griggs identifies Lovejoy's potentially liberal tendencies as soon as he introduces him, just as he did with the "ultraliberal" Mr. King. By doing so, Griggs immediately signals that Lovejoy's political status deserves scrutiny.

> blood oozing forth from gaping wounds and pains darting through its entire frame … So, young men, do not look upon this dying, decaying world to feed and support you. You must feed and support it. Carry fresh, warm, invigorating blood in your veins to inject into the veins of the world. This is far safer and nobler than sticking the lance into the swollen veins of the world, to draw forth its putrid blood for your own use. I not only exhort you but I warn you. You may go to this dying animal as a surgeon, and proceed to cut off the sound portions for your own use. You may deceive the world for awhile, but it will, ere long, discover whether you are a vandal or a surgeon; and if it finds you to be the former, when you are closest to its bosom, it will squeeze you tightly and tear your face to shreds." (49)

The speech contains contradictory registers that reflect Griggs's ambivalence about black resistance and white liberal allies. Griggs recalls the image of the dissection table, though he now casts African Americans in the place of the "surgeon." Dr. Lovejoy exhorts the young graduates "to feed and support" the "dying, decaying" world by "[c]arry[ing] fresh, warm, invigorating blood in your veins to inject into the veins of the world." He advises that "[t]his is far safer than sticking the lance into the swollen veins of the world, to draw forth its putrid blood for your own use" (49). Through Dr. Lovejoy's speech, Griggs recalls the image of injection in the "fear of combinations"

passage, though in this case he seems to advocate for black inoculation against the dangers of the world, rather than for white protection from blackness.[103] The lance again transfers blood, this time with positive associations, and the infective quality of that blood posits a message of social improvement to these young African American men, tasking them with making positive changes in the world and empowering them as examples of Du Bois's "Talented Tenth." The metaphor anticipates Viola Martin's belief, as well as Eunice Seabright's in *The Hindered Hand*, in the dominant quality of "Anglo Saxon blood" that can overwhelm "Negro blood" and pose a threat to the future of the black race. Dr. Lovejoy seems to suggest that black blood could influence the ostensibly white world, "to feed and support it." But because he presents the possibilities for positive social improvement in the language of racial pathology, Dr. Lovejoy unwittingly reveals white anxieties about black proliferation and illustrates that race can only be understood within this discourse. Like the qualified success of the combinations episode, this scene reveals Griggs's appreciation for the complexities of black resistance. Though their cause is just and their influence might be great, the

[103] The lance as metaphor returns later when Belton, after failing in his romantic pursuit of Viola Martin, who loves Bernard instead, uses the self-restraint he learned in school to abandon his feelings of jealousy and his desire for revenge. The narrator states, "And it was well for the world that this young negro had been trained in a school where there was a friendly lance to open his veins and let out this most virulent of poisons" (78-9). The narrator responds directly to the discourse of black pathology by affirming the danger Belton might pose to society if his anger had no outlet. The "friendly lance" of education allowed him to consider the situation rationally instead of acting on his passions. In this case rational thought, largely dismissed for black people in black pathology discourse, circumvents violence. When Griggs later describes white supremacy as a pathology given over to irrational passion, this moment of self-control proves more provocative.

graduates must be careful about how they encounter a world that is dubious of their motives and threatened by any overt displays of political resistance.

The world's "putrid" blood that requires new life cannot be divested from the larger historical context of this scene, in which African American men are being urged into a world that provides moral and physical dangers. And like Mr. King's advice, Dr. Lovejoy's speech is actually a warning. While he offers sound advice about successful leadership avoiding egoism that would threaten the cause, he also manages the border between white and black. Behave yourselves, he warns, or face the consequences. Dr. Lovejoy ostensibly seeks to empower these black students, but his rhetoric reveals that, despite their desire for success, the graduates' race will always structure the way they, and all African Americans, are understood in a white world. Those immediate consequences might be to their effectiveness as leaders of their race, or they might be more existentially threatening, as the white world will not abide an incautious black leader.[104] Dr. Lovejoy's distinct warning about one's encounters with this world, therefore, is shrouded in the conventions of the moment—a white benefactor's paternalistic advice to his black students—that undercut his virtuous intentions.

Griggs's image of the dissecting table in this scene casts African Americans as the physicians, charged with navigating the metaphorical body—the social body—with surgical precision. While the metaphor apparently places African Americans in an empowered position, the language of racial pathology reminds readers that they cannot ignore the persistence of this discourse. Acting recklessly, as a "vandal," will result in

[104] As the novel progresses, Belton's absorption of this advice both benefits him and harms him, which reflects Griggs's ambivalence. It tempers his resistance strategy, as he couches his approach in nonviolence, but it cannot save his life.

the kind of fatal "mistakes"—acting "too toney," to recall Belton's supposed crime—that white supremacists point to as justification for racial violence. In the dissection scene with Dr. Zackland and Belton, Dr. Zackland's psychotic desire to dissect Belton might recall the image of the vandal, even though Lovejoy's advice was directed specifically toward African Americans. Dr. Zackland is a white supremacist agent obsessed with dismantling and destroying the African American body for the benefit of whites. The supposed social benefit of dissection only thinly veils the true purpose—to annihilate African Americans.[105] In contrast, Dr. Lovejoy's use of the image of dissection seeks to motivate future black leaders to navigate the world carefully, but he nevertheless indicates how racial pathology discourse grounds his thinking. He warns the men not to act as a "burrowing parasite, feasting off of the world's raw blood," instead directing them to "[l]et the world draw life" from them. He warns them to "[u]se not the misfortunes of your people as stones of a monument erected to your name" (50-1). This language cautions future race leaders to stay true to their beliefs and their constituents, but it also repeats the call to inject their blood into the world, an articulation of a nightmare scenario for white supremacists. The literal manifestation of this metaphor for white supremacists—miscegenation—represents another threat in

[105] The consequences of Zackland's supposed desire to learn from his psychotic experiments are reflected in a nineteenth-century poem included in Savitt's *Race and Medicine*, "The Dissecting Table." The last three stanzas of the poem describe white medical students subduing and kidnapping African American victims for medical experiments. After they "drag dat poor dead nigger chile / Right een dat 'sectin hall," they "'vestigate 'is liver—lights— / His gizzard and his gall." The final stanza describes the indiscriminate dismantling of the body: "Tek off dat nigger's han's an' feet— / His eyes, his head an' all, / An' w'en dem stujent finish / Dey was nothin' left at all" (83). Whatever the supposed benefits of such experiments, like Dr. Zackland's they originate in kidnapping and murder, and they result in the literal disintegration of the black body.

terms of pathological discourse. Given Griggs's usage of pathological language at moments of white intervention upon potential black resistance, this instance makes clear that black responses must account for probable white supremacist responses. Like King, Dr. Lovejoy aims to prepare Belton for a "successful" life, not for a socially equal, and therefore revolutionary, life. At the heart of Griggs's depiction of Dr. Lovejoy's advice, then, is that in this moment of white paternalism and black conservatism, the distinction between conservative and radical shifts under the weight of white supremacist thinking. Belton may as well represent black radicalism, not conservatism, as white paranoia about his very existence ascribes to him a potential for violence, regardless of what he does. What Griggs makes clear is that Dr. Lovejoy seeks to protect African Americans by denying their political agency and that his commitment to white supremacist pathological thinking, in addition to his paternalistic worldview, overshadows his purported positive motivations. Like Mr. King, Dr. Lovejoy can only read race in pathological terms; neither man can escape the pathology of white supremacy.

Griggs's depiction of these two supposedly sympathetic white characters reveals his doubt about African Americans' ability to depend on white liberalism because of its relation to white supremacist thought, particularly through its articulation in the latter's language of pathological blackness, and he explores possibilities for black-authored resistance. The end of the novel provides possible political choices, pitting Belton's apparent conservatism against Bernard's militant call for violent resistance.[106] Belton

[106] Bernard's radicalization takes place because of his love interest Viola Martin's suicide. She refuses to marry him because of his mixed-race identity, and her absorption of white supremacist attitudes motivate her commitment to racial separatism. Bernard, in a fit of grief after her death, cries out, "By the eternal heavens these abominable horrors shall cease. The races, whose union has been fraught with every curse known to

calls Bernard to Waco, Texas, and tells him about the Imperium, indicating also that the secret members, who have been following Bernard's progress through Harvard and in his political career, want to offer Bernard the presidency of the Imperium. Bernard accepts and puts forward his plan for revolution, and Belton responds with a plea for patience. From one perspective, this showdown represents the validation of Belton's more conservative approach, as he stands up to Bernard and eventually dies a martyr. Griggs's exploration of violence in this scene, however, is more nuanced than a simple endorsement of nonviolence over violent revolution. Griggs recalls the men's childhood romanticization of violence, as well as the pathological nature of white supremacy, to assert that the race-based violence of white supremacy is something different, and consequently the scene results in the ambiguous ending critics have observed. Both men privilege revolutionary violence as justifiable, but only Belton realizes that their white supremacist enemy's violence is an ultimate limit point. Despite the ostensibly opposed political positions of the protagonists, the reader cannot come to a consistent and coherent conclusion, at least not within the polarized terms of their argument.

Griggs's ambivalence at the end of the novel results from his inability to abandon hope, even in the face of the genocidal aims of white supremacy. In Bernard's speech to the Imperium, he claims that both the revolutionary spirit of the Anglo Saxon and white responsibility for slavery derive from a violent potential defined by force, but he fails to recognize the extent of its consequences. The realities of white supremacist violence and Belton's insistence that, although revolutionary violence is the last option,

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earth and hell, must separate. Viola demands it and Bernard obeys" (120). The moment allows Griggs to explain the dangers of white supremacist thinking and to emphasize its obsession with miscegenation.

it must nevertheless be an option, undercut his gradualist position. Belton suggests revealing the existence of the Imperium and demonstrating to whites that an oppositional force exists with the potential to fight if necessary. According to Gabriel Briggs, "[t]o engage in such action is to expose the sword of hope; a veiled threat that reveals the opportunity for action" (169). Belton's hope for the future resides in his belief in the potential for people to change their minds, but his is a temporary hope backed by the threat of violence. Further, by giving voice to Bernard's position, Griggs carefully lays out the white supremacist pathology that might justify revolutionary violence. In both cases, Belton and Bernard appeal to the possibility of violence as a solution, echoing their childhood glorification of violence as a virtuous revolutionary act.

Bernard states, "That same hammer and anvil that forged the steel sword of the Anglo-Saxon, with which he fought for freedom from England's yoke, also forged the chain that the Anglo-Saxon used to bind the negro more securely in the thralldom of slavery" (141). Despite Bernard's commitment to a revolutionary response, his parallel of the Revolution and slavery for the Anglo Saxon suggests that the Anglo Saxon commitment to force is categorically different from what drives Bernard and Belton. Bernard effectively treats white supremacy as a political enemy that demands a proportionate response. If violence will remain an option for the conservative Belton, the Anglo Saxon version of that violence must be an adulteration of the morally justified violence of the American Revolution. To misapprehend the pathological nature of white supremacist violence is to run headlong toward the apocalyptic future Griggs depicts in *The Hindered Hand*. White supremacy is not a conventional political enemy;

it is a global threat. For Bernard, white supremacist violence poses the same threat as it did during slavery. Part of what motivates the urgency for his revolutionary response is that white supremacy continues to be unchallenged on its own terms, with violence.

Belton offers a putatively nonviolent alternative, but he ultimately proves just as naive as Bernard in his attitudes toward violence. Belton responds to Bernard's argument that violence is the only viable option by saying that there is indeed one more weapon, "the pen," and he pleads with his audience to "let us devote our attention to that mightier weapon" if blacks are to be denied the ballot (164). Belton argues for the pen as a way to "change the conception which the Anglo-Saxon has formed of our character." The pen will allow them to "pull the veil from before the eyes of the Anglo-Saxon that he may see the New Negro standing before him humbly, but firmly demanding every right granted him by his maker and wrested from him by man" (163). Bernard responds to Belton's optimism, asserting that he "know[s] the Anglo-Saxon race" and that "he will never admit you to equality with him" (169). On the one hand, Belton's appeal seems to be in line with a gradualist position that stresses patience and a nonviolent political response. On the other, both Belton and the reader are quite aware of the dangers posed by white supremacy. Consequently, Belton assures his audience and Bernard that despite Belton's appeals to sentiment, violence remains a last resort.

Belton proposes "[t]hat [they] spend four years in endeavors to impress the Anglo-Saxon that he has a New Negro on his hands and must surrender what belongs to him." If the whites prove unconvinced, Belton suggests that African Americans will then emigrate to Texas and, due to their "unquestioned majority of votes," take over the state government. Belton still insists at this point on a nonviolent resolution. He calls

this proposition "primarily pacific" but "firm and unyielding." He says, "It courts a peaceable adjustment, *yet it does not shirk war, if war is forced*" (163-4, italics mine). Belton's final warning, given what the reader might assume will be a negative reaction based on the picture of white supremacy the novel has painted, prepares the Imperium for war. He says, "But be prepared, if he deems us unfit for so great a boon, to buckle on our swords and go forth to win our freedom with the sword just as has been done by all other nations of men" (165). Griggs's final resolution to the apparent choice between Belton and Bernard's positions is to make no choice at all. The associations of white supremacy with pathology transcend the characters' conflict about violence and enable an alternative resolution for Griggs, one that reveals the author's ambivalence but also emphasizes the pathological nature of white supremacy.

Like Bernard, Belton hearkens back to that notion of revolutionary violence that inspired both school boys. Despite their supposed political differences, both men agree that violence can effect social change; the difference lies in where to assign the limit. At the same time, the reader recalls the ambiguity at the center of Mr. King's and Dr. Lovejoy's speeches. Despite the apparent differences between their liberal attitudes and the conventional racial politics of the South, Belton's conservatism loses its significance in the face of the threats justified by pathological blackness. Because even white liberals emphasize Belton's racial identity at the expense of his political opinions, they diminish the importance of political opinions and unwittingly emphasize the existential danger white supremacist violence posed.

Rather than choosing sides, Griggs introduces a third character—Berl Trout—to attempt to resolve the supposed tension between Belton's gradualism and Bernard's

militancy. By doing so, he ends the novel with a final warning about the future of white supremacy and the inability of violent resistance to counter it. The Imperium chooses Bernard's path, despite Belton's plea for patience and a promise of violence if necessary. When Belton decides he must ultimately leave the group, he is executed. Afterward, Berl Trout, a member of the Imperium, betrays the organization by revealing its identity thereby destroying the organization that has relied on its secrecy. Trout witnesses Bernard standing over Belton's grave and expressing his grief in a "fearful, wicked laugh like unto that of a maniac" (176). Bernard vows violent revenge on the "Anglo-Saxon," demanding that they "exhume Belton's body if [they] like and tear [their] flag from around him to keep him from polluting it," as even in death, Belton's disease of blackness threatens infection (176). Trout is struck with fear and sees that, with Bernard as the president, the "Imperium was a serious menace to the peace of the world." According to Trout, a "chance spark might at any time cause a conflagration, which, unchecked, would spread destruction, devastation and death all around" (176). Trout then describes an apocalyptic vision in which, after a "terrific explosion … [t]he only sound to be heard was a universal groan [because] those who had not been killed were too badly wounded to cry out" (176).

Gruesser reads the novel as ending "on neither a positive nor a negative note" (61). Instead, *Imperium* "offers [Griggs's] black readers a chance to indulge momentarily their revenge fantasies and dreams of power—and even empire—but also shows them that they must be rejected" (62). For Gruesser, the ending demands that readers "realistically face the here and now" by serving as a warning—either work with the Belton Piedmonts or face the Bernard Belgraves (62). I agree with Gruesser's

resistance to the ending as a wholesale endorsement of conservatism or militancy. His reading also focuses on the dire nature of the consequences of violent confrontation, which the nature of white supremacy requires. For Gruesser, the ambiguity at the end of the novel results from both men's inability to recognize the true nature of the white supremacist enemy. Romanticized violence cannot face this menace, and while Belton comes closest to understanding this by initially advocating for an alternative nonviolent response, his commitment to the supposed moral certainty and superiority of revolutionary violence undercuts his position. But Griggs also shows that the supposed tension between the two characters does not serve any explanatory function except to emphasize white supremacy's pathological nature. For this reason, Berl Trout gives voice to the novel's lasting thought: white supremacist pathology leads to death for all. That *Imperium in Imperio* ends in a barely avoided catastrophe anticipates the apocalyptic pall Griggs later assigns to white supremacy in *The Hindered Hand*.

Though published over five years after *Imperium*, *The Hindered Hand* picks up on this theme at the end of *Imperium* and extends its violent vision for the future. *The Hindered Hand* dramatizes another nightmare scenario for white supremacists, as it takes some of the anxieties in *Imperium* regarding race mixing and distills them through examples of infiltration, border crossings, and secret relationships.[107] It presents an apocalyptic vision of the consequences of white supremacy allowed to run its course. Like *Imperium*, *The Hindered Hand* has a double structure with two protagonists. The central target of *The Hindered Hand* is again pathological white supremacy, but as an

[107] At one point, a white character dons black face to infiltrate the black community to find his wife's murderer. At another point, a black character dresses as a woman to infiltrate the white community, where he learns about the danger white men pose for black women.

end to Griggs's investigation of violence, the novel ultimately descends into madness and nihilism, leaving its supposedly conservative voice, Ensal, fleeing the country rather than staying to fight for his race. Thus, Griggs forces the reader to reckon with the violent consequences of white supremacist racial thinking. But at the same time, Griggs is not ready to abandon hope completely, and in an appended supplement to the novel, which he titled "A Hindered Hand," Griggs responds directly to Thomas Dixon's popular novel *The Leopard's Spots*. In both his novel and in this supplement, Griggs uses the language of disease to examine pathological white supremacy in an attempt to rescue African Americans from the discourse of black pathology and make a final plea for a rational alternative to a catastrophic race war. Coupled together, *The Hindered Hand* and its supplement represent a fascinating example of discursive intervention on Griggs's part, as he responds directly to Dixon, the author of so much disinformation about African Americans and a key contributor to the language of black pathology. In doing so, Griggs returns the responsibility for pathological thinking and violence to white supremacists and their ideology.

The Hindered Hand tells the story of Ensal Ellwood and Earl Bluefield as they navigate the political terrain of the United States at the turn of the century. Their pursuit of individual success comes into conflict with racial politics, and they become representative leaders of their race who chart two different paths forward, much like Belton and Bernard in *Imperium*. But *The Hindered Hand* is different for the number of characters and plot strands it incorporates in attempt to deal with the possible futures for African Americans. To simplify such a complex work, I focus on Earl and Ensal's central conflict about violence by first analyzing a group of ancillary characters and

subplots: Ramon Mansford's infection by the virus of white supremacy; the Seabright family plan to infiltrate the white South and the consequences of the racial caste system for Eunice Seabright; and Mr. Hostility's apocalyptic scheme to bring about global race war. In each of these cases, Griggs critiques white supremacy with pathological language similar to that in *Imperium*. His use of another set of polarized characters again registers his ambivalence about possibilities for black resistance, and he defines pathological white supremacy in his most explicit terms, outlining in detail its dangers and the anxieties that motivate it.

The "Anglo Saxon race" as described in *The Hindered Hand* is motivated by fear and committed to violence, and it risks infecting others, no matter their political persuasions. When Ramon Mansford, a Northerner, arrives in the South, Arthur Daleman, a liberal Southerner, talks to him about "the dark shadow that projects itself over our section, the Negro problem" (99).[108] Daleman argues that "two classes of Southerners exist," and liberals like Daleman "hate to see [the Negro] the victim of the spleen of the radicals and they do grow furious at the sight of the Negro in exalted station" (101). These distinctions dissolve, however, when Ramon's fiancée, Alene, is murdered, purportedly by a black man. The narrator states, "In the darkness of [Ramon's] own calamity distinctions between right and wrong began to fade away, and he found his hatred of the Negro race assuming a more violent form than that manifested by the native Southerner" (108). This moment parallels Griggs's analysis of

[108] Ramon's name, like King's, perhaps represents another effort on Griggs's part to problematize political categories, this time the notion of whiteness with nonporous borders. Ramon's Hispanic-sounding name challenges the supposed rigidity of Anglo Saxon identity.

political categories throughout *Imperium*, as racial animus quickly dissolves ideological distinctions.

Further, Ramon feels a connection to a racial identity that is elemental in its violence. In Ramon's "heart there was the harking back to times more than a thousand years ago when his race was a race of exterminators" (108). Ramon's experience of supposed racial violence galvanizes his connection to his imagined Anglo Saxon roots, which transcend current political divisions and make them obsolete. Pure Anglo Saxon racial hatred is supposedly even more extreme than the radicalism practiced in the South. He is overcome by rage; "it seemed to him that nothing would have suited him better than to have taken the lead of forces bent on driving back every black face from the land" (108). The way Ramon is quickly radicalized suggests something about white supremacy that goes beyond political ideology, something perhaps closer to the "spleen of the radicals" that Daleman initially describes. Alene was not actually murdered by a black man, but even the suspicion is enough to transform Ramon. This is the reality with which Ensal Ellwood is familiar. He asks Earl Bluefield, upon hearing of Earl's plans for violent revolt, "[D]o you know the Anglo-Saxon race and particularly that brand found in the South? Provoke the passions of that race, arouse the dormant but ever-present fear of secret plottings for a general uprising, and you will inaugurate the wholesale slaughter of innocent men, women and children" (146). Ramon's deterministic response illustrates the "dormant, but ever-present fear" Ensall describes.

Given the proliferation of pathological language at key points in both novels, this moment extends the metaphor of disease to describe Ramon's reaction in direct response to the pathologization of blackness in terms of criminality. The dramatic irony

in the scene emphasizes the fact that the ultimate victim of Ramon's violence does not matter. He desires "to [drive] back every black face from the land," because in his mind they are all guilty. This experience in part acculturates him to the racial caste system. As an interloper from the North unfamiliar with the racial politics of the South, Ramon must be familiarized with their nuances. At the same time, his own racial identity subsumes his geographic identity. Try as he might, Daleman cannot protect him from blackness, nor from the immediate and seemingly physiological response of whiteness. His experience as a victim of the kind of racial violence rumored in the discourse of black pathology enables Ramon's racial hatred, perpetrating a violence that seems ultimately inescapable for African Americans. In Griggs's characterization, the virus of white supremacy is always dormant and only requires activation. Like Mr. King's fear in *Imperium* that all black men are only a moment away from violence, Ramon's response indicates Griggs's concern: no matter their geographical origins or if they claim liberal attitudes, all white men are only a moment away from racist violence. What Griggs will eventually label "the virus of race prejudice" is a persistent threat.[109]

[109] At one point in *The Hindered Hand*, a white attorney attempting to prosecute the perpetrators in the Bud and Foresta lynching, one of the most graphic spectacles of racial violence in American literature, asks plaintively, "Have we, the proud Anglo-Saxon race, fallen so low that we are to ask that the Negro meekly lay down in our pathway, while we enjoy the pleasant sport of boring holes through his body?" (174). He likens lynching to a regression to man's decision to "leave behind him these depraved parts of his nature" (171). He explains that "the moral health of the world demands that every community have a pest house where the isolation and treatment of the morally diseased may forestall an epidemic" (172). As he is discussing the supposedly atavistic crime of lynching, his appeal to the "pest house" for the "morally diseased" does not merely refer to prison meting out justice in general. He articulates the consequences of and dangers posed by a pathological racism that shores up the identity of whiteness through violence. For this character and for Griggs, white supremacist violence is a global problem that demands moral intervention.

The Seabright family subplot allows Griggs to continue to explore fears of infiltration that animate white supremacist thinking through metaphors of infection and disease. The mixed-race family includes Arabelle Seabright, her daughters Eunice and Tiara, and one son, Reverend Percy G. Marshall. Late in *The Hindered Hand*, the reader learns that Mrs. Seabright has led a convoluted plot to infiltrate Southern white society to "break down the Southern white man's idea of the Negro's rights" (230). She wants to influence white society by intermarrying into a Southern family, so she hatches a plan to marry her daughter, Eunice, to the Honorable H. G. Volrees, "the real head of the Democratic party of the state" (75). Mrs. Seabright's daughter Tiara explains her mother's strategy at the end of the novel. She says that Mrs. Seabright's scheme to use her family as the first step of infiltrating Southern white society anticipated her desire "to organize the mixed bloods of the nation and effect an organization composed of cultured men and women that could readily pass for white, who were to shake the Southern system to its very core" (230). This subplot sets up the consequences visited on Eunice Seabright for her attempts to pass as white, and as a metaphor for the white supremacist anxiety about porous racial borders, Mrs. Seabright's plan reflects fears of blackness and white fragility that pervade the novel. The white community immediately responds to the threat after it is revealed in Eunice Seabright's trial for bigamy.[110] From

[110] Eunice thwarts her mother's plan by falling in love with a "Negro" who through a convoluted series of plot twists turns out to be Earl Bluefield. Despite this confusion, Eunice's role at the end of the novel is to represent the arbitrary nature of the color line, the cruelty of the "caste" system in the South, and the futility of her mother's plan to infiltrate the South. Eunice stands trial for bigamy because she married her lover while already married to Vorhees, and the trial becomes a referendum on her racial identity and the possibility of passing and miscegenation. If the white jury finds her guilty, they will validate an interracial relationship as legally binding.

the white supremacists' point of view, this secret plot is a literal enactment of the metaphor of blackness as a disease. "Negro blood" surreptitiously infects the bloodstream and threatens the Anglo Saxon race. Her plot is thwarted, however, and her daughter suffers the consequences of an unbending racial caste system.

Eunice's trial at the end of the novel threatens to subvert the white identity she claims and designates her eternally black and part of a race she calls "the burden bearers of the world" (236). She begs the jury to find her guilty, and in her testimony she echoes the white supremacist language of black pathology and refers to blackness as leprosy, "a loathsome disease [that] has befallen" her such that "everybody now spurns" her (244). In the sanitarium soon after, Eunice's doctor reverses that language to identify her as a victim "of the Southern situation that has borne tremendously on her." He claims that as a result she suffers from an "incurable" disease, and he diagnoses future cases of such suffering. He says, "That whole region of country is affected by a sort of sociological hysteria and we physicians are expecting more and more pathological manifestations as a result of the strain upon the people" (249). Griggs reverses the language of pathology from Eunice's reference to blackness as leprosy to the doctor's assertion of racism, and more specifically the white supremacist racial caste system, as a dangerous and pervasive disease. Further, this disease is a direct result of Eunice's inculcating white supremacist ideology about herself and her race.[111]

Eunice's speech in her defense at her trial echoes this language of Anglo Saxonism's global reach, but she focuses her argument on racial pathology in particular.

[111] At this point Griggs solidifies the metaphor of disease to describe the Ramon Mansford episode. This doctor's diagnosis must explain what happened to Mansford: he was overcome by that "sociological hysteria," the "virus of the racial caste system."

She asks the court to consider, "for argument's sake," that she might indeed "have some Negro blood," a possibility she denies vehemently as she lays claim to her white identity. She tells her white audience that they have "already made a mistake in making a gift of [their] blood to the African." She then lists some accomplishments of Anglo Saxonism, each an example of the race's violent power: "[Anglo Saxonism] hammered out on the fields of blood the Magna Charta; it took the head of Charles I; it shattered the scepter of George III; it now circles the globe in an iron grasp" (236-7). She claims the superior power of "Anglo-Saxon blood" to overwhelm any presence of "Negro blood" in her, and in doing so she becomes a mouthpiece for white supremacy in the specific pathological language of that ideology. Whiteness is a blood-borne pathogen that will defeat the lesser race. This belief parallels white anxiety about blackness as contagion, as racial thinking posits that the coming race war gets acted out in the bloodstream as well.

Despite Eunice's pleas to be found guilty, the jury acquits her of bigamy, thereby denying the validity of a mixed-race marriage and solidifying her identity as an African American. The jury foreman observes, "[Our] great race stands in juxtaposition with overwhelming millions of darker people throughout the earth, and we must cling to the caste idea if we would prevent a lapse that would taint our blood and eventually undermine our greatness" (238). Tainted blood marks race as a pathogen, and whether the threat is blackness itself, or black political empowerment, pathological white supremacist thinking obsesses over defending the race from outside intruders. Griggs uses the moment of Eunice's acquittal to subvert white supremacist beliefs in racial hierarchy as defined by blood and to classify white supremacy as the threatening

disease. Eunice suffers because she has contracted white supremacist beliefs about black inferiority, an infection that causes her mental illness and demise. The only logical outcome for this kind of racial thinking is death.

Griggs takes this conclusion to its extreme with the appearance of a mysterious white man at Ensal's house, which initiates an apocalyptic vision of pathological white supremacy. Mr. Hostility meets Ensal at a crisis point in Ensal's life. Gus Martin reported in a letter that he had seen Ensal's fiancée, Tiara, kissing Reverend Percy Marshall, so Ensal has resigned himself to fleeing the country. Before he can leave, "a cadaverous looking white man" approaches him with a proposition. Griggs's description of Mr. Hostility recalls that of Dr. Zackland in *Imperium*, who "cadaverously" analyzes the body of Belton Piedmont. Both men represent the violent logic of white supremacy, one clinical and probing of the individual body, the other diabolical and determined to cause a global race war. Both men enact the language of racial pathology to achieve their goals of racial superiority. While Dr. Zackland's goal is black genocide, Mr. Hostility seeks to exploit African Americans as adjuncts in a global race war, an event that will certainly lead to the destruction of all "lesser races." The narrator explains that Mr. Hostility "comes forward to inject his peculiar virus into the awful wound made in Ensal's heart by the disclosures of the Gus Martin letter" (201). This "peculiar virus" reflects Mr. Hostility's unclear motivations but continues Griggs's previous use of the language of pathology to describe the disease of caste prejudice. It also recalls the virus that lay dormant in Ramon Mansford waiting to be activated.

Mr. Hostility identifies himself as "the incarnation of hostility to [the Anglo Saxon] race, or to that branch of the human family claiming the dominance of that strain of blood." He refers to the Anglo Saxon as "the God-commissioned or self-appointed world conqueror" (202). Though Mr. Hostility claims Anglo Saxon identity himself, he is working against that cause in a global battle for racial supremacy between the Anglo Saxon and the Slav. He does not want to explain why he is "Pro-Slav in this matter," but he says that "it is the one dream of [his] life to so weaken the Anglo Saxon that he will be easy prey for the Slav in the coming momentous world struggle" (203-4).[112] The nineteenth-century popularity of Anglo Saxonism and its status as a fluid signifier of white racial identity, utilizing various explanations for an Anglo Saxon origin for American dominance, contextualizes Griggs's allusion to race history.[113] Griggs emphasizes Mr. Hostility's position as a so-called race traitor and the fear of an inevitable global race war as primary for his readers' interpretation of Mr. Hostility, whose adherence to the language of pathology emphasizes the peculiar danger he poses. And Griggs indicates that the outcome of pathological thinking is global war. That the reasons for his horrifying proposed actions are nebulous only increases the reader's sense of terror.

Mr. Hostility tells Ensal of the inevitable future of racial violence among the white races and that African Americans will be merely an accessory to this conflict. Mr. Hostility says, "The higher order is given the power of life and death over the lower.

[112] Hanna Wallinger argues that Mr. Hostility "embodies the feared figure of the European immigrant who threatens to overthrow the system of Anglo-Saxon superiority" (174).

[113] I addressed this issue in the chapter on Thomas Dixon, in which I cite the work of Thomas Gossett and Reginald Horsman on race and white supremacy in the nineteenth century.

Can't you see that your race is simply preserved because it is not yet in the way of the white race?" (208). White supremacist global dominance identifies African Americans as a mere obstacle in its way that will eventually face destruction, and Mr. Hostility proposes a particular strategy for Ensal's participation that isolates pathological blackness itself as a potential weapon. Mr. Hostility suggests that Ensal exploit his supposed natural immunity to yellow fever to serve as the means to bring about race war. Mr. Hostility tells him to "[o]rganize … a band of trusted Negroes" and travel through the South to "pollute the water" with yellow fever germs. Such an act will cause the "greatest scourge that the world has ever known [to] rage in the South." He concludes, "The whites will die by the millions and those that do not die will flee from the stricken land and leave the country to your people" (210). Mr. Hostility points to the biological makeup of African Americans as constitutive of immunity, as he tells Ensal that the "pigment that abides in [his] skin" as well as the "peculiar Negro odor renders [him] immune from yellow fever" (210). Mr. Hostility forwards a persistent historical belief in African American immunity to disease that Griggs may or may not have believed himself.[114] In the process, Griggs animates another nightmare scenario for white supremacists, more spectacular but parallel to the Seabright plan to infiltrate the South. In both plans, the physiology of African Americans represents a secret and

[114] In his supplement to *The Hindered Hand*, which I discuss at the end of this chapter, Griggs describes black origins in Africa in racially essentialist terms, and he mentions that to "save ['Negroes'] from yellow fever, nature gave them pigment and lost them friends" (315). The belief persists today, though with environmentally focused explanations. See Mariola Espinosa's "The Question of Racial Immunity to Yellow Fever in History and Historiography." Contemporaneous to Griggs's historical moment, pervasive nineteenth-century beliefs about innate black immunity to yellow fever derive in part from the work of Benjamin Rush. See Kopperman's "'Venerate the Lancet': Benjamin Rush's Yellow Fever Therapy in Context."

imminent danger to the white race. In Mr. Hostility's plan, Ensal is to be the conduit for an infection that will severely endanger Anglo Saxonism.

After Griggs clarifies the pathological nature of the white supremacist threat, he ends the novel with the ambivalent conclusion familiar to readers of *Imperium*. When Ensal and Earl are locked in a physical struggle to decide whose philosophy will lead the movement, Earl accidentally shoots himself. His militant philosophy results in physical violence and self-inflicted harm, a clear warning about the dangers and unpredictability of violence. The narrator explains Earl's refusal to seek treatment for the wound: "He preferred to heal the racial sore himself without calling a doctor, whose remedy might be worse than the disease" (165). The metaphor speaks to both sides of the racial conflict, the threat of white supremacy (especially through medicalized violence) and the challenge of creating an effective black resistance. It recalls the white supremacist benevolence of Mr. King and Dr. Lovejoy in *Imperium*, who patronized African Americans and risked disempowering them. And it echoes the ambivalence at the end of that novel.

Like the previous appeals in Ensal's manifesto to conservative values, Earl's insistence on a self-authored solution that avoids exacerbating the problem reflects Griggs's final appeal for caution rather than continued risk and violence. But because that caution derives from the pathological nature of white supremacy, it offers a more pessimistic resolution than *Imperium*. Having faced the reality of pathological white supremacy, Griggs cannot support violent reactions. His investigation of pathological discourse indicates his central conclusion: whiteness, not blackness, is a race problem. Griggs cannot advocate for any kind of violent resistance to white supremacy because

he has seen its pathological valence. He has also used a discourse of pathology committed to harming black people to identify that valence. Griggs's novel demonstrates possibilities for re-orienting that discourse and disrupting naturalized assumptions of white supremacy and black pathology. But considered alongside Griggs's graphic and terrifying depiction of the future, as well as with Ensal's ultimate decision to flee the country, Griggs's final assessment in *The Hindered Hand* lacks the openness at the end of *Imperium in Imperio*. There is no Berl Trout to act as arbiter, and only danger remains.

Instead, Griggs saves his more optimistic vision for the supplement that accompanies the third edition of the novel.[115] The continued popularity of Dixon's novel pressed a response from Griggs, who penned a 30-page attack on Dixon's work as propaganda. Griggs appeals for reason in the face of the white supremacist philosophy Dixon promotes. In the process, Griggs articulates the ways Dixon's position perpetuates the stereotypes of pathological blackness that put lives in danger, and he ultimately diagnoses pathological white supremacy and the resentment that animates it. He explains Dixon's aim to "stir up the baser passions of men against [the Negroes] and to send them forth with a load of obloquy and the withering scorn of their fellows the world over" (306). This particular strategy romanticizes slavery, and Griggs notes that "as a part of the propaganda" in support of slavery, Southern whites "thoroughly committed themselves to the doctrine of the *ineffaceable*, *inherent* inferiority of the

[115] Griggs explains in the "Notes to the Third Edition" that previous editions included a review of Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* "in the form of a conversation between two of the characters of the book, whereas in the present edition the review is more fully given in an article appearing in the rear of this book after the closing of the story" (298). This supplement is the subject of my analysis.

Negro, and had no largeness of faith in his possibilities along lines of higher culture" (309, italics in original). Griggs's appeals to reason in his novels take place in the larger context of violence committed against African Americans that benefits from these caricatures of African Americans. The "unreasoning, undiscriminating, brutal, murderous mobs arose to do violence" as a result of their anger regarding the reforms of Reconstruction, as in those places political leaders were not "prepared to deal with the Negroes as political equals" (316). Griggs rebuts the white supremacist version of history through a long excerpt from James G. Blain's article in *North American Review*. Griggs believes that by setting the record straight he can appeal to his rational readers and rescue the African American reputation from the discourse of black pathology.

Griggs redirects the language of this discourse in ways familiar to readers of *Imperium* and *The Hindered Hand* in the closing pages of the supplement. He says, "What a terrible enemy to humanity does Mr. Dixon prove himself to be when, essaying to speak for the South, he would impart to this mighty force, with work before it worthy of the gods, a larger measure of the virus of race prejudice." Griggs instead hopes that "this unified Anglo Saxondom" that opposes African American rights and humanity might "choose the opening hours of its era for the purging from its great heart all the lingering vestiges of hatred of men and with eyes ever on the heights above, begin the final climb of the human race toward the ideal state" (327-8). Griggs echoes turn-of-the-century Anglo Saxon popularity, the context of which I previously discussed in my chapter on Dixon, but most important in this passage is his repetition of the metaphor of race prejudice as disease that he deploys in his novels. He understands white supremacy as a pathology, curable in this case to support his optimism, and he completes his

diagnosis in the final pages of the essay. Part of this pathology manifests in a projection of white anxieties regarding African American success or endurance onto black people.

Griggs asserts that Dixon's popularity results from "the most powerful element in his work, namely, his grasp upon the emotions of men, his ability to rouse and sway their feelings." Though he does not draw a direct parallel to his own project, Griggs notes the "irony of fate" of the fact that Dixon "owes his emotional power to the very race which he has elected to scourge." According to Griggs, "Mr. Dixon has not breathed the Negro air of emotionalism without being affected thereby." The contagion of blackness transfers a supposedly essential black trait to one of its most virulent critics. Griggs explains this ironically dependent relationship further by noting that the "fact that Mr. Dixon has chosen the discomfiture of the Negro race as the chief end of his existence is not inconsistent with the fact that the predominating element in his power is the gift of that race." Dixon's obsession, according to Griggs, is no surprise, given that he has been infected with the disease from which he has insisted upon segregating himself. Griggs notes that it "is perhaps this subconscious feeling on the part of Mr. Dixon that he is in the grasp of a power not Anglo-Saxon that causes him to rant and cry for a freedom that his own Southern brethren less affected do not understand" (329-30). Griggs exploits Dixon's belief in absolute racial separation to argue that not only is such a belief naive but it also motivates Dixon's own virus of race prejudice. Resentment is at the heart of white supremacy, and race paranoia and anxiety manifest those feelings through the discourse of racial pathology. Griggs satirizes that discourse in this moment, as he does throughout both novels, by accusing Dixon of suffering from Dixon's biggest fear: the disease of blackness. In fact, blackness is not

the pathology here; it is pathological white supremacy that uses racial pathology discourse to express fear and animus. That discourse enables both discursive and physical violence against black people, and while Griggs's supplement indicates his desire to continue to fight inaccurate depictions of black people and to label white supremacy accurately, his novels reveal his ambivalence about the state of the future. Ultimately, the threat of violence follows from all political or discursive instances of white supremacy, a fact that black writers attempting a resistant response at the turn of the century took seriously. While Griggs saw metaphors of disease as most instructive for understanding the contours of white supremacy, Charles Chesnutt focused on something less abstract—lynching.

"Faded away like a vision of the night": Lynching and Black Political Agency in the Work of Charles Chesnutt[116]

"Ellis felt a surging pity for his old friend; but every step that he had taken toward the jail had confirmed and strengthened his own resolution that this contemplated crime, which he dimly felt to be far more atrocious than that of which Sandy was accused, in that it involved a whole community rather than one vicious man, should be stopped at any cost. Deplorable enough had the negro been guilty, it became, in view of his certain innocence, an unspeakable horror, which for all time would cover the city with infamy."—*The Marrow of Tradition*, p. 220

As a character in Charles Chesnutt's 1901 novel *The Marrow of Tradition* runs to try to save an African American character from being lynched, the gravity of the "unspeakable horror" of lynching becomes clear to him. As he makes his way through the fictional stand-in for Wilmington, North Carolina, Lee Ellis, the white editor of the city newspaper, notices the pine bleachers being constructed, so that "the spectacle might be the more easily and comfortably viewed." He learns from townspeople that special "excursions" from nearby towns were being commissioned by the railroad "to bring spectators to the scene." He hears from another passerby that "the burning was to take place early in the evening, so that the children might not be kept up beyond their usual bedtime." Finally, Ellis overhears a group of young men "discussing the question of which portions of the negro's body they would prefer for souvenirs" (219-20). As the

[116] The quotation is taken from an essay by Chesnutt written c. 1899 titled "Liberty and the Franchise," and the full text of the sentence is as follows: "Under the system of 'white supremacy' now in vogue, murder and lynching abound, repressive and degrading legislation against the Negro is the order of the day, the civil rights which have heretofore been largely denied the colored race by mere force of custom and prestige and judicial decision, are now being steadily taken away from him by legislative enactment, until soon his boasted liberty, so dearly bought, so freely bestowed, so nobly maintained for a few brief years will have faded away like a vision of the night" (*Essays* 105).

epigraph that leads this chapter indicates, Ellis is horrified by what he sees and hears, and the fact that this spectacle of murder targets an innocent man is for Ellis ultimately irredeemable. It would be a crime, if allowed to proceed, that would "cover the city with infamy."

The 1898 Wilmington Race Riot, the subject of *Marrow*, now occupies a similar place in history, as the euphemism "race riot" occluded the true aims of the successful coup by white supremacist Democrats to gain control of the local government. While Chesnutt's character recognizes the particular horror of lynching in moral terms, Chesnutt shows throughout his novel that he is equally committed to analyzing the political motivations of lynching. In *Marrow*, Chesnutt uncovers and dramatizes this coup through the metaphor of a lynching, which is for him the most instructive sign of white supremacy and the political and physical threats that African Americans at the turn of the century faced. While he expresses horror at spectacles of ritualized violence, he draws the reader's attention to the ways lynching forwards white supremacist strategies for political and social domination, and he identifies the origins of violence in attempts to disempower African Americans politically.

In both his fiction and in his essays and speeches, Chesnutt focused specifically on the importance of the franchise and the denial of political rights for African American that were guaranteed by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. He saw a direct connection between denied rights and vulnerability to white supremacist violence. Consequently, he viewed political rights as fundamental and considered their enforcement primary to any other actions that might accompany progress regarding race relations in the United States. While others argued

that African Americans should work to improve and solidify a reputation deserving of such rights, Chesnutt rejected such a notion out of hand.[117] For Chesnutt, there should be no conditions for the granting of political rights; they must simply be respected. And conditions in the South in the post-Reconstruction period did not bode well for that possibility, as the unprecedented rise of white supremacy during this period influenced his reading audience and certainly his own ideas.

In this chapter, I analyze how Chesnutt connects black political rights to an increase in white supremacist violence through the sign of lynching in part by analyzing its relationship to the law in white supremacist ideology. Chesnutt theorizes that white supremacist ideology that seeks to render African American subjects abject creates the conditions under which they can be killed with impunity, and therefore lynching explains both white supremacist political motivations as well as the urgent existential threat it represents. Through current and contemporaneous analyses of lynching and readings of some of Chesnutt's essays and *Marrow*, I demonstrate the ideological slippage between lynching and the law, as white supremacist ideology appeals to the authority of the law while also employing extra-legal violence to manage racial hierarchy. At the same time, white supremacist ideology benefits from the authority of the law to create second-class African American citizens that are therefore more vulnerable to extra-legal violence. Chesnutt draws a straight line between African American political status and lynching to assert that without the protection and

[117] In a letter to Booker T. Washington dated June 27, 1903, Chesnutt makes his feelings plain: "I am squarely opposed to any restriction of the franchise in the South on any basis now proposed. It is wholly and solely an effort in my opinion to deprive the negro of every vestige of power and every particle of representation" (*"To Be An Author"* 181).

enforcement of political rights that the Constitution defines, African American lives will be at risk.

To understand Chesnutt's attempt to theorize white supremacy through the lens of lynching as a technology of power, I return in this chapter to Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*, particularly to the "state of exception" and the figure of the *homo sacer*. Most important to Chesnutt are the ways lynching elides its political purposes, and Agamben's work, as well as Robyn Wiegman's *American Anatomies*, elucidates the ways that disciplinary structures work to consolidate power in part by occluding their logic. I apply Agamben's work to illustrate how the denial of political agency to African Americans, a subject Chesnutt takes on in detail in his articles and essays, created a corollary and dependent relationship between whiteness and abject blackness. White supremacists defined the sovereign power of whiteness both within and without the law via the language of the state of exception; lynching represents the clearest expression of that relationship. Agamben's *homo sacer* and state of exception help to explain the role of the law in defining racial others and exposing vulnerable marginalized citizens to violence all while those politically empowered to enforce the law appeal to its sanctity and guarantees. Lynching exists both within and without the law, and lynchers benefit from the complicity of government inaction and claiming exceptional status as "vigilante justice" when the law supposedly fails.

Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereignty and Bare Life* (1998) locates in "an obscure figure of archaic Roman law" a telling illustration of the origin of modern Western political philosophy (8). For Agamben, the figure of the *homo sacer*—a being who can be killed with impunity but not sacrificed—exemplifies the paradoxical fact of

the sovereign's ability to rule through the state of exception.[118] Developing his work through the political and social theorizing of Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, and Carl Schmitt, among others, Agamben argues that the inclusion/exclusion paradox of the state of exception suggests that the ideals of democracy and Western liberalism derived from the social contract as the originary metaphor for modern law and culture would be better served to recognize the ban as the founding act of current political reality.[119] The sovereign ban creates the *homo sacer*, a liminal figure that is at once excluded from law but also subject to its limits because it is always already under the power of the sovereign. Similarly, as Carl Schmitt has explained, the sovereign is defined by the state of exception—it is contained within the rule of law (because his existence is constituted by it) but separate from it in the sense that he can enact the state of exception at any time. According to Agamben, the sovereign and *homo sacer* "present two symmetrical figures that have the same structure and are correlative." The sovereign "is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially *hominess sacri*," and "*homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns" (84).[120] Agamben defines sovereign power as the power over the life of the other, and the *homo sacer* represents its target.

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[118] Agamben states at the beginning of *Homo Sacer*: "The protagonist of this book is bare life, that is, the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*, and whose essential function in modern politics we intend to assert…" (8, italics in original).

[119] According to Agamben, "The understanding of the Hobbesian mythologeme in terms of *contract* instead of *ban* condemned democracy to impotence every time it had to confront the problem of sovereign power" (109).

[120] In a previous chapter, I articulated this aspect of the *homo sacer*—that all men are potentially marginalized by the sovereign into non-citizens—as an animating idea in white supremacist ideology. In this chapter, I focus on the post-Emancipation African American subject as *homo sacer*, whose denied agency makes him vulnerable to white supremacist violence born of this anxiety.

As the sovereign creates both the law and the conditions for its exception, the *homo sacer* seemingly has no recourse and is subject to the whims of the sovereign.[121]

Agamben's conception of "bare life" provides more insight about the structures of *homo sacer* and the sovereign, and it invites further comparison to racial power differentials in the United States. Grounding his argument in the terminology of classical Greek and Latin law, Agamben defines bare life through the concepts of *zoē* and *bios*. Whereas *zoē*—"the simple fact of living common to all beings"—and *bios*—"the form or way of living proper to an individual or group"—could be distinguished one from another in classical antiquity, Agamben argues that this distinction is impossible in the modern biopolitical age that has made life the subject of politics.[122] Agamben argues that "the entry of *zoē* into the sphere of the *polis*—the politicization of bare life as such—constitutes the decisive event of modernity and signals a radical transformation of the political philosophical categories of classical thought" (4). For Agamben the concentration camp is the representative image of the politicization of bare life. According to Agamben, in the camp Jews were murdered "not in a mad and giant holocaust but exactly as Hitler had announced, 'as lice,' which is to say, as bare life" (114). Agamben does not conceive of the camp as an anomalous occurrence or exception in itself, as it contains the originary structure of modernity: the act of sovereign power that conflates bare life with the political as signified by the sovereign

[121] Notably, many critiques of Agamben cite his preclusion of collective resistance as a central shortcoming of his argument. See Ziarek's review of *Homo Sacer*.

[122] Agamben defines biopolitics as "the growing inclusion of man's natural life in the mechanisms and calculations of power" (119). His work extends Foucault's analysis of biopower in *The History of Sexuality* and in his series of lectures delivered at the Collège de France.

ban and the state of exception.[123] The exception is, in fact, the rule, as Schmitt argued, and the horrors of the camp result from the indistinguishability that marks the paradox of *homo sacer* and the sovereign power. One is contained within and defined by the other. They cannot be separated in their structural relationship.[124]

By locating within the concentration camp and totalitarianism a structure in common with democracy, in other words, by stating that both political systems share the same origin in the violent act of the sovereign, Agamben points out an important contradiction within democracy that he feels has been dangerously veiled by the language of rights and the so-called sanctity of life, most notably modern democracy's claim to liberate life. Agamben states: "Hence, too, modern democracy's specific aporia: it wants to put the freedom and happiness of men into play in the very place—'bare life'—that marked their subjection" (9-10). According to Agamben, because modernity conflates political life with the simple fact of living, we are blind to the structures of subjection that exist often in the name of democracy.[125] Claims of the value of human life coexist alongside ideologies and policies of exclusion that make life

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[123] Leland de la Durantaye speaks to the controversy caused by Agamben's claim and mentions some of the initial reviews of the book that declaimed such a view as untenable, but he explains Agamben's claim as opposed to those who allowed that "the concentration camp indeed served as an example, but of a different sort—an example of a horrendous *exception* to the civilized norm" (213). Agamben's argument, of course, claims that the concentration camp represents, as de la Durantaye states it, "the rule toward which we are dangerously tending" (213).

[124] There is a danger in making too broad of a comparison between two discrete historical events, or theorizing about these events in such an abstract way that they become disconnected from the suffering of their victims. I want to emphasize the singularity of each event while also investigating useful points of comparison that will make the operation of racism clearer and more precise.

[125] For a specific application of this idea in the context of the nineteenth century racialized United States, see Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection*.

expendable. And an ethical perspective that views modern violence as somehow exceptional and abnormal fails to reckon with the truth about how modern political theory defines the subject. Further, because Foucault did not complete his analysis of biopolitics and racism in a twentieth-century context, Agamben seeks to fill that gap.

While the post-Reconstruction South inhabits an historical period distinct from the vantage point of Agamben's work, Agamben's critique of the illusion of the social contract resonates with a period of perhaps unparalleled frustration for Chesnutt and others interested in the functioning (or lack thereof) of the rule of law. The highest order of the rule of law, the Constitution enshrined black freedom and political agency in the Reconstruction Amendments. That state governments would actively work to circumvent the law by codifying discrimination in their own constitutions through grandfather clauses and other instruments of vote suppression demonstrates the precarious position the law as guarantor of rights defined by the social contract occupies in the nineteenth-century United States. Additionally, the figure of the *homo sacer* creates a metaphor to explain the status (or non-status) of African Americans. The definition of *homo sacer* as one who can be killed with impunity and yet not sacrificed is important considering the centrality of lynching to the post-Reconstruction South and to *Marrow*. As the narrator of *Marrow* explains, lynching often scapegoated the innocent to impute crimes to the race as a whole, and "there was neither the martyr's glory nor the saint's renown in being killed for some one else's crime" (179). The fact that most lynchings led to virtually no arrests of white perpetrators and were often sensationalized in the local and national media speaks to the "impunity" with which the acts were committed and consumed. As a technology of white supremacist power,

lynching exploited the second-class status of black citizens and utilized the law as both justification and endorsement of the crime.

Especially in the post-Reconstruction South, the social construct of whiteness operates as sovereign power, beyond the reach of federal law, the effectiveness and applicability of which, ironically, both white southerners and African Americans questioned. As Chesnutt noticed, more often federal law was used to perpetuate and maintain the sovereign power of whiteness rather than the ideals of liberal citizenship. And perhaps nowhere was this phenomenon more apparent than within the legal justification of segregation. Concerning *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, Grace Elizabeth Hale writes, "As important as the ruling was the Court's reasoning: its insistence that racial differences lay outside the law, beyond and before any act of human agency" (23). The Court effectively stripped African Americans of their political agency by insisting upon an arbitrary and supposedly essential racial difference. Such an arbitrary act of power creates bare life, which has been "denuded" of its political agency and can therefore be killed.[126] Gwen Mathewson notes that the sole dissenting opinion by Justice Harlan was especially prescient because of how it forecast the effects of the decision. Justice Harlan wrote that the "present decision … will not only stimulate aggressions, more or less brutal and irritating, upon the admitted rights of colored citizens" but will encourage those intent on defeating the "beneficent purposes" of constitutional amendments regarding black rights "by means of state enactments" (qtd in Mathewson 232). Justice Harlan's warning about the legal precedent set by *Plessy* exactly identifies white

[126] This arbitrariness can also be understood in terms of the choice of skin pigmentation—rather than place of origin, for instance—as the primary condition of ontological status.

supremacists' future justifications for circumvention of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments to the Constitution, which had promised political agency to African American men. *Plessy* illustrates the dangerous and arbitrary conflation of the ontological and the political, the notion of life/existence and that person's right to participate politically, a site of indistinction that Agamben locates as the fundamental and primary act of sovereign power and the obsession of biopolitics.[127]

In the above example, whiteness as sovereign power depends upon a central paradox: whiteness is constructed by the creation and exclusion of blackness, and whiteness depends upon this exclusion to maintain itself. For Chesnutt, the post-Reconstruction legal system both guarantees rights and is a means to deny them to African Americans. And Chesnutt recognizes that the law serves to maintain whiteness and to target blackness. Though lynching technically represents an extra-legal strategy for asserting white supremacy, the complicity of the law in these acts of terrorism represents for Chesnutt a central danger for African Americans, either in the case of courts refusing to prosecute or convict lynchers or in the fact that the legal system enables lynching by creating citizens who can be killed with impunity.[128] At the same

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[127] Sovereign power and biopolitics are not mutually exclusive, and because of this fact it is misleading to assume that one begets the other. Instead, in Agamben's reading of Foucault, sovereign power is always already existent in biopolitics, ready to be deployed through spectacular acts of violence—like lynching in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century American context—or to recede into less specifically violent operations of power like legal segregation. See Jeffrey Nealon's *Foucault Beyond Foucault*, particularly his analysis of power's "intensifications," which revises readings of Foucault that see a simple progression of power systems.

[128] According to Jacqueline Goldsby in *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature*, important U.S. Supreme Court cases that emboldened and enabled lynching included *Slaughterhouse* (1873), *Cruikshank* (1876), the *Civil Rights Cases* (1883), and *Plessy* (1896). She explains that "[b]y nullifying African Americans' rights

time, for Chesnutt the law represents the only feasible way forward, as its protections, executed in good faith, possess the power to save African Americans by guaranteeing their political agency and ultimately their personhood. Consequently, Chesnutt's work focuses on identifying these functions of the law and emphasizing the fundamental importance of political rights.

During his career, Chesnutt was active in publishing essays and newspaper articles and delivering speeches and lectures around the country in which he stressed the direness of the situation for African Americans in the United States, especially those living in the South. Steady erosions of political rights for African Americans had followed the passing of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, and segregation laws and circumscribed voting rights late in the century, coupled with increased instances of violence, threatened African Americans. Appeals to the legal system continually failed, and southern state governments became further emboldened when unchecked by the federal oversight of Reconstruction and the Supreme Court. In his 1899 essay "Liberty and the Franchise," Chesnutt explains that there "is absolutely no recourse for the colored man who is denied his rights." The Supreme Court "stands

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of citizenship and, with them, the affirmative duty to protect black people from unjust harm, the federal government effectively granted mobs a license to kill" (17). The fact that this status of being beyond the law, both for white citizens and black (essentially) non-citizens, meant that African Americans could be killed with impunity resonates with Agamben's definition of the *homo sacer* banished by but paradoxically contained within the law. Further, a tendency to forget the victims of lynching in the cultural memory is based on the presumption that "once African Americans became the majority targets of lynching's violence—and because African Americans lacked the legal, civic, and moral authority to repel mob assaults on their collective lives—the history of those deaths could be marginalized from our conventional accounts of the formation and meaning of modernity in American life" (27). The victims of lynching could be forgotten because lynching worked in part under the assumption of their lack of citizen status in the first place.

by the doctrine of the Dred Scott decision," and the federal government is unwilling to intervene to prevent states from undermining the Civil Rights amendments. He argues that "no more disastrous course could be pursued by the colored race than to carry their wrongs to the Supreme Court of the United States" because though "[t]hey have rights … that have been violated" when they go to the Court, "when they leave, they are likely to have no rights at all" (106). Chesnutt specifically references the successful disfranchisement of black voters in Mississippi and the failure of the "Civil Rights bill," or the 1883 Supreme Court ruling that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional, as evidence of the law's failure to protect African Americans. The liberties the Amendments granted were being threatened by state attempts to circumvent that legislation through lawsuits that raised as-applied challenges to the constitutionality of those amendments.[129]

As a result of these conditions, Chesnutt argued that the most urgent requirement for African Americans was the franchise. Any other considerations must proceed from that institution and the protections it guarantees. If the franchise were to be denied African Americans, in other words, if the Fifteenth Amendment were to be repealed, then a lack of legal recourse would become a lack of political existence,

[129] In a 1903 essay published in *The Negro Problem* titled "The Disfranchisement of the Negro," Chesnutt explains such attempts. He explains that "in defiance of the Federal Constitution," the states of Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, which "contain an aggregate colored population of about 6,000,000," have denied African Americans the right to vote. He says that methods of disenfranchisement "devised with much transparent ingenuity" are designed "to violate the spirit of the Federal Constitution by disfranchising the Negro, while seeming to respect its letter by avoiding the mention of race or color" (180).

further emboldening white supremacist violence.[130] Each battle waged to procure and protect the principles of the franchise was therefore vital not only in itself and the principles it defended but in its relation to other ongoing cases and existing legal precedent. According to Chesnutt in "The Negro's Franchise," African Americans must "let no right, great or small, go by default." Citizenship is a guaranteed status, and the African American "is either a citizen or not a citizen, and our laws and the theory of our government recognize, so far, no halfway ground." Further, African Americans should ensure that their own particular cases of denied political agency "be not taken to establish a precedent for a curtailed citizenship" (166). The fight of the individual was the fight of all African Americans. Chesnutt's urgent appeal to his audience reflected the severity of the conditions in the South and the ironic complicity of the law in denying the rights of African Americans. Without the right of citizenship, which guaranteed the protections required for survival and therefore existence, African Americans could never be safe in the United States. The disfranchisement of the African American man represented an attempted negation of his existence, his designation to an in-between status subject to the law but with no recourse to benefit from it.[131]

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[130] In "The Negro Problem," Chesnutt writes: "There is no doubt that an effort will be made to secure the repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment, and thus forestall the development of the wealthy and educated Negro, whom the South seems to anticipate as a greater menace than the ignorant ex-slave. However improbable this repeal may seem, it is not a subject to be lightly dismissed; for it is within the power of the white people of the nation to do whatever they wish in the premises—they did it once; they can do it again" (184).

[131] I continually refer to African American men in terms of the franchise because at this point in history it applied directly only to them. This is not to deny, however, the importance of women to the franchise at this time. In *Gender and Jim Crow*, Glenda

Chesnutt warned against accommodationist arguments that called for patience in the face of such threats. He described as "fatally short-sighted" the argument of "peace-loving Northern white men and Negro opportunists" that because the political power of African Americans had "long ago been suppressed by unlawful means, his right to vote is a mere paper right, of no real value, and therefore to be lightly yielded for the sake of hypothetical harmony" (184). Chesnutt understood the potential of this right, if it could ever be realized through committed federal support, and its fundamental importance to human beings. He recognized the "latent power of … unexercised rights," power that could not only allow for equal representation in the creation and administration of law but could protect the lives and well being of African American citizens in the United States under constant siege (184). He also understood the intersection of the mission to disfranchise African Americans with the logic of other strategies of terrorism and dehumanization and with the maintenance of the fiction that defined the supposedly essential differences between the races. Chesnutt understood, like Justice Harlan, that to erase the primacy of rights meant to invite violence with impunity.

If for Agamben the exemplary site of the *homo sacer* and the sovereign ban is the concentration camp, in the discourse and period within which Chesnutt is writing it is the lynching tree. As the sovereign fiat that constructs *homo sacer* creates the possibility through the state of exception that he can be killed with impunity, lynching had extra-legal status that was sometimes uncomfortably acknowledged but still allowed to exist, exploited the non-status of African Americans, and effectively rejected the supposed sanctity of the rule of law. The scholarship on lynching is extensive, and

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Elizabeth Gilmore argues for the significance of African American women in holding on to "what they deemed the race's most important right: the male franchise" (104-5).

this chapter engages a few notable examples in order to explore the theoretical underpinnings of lynching and its effect on literature and culture. Both contemporary and current analyses of lynching observe the ways its apologists obscured its political motivations. As an instrument of white supremacist power, lynching ritualizes a process to secure the fiction of whiteness and to punish African American political potential or economic success. Lynching trafficked in assumptions of black criminality and pathology and revealed the psychological obsessions of white supremacy in gendered and racialized terms.

For my analysis of lynching in Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*, I rely on the work of critics who emphasize the political operation of lynching and point out the importance of historical analysis in establishing lynching's broader implications as a sign of its political and discursive power. Ida B. Wells-Barnett provides an essential contemporary analysis of the political motivations of lynching and its dependence on assumptions about black sexuality and criminality. In *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*, Eric Sundquist expands upon Wells-Barnett's analysis and historicizes the ways that charges of rape became a fluid signifier that masked the political motivations of lynching as a technology of power that shored up white identity and entrenched white supremacist power. He and Wells-Barnett demonstrate the specific importance of the white supremacist occlusion of history, and they illustrate the consequences of a racist discourse of black pathology that helps create abject citizens. As a further extension of this important historicist work, Jacqueline Goldsby analyzes the broader cultural implications of lynching and argues for its particularly modern qualities, and in this way she echoes Agamben's argument about sovereign power in an

ostensibly democratic society. She rejects the idea that lynching is anomalous and warns against historical or critical accounts that fail to emphasize lynching as symptomatic of some aspects of modern industrial society. While my argument focuses in more detail on the historical and political motivations and consequences of lynching, Chesnutt's use of lynching as a literary sign invites the kind of larger cultural critique Goldsby offers. Finally, I apply Robyn Wiegman's work on lynching as a specific technology of power to analyze lynching's role as a cultural sign of political exclusion and violence dependent on a discourse of black pathology. Taken together with Agamben's work, these critics help to illustrate how Chesnutt constructs a symbolic logic of lynching that erases its political function through discourses of the law and black criminality and becomes acculturated, if not normalized, into racial discourse at the turn of the century.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett was perhaps the most accomplished contemporary theorist on the sociopolitical motivations of lynching in the South.[132] In his article "Theory in History: Foundations of Resistance and Nonviolence in the American South," Preston King identifies Wells-Barnett as especially influential in the study of and activism about lynching. Rather than accepting the contemporary conception of lynching as the angry mob run amok, or retributive justice gone awry, or even as the justified punishment for guilty rapists or murderers, Wells-Barnett, according to King, "saw lynching as nothing more than a deliberate campaign of terror, borne along by the specific concern to end

[132] Her pamphlets *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in all its Phases*, published in 1892, and *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States*, published in 1895, provide an in-depth analysis of the causes and consequences of lynching and remains an influential scholarly intervention on the subject. For more on Wells-Barnett's campaign, see Patricia A. Schechter's *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880–1930*.

competition, entrench dependent labour, and sustain the dominance of twisted oligarchs" (44).[133] Wells-Barnett also challenged the discourse on pure white womanhood and the black rapist, the frequent sources of justifications for lynchings, in order to subvert the supposed moral status of white supremacy by suggesting not only that black men were innocent of most of the charges leveled against them by their supposed victims, but that white men must accept the possibility that these relationships between white women and black men were voluntary.[134] Gail Bederman argues that Wells-Barnett "convinced nervous white Northerners that they needed to take lynch law seriously because it imperiled both American civilization and American manhood" (46).[135] Wells-Barnett's claim figures into the discourse in which Northern white men were living vicariously through their Southern counterparts to prop up a model of whiteness that benefited from the destruction of blackness. White Northerners followed the sensational stories of lynchings that dominated the northern press and "[t]hese representations … encouraged Northern white men to see themselves as manly and powerful and gave them a rich ground on which issues of gender, sexuality, and racial dominance could be attractively combined and recombined to depict the overwhelming

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[133] According to Goldsby, "During the period 1882–1930 (the years, scholars agree, when the most reliable lynching statistics were kept), 3,220 African American men women and children were murdered by lynch mobs" (15).

[134] Wells-Barnett writes: "In numerous instances where colored men have been lynched on the charge of rape, it was positively known at the time of the lynching, and indisputably proven after the victim's death, that the relationship sustained between the man and woman was voluntary and clandestine, and that in no court of law could even the charge of assault have been successfully maintained" (*The Red Record*, n.p.).

[135] Bederman echoes Agamben's language in her description of Wells-Barnett's personal experience with lynching in Memphis, noting that "white men could ignore any rights a black man claimed—could even murder black men with impunity—in order to retain absolute dominance" (54).

power of their civilized white manliness" (46). By implicating white Northerners as unlikely participants in the spectacles of lynching in the South, Wells-Barnett indicated that not just Southern whites benefitted from the ritual.[136] Lynching helped to construct a communal identification of whiteness even from afar by victimizing African Americans.

Lynching and its political motivations reveal a constellation of assumptions regarding belief in black inferiority, cultural anxieties about racial borders, and white resentment. In particular, gender and sexuality intersect in lynching because, as Wells-Barnett shows, the standard justification for it was the protection of white womanhood based on charges of rape.[137] As Eric Sundquist argues, the threat of the black rapist proved to be a fluid signifier that masked more expedient motives. Sundquist observes that "[w]hat Wilbur Cash would later call the South's 'rape complex' was detached from contemporary as well as historical reality, a free-floating trope of attack that could be used with virtual impunity on any political occasion and in support of any racial

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[136] In *White Violence and Black Response*, Herbert Shapiro echoes Wells-Barnett's analysis of the logic of lynching and its national implications. He notes that in response to charges of black criminality, "Northern opinion … generally lamented lynching and found it proof of southern backwardness but largely accepted the racist argument that southern white men were motivated by the desire to protect white women against black rape" (31). Northern complicity included the tacit assumption, in other words, that though lynching was technically an extra-legal strategy, it still effectively meted out purportedly necessary justice, even if its methods were barbaric to some.

[137] Further, as a technology of power, lynching exploits the two predominant gendered caricatures that both define and attempt to neutralize the apparent threat of the African American male, "the feminized, bumbling black 'coon'" and "the hypermasculine black male rapist" (Wiegman 13). In *Race, Rape, and Lynching*, Sandra Gunning argues that Chesnutt "offer[s] radical and complex indictments of post-Reconstruction white supremacy" in part by sustaining a clear gender division (74). She notes that Chesnutt "still has to use the metaphor of violated white womanhood to talk about masculine action" (76).

cause" (410). White supremacists argued that in the post-bellum South, emancipated black men posed a new threat not faced during slavery. As a result, post-Reconstruction white society developed an anxiety regarding these supposedly empowered African American men and channeled it into fear of rape. Martha Hodes explains that "for the first time, black men possessed political power, as well as opportunities for greater economic and social power … [and] White Southerners thus conflated those powers with a new alarmist ideology about black male sexuality" (61).[138] Lynching is first and foremost a technology of power. Like the open signifier of black sexual criminality used to justify it, lynching shifts between the law and its apparent absence because it benefits from the power to define both racial hierarchy and the discourse that supports it.

Despite modern critical consensus about the political motivations of lynching, Jacqueline Goldsby warns against the designation of lynching as extra-legal, and in the process she articulates what she sees as continued attempts to occlude its "cultural logic." Her argument reminds us of the imporance of historicizing lynching's broader implications while being precise in our attempts to theorize its operation. According to Goldsby, the history of lynching before it became a post-Reconstruction technology for

[138] In his essay "Race, Place, and Space: Remaking Whiteness in the Post-Reconstruction South," Angelo Rich Robinson argues that "lynchings also sought to reverse the progression toward humanity that Negroes gained as a result of Reconstruction amendments that granted them the civil rights of personhood" (105). In *White Violence and Black Response*, Shapiro recounts Frederick Douglass's activism concerning lynching and explains that Douglass "demonstrated that the basic aim of the lynchers was to render blacks powerless through disfranchisement." Shapiro states that "Douglass did not argue that blacks were never guilty of criminal acts, but he rejected the charge of criminality leveled against blacks as a group" (37). Instead, the justification of lynching through the charge of rape served a key role in "the campaign to deny black Americans legislatively and judicially all protection under the Constitution" (38).

disciplining black bodies, in which "frontier justice" served a supposedly necessary function in spaces at the limits of society and the law, invites confusion as the word lynching "potentially misidentifies the range and aims of punishments targeting African Americans precisely because the state routinely allowed extreme, and often lethal, measures of discipline to be exacted on them" (17). Goldsby avoids what she sees as the conventional economic, psychological, or sociological readings of lynching in favor of analyzing the ways lynching's cultural logic reveals a particularly modern bent.[139] She argues that the historiography of lynching "has institutionalized the perception that lynching means less to the central processes defining American life and culture because the violence is, we presume, best understood as regional and aberrant" (20-1). Whether or not the fact and function of lynching reveals a broader insidious logic at the heart of American life, its complicity with the law and a larger national concern regarding pathological black criminality demands a close analysis of how lynching functions as a part of white supremacist ideology, especially as part of that ideology uses the law as a cover for its political strategies. And the intersection of race and sexuality is a central focus for that analysis.

In *American Anatomies*, Robyn Wiegman is also attentive to both the historical and theoretical implications of lynching; however, she particularly focuses on lynching in terms of Foucault's analysis of disciplinary structures and the ways such structures intersect with narratives of black pathology. She claims that lynching "proves to be an interesting link," in the context of the nineteenth-century United States, "between the

[139] Goldsby sees lynching as symptomatic of and coextensive with "the nation's ambivalences attending its nascent modernism," including anxiety about the power of the state and a rapidly changing economy (24).

spectacle of public torture and execution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the strategies of surveillance that increasingly accompany the production of subjects in the nineteenth" century (13). The "shift" after Emancipation of the influential trope of the black male rapist, instrumental to the discourse of black pathology as I have shown throughout this project, "as the narrative around which the practice of lynching becomes racialized at the end of the nineteenth century points as well toward a reinvigoration of the disciplinary structures of white supremacy" (13). According to Wiegman, lynching as a disciplinary practice "figures its victims as the culturally abject—monstrosities of excess whose limp and hanging bodies function as the spectacular assurance that the racial threat has not simply been averted, but rendered incapable of return" (81). This racial threat manifested in white supremacist ideology as fear of infiltration of the race through miscegenation, but it occluded political and economic motivations to disempower African Americans. As his essays demonstrate, Chesnutt recognizes the consequences of disenfranchisement; it enables lynching by evacuating what Wiegman identifies as the power of the "disembodied abstraction." According to Wiegman, "With the advent of Emancipation and its attendant loss of the slave system's marking of the African American body as property, lynching emerged to reclaim and reassert the centrality of black male corporeality, deterring the now theoretically possible move toward citizenry" (94).[140] The fact that lynching became "an increasingly routine response to black male as well as female attempts at education,

[140] Wiegman attributes the "disembodied abstraction" to Lauren Berlant's work. Whiteness claims the privilege of the abstract self, as opposed to the embodied nature of the other, to define its power. It is the transcendental subject that defines political identity and creates the abject other. See also Russ Castronovo's *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States* and Priscilla Wald's *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form*.

self- and communal government, suffrage, and other indicators of cultural inclusion and equality attests to its powerful disciplinary function" (94). As current critics as well as Chesnutt and his contemporaries like Ida B. Wells-Barnett make clear, to understand lynching as a white supremacist strategy was to understand white supremacy.

The historiography of lynching illustrates the importance of signification in the way lynching operates as a technology of power. It is both a physical act of terrorism and an act of discursive violence that creates vulnerable subjects. Chesnutt recognized this connection in various acts of politically motivated violence, and consequently he uses lynching and the incident of a racially motivated coup in a symbolic logic to analyze the way the law is both completely involved and completely breached in a white supremacist ideology that deems African Americans *homo sacer*, capable of being killed with impunity but not sacrificed. In *Marrow*, Chesnutt explores the causes and implications of the 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina race riot and examines the relationship between political agency and white racially motivated violence towards blacks by articulating the white supremacist violence of the coup through the sign of lynching. As a result, his protagonists recognize the political messaging of all white supremacist acts of violence and lose faith in the law as a source of security and stability.

Chesnutt wrote the novel in part in response to the designation of the political coup as a "race riot" by white-owned newspapers throughout the South.[141] His novel recovers the historical event of the coup in response to various inaccuracies perpetuated

[141] I refer throughout this chapter to the event in Wilmington as a coup rather than a riot to emphasize its actual motivations and, following scholarship on the event, to place responsibility on its white supremacist actors rather than on its black victims.

in the media and depicts the event based on the experiences of African Americans who survived it.[142] "Wellington," the fictional stand-in for Wilmington, is an instructive example of what can happen when white supremacists are emboldened by the continued reduction of black rights. Chesnutt explains how cultural assumptions and the denial of political rights make possible events like Wilmington, promise future events like the various "race riots" throughout the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, and virtually guarantee the continued torture and murder of African Americans in the United States.[143] The urgency of the situation was clear to Chesnutt, even if it was not so clear to his largely white readership. In *Marrow*, he configures his analysis through lynching, both literally and metaphorically, to trace the way white supremacist power operates and to caution those who might underestimate the white supremacist threat.

The most cited sources of historical reconstruction of the event include Leon Prather's *We Have Taken a City* and, more recently, a study commissioned by the Wilmington Race Riot Commission in 2000, LeRae Sike Umfleet's *A Day of Blood: the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot*.[144] Umfleet relies upon extensive archival evidence and grounds her discussion in the contemporary and historical revisionist accounts of the coup.[145] Umfleet contends that "riot" was a misnomer and that the event was actually a

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[142] For an analysis of contemporaneous newspaper accounts of the event, see Dolen Perkins's "White Heat in Wilmington: The Dialogue Between Journalism and Literature in *The Marrow of Tradition*."

[143] Shapiro's *White Violence and Black Response* is a useful source on this topic, as is Paul Gilje's *Rioting in America*, especially chapter 4, "The Tragedy of Race."

[144] Sundquist explains the historical events of the coup in his introduction to the 1993 Penguin edition of *Marrow*.

[145] Umfleet points out that Helen G. Edmonds's 1951 study *The Negro in Fusion Politics* was perhaps the first attempt by a major publication to decry the conventional rehearsal of the events, though the white citizens of Wilmington denied its historical

"planned insurrection" by white citizens threatened by African American representation in city government (xviii). According to Umfleet, because white rioters in Wilmington "were able to murder blacks in daylight and overthrow a legitimately elected Republican government without penalty or federal intervention, everyone in the state, regardless of race, knew that the white-supremacy campaign was triumphant on all fronts" (xix). Umfleet also notes that "[t]he change in government on that day completely terminated black participation in city and county government until the advent of the civil rights era" (xviii).[146] The willful attempt by the white press to misrepresent the story as a race riot instigated by African American citizens angered Chesnutt. As a result, he traveled to North Carolina not long after the event to begin research for a book.

In *Marrow*, Chesnutt attempts to correct the inaccuracies in the historical record of the Wilmington coup by identifying the political motivations of the so-called riot and figuring the "Secret Nine"—the white businessmen in Wilmington responsible for orchestrating the coup—through "the Big Three" in *Marrow*. These three men, Major Carteret, General Belmont, and Colonel McBane, represent various aspects of the white community in Wellington, as Chesnutt aims to demonstrate that the doctrine of white supremacy that motivated the coup was not localized within one particular social or

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accuracy. It was only upon the publication of Prather's book in 1984 that the corrected historical record was solidified (Umfleet xviii).

[146] Umfleet's text also addresses the issue of casualties on that day, which is complex. She analyzes a variety of official and anecdotal evidence and concludes that the exact number is impossible to ascertain. The generally agreed upon estimate is that twenty African American citizens were killed, though anecdotal evidence suggests that this number could have approached as man as one hundred, as some claim that bodies were concealed in the river or buried in secret (119).

professional class.[147] They see black citizenship as a "grotesque farce" and seek to "endeavor, through [the state] constitution, to escape from the domination of a weak and incompetent electorate and confine the negro to that inferior condition for which nature had evidently designed him" (79). William Miller, a middle-class black doctor who serves as a central protagonist in the narrative, becomes a reluctant force of opposition to these men, though he is ultimately helpless in the face of white supremacist violence. Ultimately, Chesnutt explores white supremacist political violence through two events: a lynching and the political coup to reclaim the city in the name of white supremacy.[148] The lynching never actually takes place, as Sandy, the accused servant and former slave for Mr. Delamere, the last of the town's antebellum aristocrats, is vindicated at the eleventh hour, in large part due to Delamere's (inaccurate if well intended) testimony. Consequently, Chesnutt displaces the violence

[147] In *The Slave's Rebellion*, Adeleke Adeeko reads *Marrow* in part as an exploration of interracial class issues.

[148] Parallel to this strand of the novel's plot is a story of family genealogy represented by the two figures of Janet Miller and Olivia Carteret. These two families are inextricably linked through the slave-era past, as the patriarch of Olivia's family (Merkell) fathered Janet Miller with his black housekeeper. Similarly, the living patriarchs of the family, Major Carteret, a white newspaper editor, and Dr. William Miller, a middle-class black physician, serve as doubles for each other, tied together by their families but also by their social classes. This phase of the plot not only illustrates the logical impossibility of truly separate races through legal enactments like the Jim Crow laws, and by positioning this argument within the genealogical frame, Chesnutt seems to suggest also that the biological, ontological distinctions of race are equally tenuous. The parallel plot structures develop throughout the story, culminating on the one hand in a final dramatic scene to resolve the family genealogy plot—Janet Miller rejects the recognition offered by Olivia in exchange for saving her son—and on the other in a near lynching and subsequent "riot" in order to enact the political coup.

of the near-lynching onto another act of racist violence, the coup, to demonstrate the disciplinary function all acts of racist violence serve.[149]

The near-lynching occurs when Polly Ochiltree, another representative of the old guard and a part of the Carteret-Merkell family, is robbed and murdered. Sandy is suspected, even though the actual perpetrator, Mr. Delamere's son Tom, a white man, committed the robbery in order to pay off gambling debts and disguised himself in blackface and Sandy's clothes to make Sandy his patsy. The novel builds toward a violent conclusion with Sandy incarcerated and the anger of the mob approaching a frenzy. Meanwhile, the Big Three are working hard to use the imminent lynching to provoke the mob toward their goal of disfranchising the city's African Americans.[150] By republishing an editorial by the editor of an African American newspaper that rejects the black male rapist justification of lynching, the Big Three stoke the rage of the white citizens of Wellington.[151] Their logic is that, by exacerbating white anxieties regarding

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[149] Initially, the violence of the coup seems not to share the ritualized features of lynching that historians identify in the scholarly literature on lynching. For instance, Trudier Harris analyzes the psychological and symbolic function castration serves to cathect white anxieties about black sexuality onto the victim. But as this act serves a part of a broader political message, one designed carefully to terrorize and disempower African Americans, the coup reflects a similar level of design. Moreover, the spectacular aspects of violence, which, as I will show, the coup shares, should not occlude its carefully planned political motivations.

[150] H. Leon Prather notes that African Americans comprised approximately 60% of Wilmington's population and that the extent of their representation in government was overstated by the white supremacists. For a more detailed discussion, see Prather's *We Have Taken a City*.

[151] This event, as is the case with much of *Marrow*, is based on the historical facts of the Wilmington riot. Arthur Manley, the successful owner of a black newspaper in Wilmington, published an editorial that, besides defending black men from accusations of rape, sardonically asserted that perhaps white men should do a better job of keeping watch over their women. In this way the letter echoes Ida B. Wells-Barnett's argument.

the murder and presumed sexual assault of a white woman, they will be incite a "riot" that will intimidate black voters and reclaim political power from the Republican Party in Wellington. The common assumption that served as the pretext for lynching—the sexual criminality of black men—becomes the means by which the white supremacists launch their political attack. Therefore, lynching is the foundational sign for violence in the novel. But by subverting expectations and never allowing the lynching to take place, instead channeling the political manipulations of the Big Three and the rage of the white citizens into the "race riot" in the novel's last act, Chesnutt indicates the role lynching serves—its political motivations, its function in galvanizing white anxiety, and its ability to explain how white supremacist ideology structures the world.[152]

As the history of lynching demonstrates, the anxiety about the rape of white women by African American men is inextricably tied to the disfranchisement of those same African American men, and Chesnutt critiques the logic of lynching and disfranchisement while challenging the general notions of racial hierarchy that support them. Early in the novel, Major Carteret writes an editorial for his newspaper in which he makes clear one of the central assumptions of white supremacy and the disfranchisement of the African American man—his supposed "unfitness" to govern.

The Manley letter explains that many lynchings "were not for crimes at all, but for voluntary acts which might naturally be expected to follow from the miscegenation laws by which, it was sought, in all the Southern States, to destroy liberty of contract, and for the purpose of maintaining a fanciful purity of race, to make crimes of marriages to which neither nature nor religion nor the laws of other states interposed any insurmountable barrier" (85). Manley's newspaper office was burned to the ground in the Wilmington riot and he fled the city (see Sundquist's critical introduction to the Penguin edition).

[152] The Wilmington coup continues a strategy of Southern "redemption" to roll back gains achieved by African Americans in Reconstruction. For another example of a Democratic political coup, see LeeAnn Keith's *The Colfax Massacre*.

The narrator explains that Carteret took "for his theme the unfitness of the negro to participate in government … due to his limited education, his lack of experience, his criminal tendencies, and more especially his hopeless mental and physical inferiority to the white race." Carteret asserts that "the ballot in the hands of the negro was a menace to the commonwealth" (31). He configures his argument within the discourses of race and the franchise, asserting white superiority while decrying the African American man's "unfitness" to even participate in government. He situates his attack on African American citizenship in the praise of whiteness as mentally and physically superior and in the assertion of black pathology. Carteret is talking about the right to vote, but his language invokes the charge against African Americans that provokes white supremacist violence: supposed black inferiority in terms of criminality. The black man must be denied the franchise because he is a "menace." This is the same rationale that makes his life expendable and allows him to be killed with impunity.[153] Carteret sees the "darker race" as "an incubus, a corpse chained to the body politic" and believes "that the negro vote was a source of danger to the State no matter how cast or by whom directed" (80). The black voter in Wellington is both a non-citizen undeserving of political agency—a "corpse" and an "incubus"—and an existential threat that must be dealt with, violently if necessary. He is bare life, at once outside the law but defined within it.

[153] African Americans still have the vote at this point in the story, which explains the particular urgency and form of Carteret's argument. The outcome of the riot at the novel's end will be to impose the "grandfather clause," which was one of many Jim Crow-era strategies to restrict the African American vote and which spread across the South at the end of the nineteenth century as legal precedent shifted and opened the door for new restrictions to constitutional law.

The irony that whites claimed the law as justification for the exclusion and eventual disfranchisement of African Americans was not lost on Chesnutt. Nor is white supremacy in his novel limited to the Big Three. Chesnutt instead suggests that these assumptions were endemic to the white community he represents in *Marrow*. Matthew Wilson argues in *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles W. Chesnutt* that Chesnutt "used the Manley editorial in particular to show how the fiction of whiteness was manufactured and how that whiteness was employed to create a solidarity that transcended political and class differences" (133). The solidarity of whiteness is represented in *Marrow* by a notion of a "higher law" that governs (white) human behavior and that by definition can trump the legal constructions of the state or federal government. While much of Chesnutt's nonfiction was focused on identifying and challenging specific legal cases that tried to circumvent constitutional law, in *Marrow* he identifies the terrifying pervasiveness of an illogical appeal to whiteness itself, fictionalized as pure and constantly under threat, to govern decisions that caused violent harm to American citizens. Therefore, higher law also served to justify lynching. Despite its official extra-legal status, lynching functioned as an instrument of dominance that appeals to justice and, in the case of Chesnutt's novel, forwards the white supremacist mission of the Democrats determined to take back control of the government. As Wilson explains, "The higher law was then a transcendent principle that could be used to rationalize any illegal or immoral behavior on the part of white folks; any violence, public or private, could be countenanced by resorting to this explanatory principle" (135). Like the appeal to black criminality, higher law became an empty signifier justifying white supremacist violence.

Carteret makes this clear frequently during the narrative. After the men discover that Sandy is indeed innocent, and after Carteret decides that political diplomacy requires that he suppress the news of the event to retain some degree of "moral standing" for the citizens of Wellington, he spins the story his way. In doing so, he appeals to the sentiment of "higher law" while ironically asserting the just nature of whiteness. Carteret states that, "even as a negro," Sandy "is entitled to protection of the law," but only if he "behaves himself and keeps in his place." Carteret explains the moral high ground reserved for white supremacists: "We may be stern and unbending in the punishment of crime, as befits our masterful race, but we hold the scales of justice with even and impartial hand" (229-30). The full extent of the irony in Carteret's comments is realized later when those African Americans who have behaved themselves by showing the proper amount of deference and docility to their white superiors, namely Jerry and "Mammy Jane," are murdered during the riot. Chesnutt's point is clear, especially when the reader considers his commentary on political theory and the franchise in terms of the sign of lynching. The law as it is practiced by those who would attempt to disenfranchise African American citizens is nothing but a ruse to justify otherwise wrongful actions they might take in defense of white privilege. They are willing to expand the supposed limits of the law to render "justice" to those African Americans who try to assert any agency. At the same time, what Agamben might call the sovereign power of whiteness also means that nothing is outside the law. Whatever exceptional status lynching claims to occupy, it is always available as an instrument of power, and Carteret's appeal to the "even and impartial hand" shows how the law can both enable and validate lynching. Denied the true protections of citizenship through the

law, African Americans are vulnerable to extra-legal instruments of white supremacist power, and white supremacists' claim to legal justice demonstrates their power over the rule and the exception.

Carteret illustrates lynching's tenuous relationship with the law, and he argues for the justness of lynching in terms familiar to Chesnutt's early twentieth-century readers. According to an article in Carteret's *Chronicle*, a white public with an aroused sense of moral indignation could be justified in meting out their own form of "justice":

> If an outraged people, justly infuriated, and impatient of the slow process of the courts, should assert their inherent sovereignty, which the law after all was merely intended to embody, and should choose, in obedience to the higher law, to set aside, temporarily, the ordinary judicial procedure, it would serve as a warning and an example to the vicious elements of the community, of the swift and terrible punishment which would fall like the judgment of God, upon any one who laid sacrilegious hands upon white womanhood. (185-6)

Carteret grounds his argument in an appeal to the law, as he asserts that the law is a servant to the naturally embodied sovereignty of the people, in this case white citizens. This sovereignty precedes any legal sanction and is subject to the state of exception, which the article argues can be invoked by the sovereign power to create the anomalous

but necessary situation of a public lynching.[154] Further, the "vicious elements" to which Carteret alludes represent African Americans as *homo sacer*. They are both within and without the law, inscribed by its limits but not subject to its protections, and always vulnerable to white supremacist violence through the state of exception.

In his article "'Between Absorption and Extinction': Charles Chesnutt and Biopolitical Racism," Ryan Jay Friedman reads the state of exception Chesnutt represents in *Marrow*, with reference to Agamben. Though Friedman only briefly focuses on the issue of lynching, he identifies an important scene in the tense moments leading up to what could be Sandy's death. William Miller's friend Watson, a lawyer, attempts an eleventh-hour appeal to Judge Everton to save Sandy's life. Judge Everton is a man whom Watson thought "always seemed to be fair." Watson explains that Judge Everton "admitted that lynching was, as a rule, unjustifiable, but maintained that there were exceptions to all rules … [and] in a state of emergency the sovereign people might assert itself and take the greater law into its own hands" (193). Friedman points out that this important scene reaffirms the assumption that whiteness functions as the sovereign power and that in these terms the "perceived threat to white womanhood constitutes a case of extreme necessity, justifying a state of 'exception' to the rule of law" (49). Like

[154] Ironically, the moment of the sovereign exception creates the opportunity for its opposition, as the riot that results from the failed lynching gives rise to Josh Green, the potential revolutionary hero of the novel, and the literary embodiment of Agamben's *homo sacer*. As I will make clear in my analysis of the riot, the sign of lynching represents an attempt to adjudicate the crime of black empowerment behind accusations of black criminality. As the hypermasculinized representation of white anxiety, Green brings lynching and revolutionary violence to the fore. As opposed to Sandy, who eventually loses his life despite playing the role of the docile slave, Green rejects both white supremacy and the law that supports it, and his role at the end of the novel indicates Chesnutt's ambivalence about possibilities for social change.

the appeal to higher law that justifies white supremacist violence, the legal system has limits defined by "exception." In this case circumstantial evidence, coupled with his racial identity, is enough to find Sandy guilty. But the heinousness of his purported crime and his abject identity are enough to remove the case from the field of law and into a state of emergency that allows the "unjustifiable" to take place.

At the same time, Delamere's attempt to rescue Sandy strains the limits of the supposed sanctity of the law, as Chesnutt satirizes white supremacist appeals to moral superiority through the law that creates vulnerable second-class citizens and justifies their murder. Though lynching supposedly acts as the last defense of Southern honor, charges of rape prove no match for Delamere's testimony that Sandy "has the family honor of the Delameres … at heart" and could not be guilty of the crime (198-9). Delamere naively believes his word and Sandy's status as a loyal family servant should be enough to save Sandy's life. Delamere tells another servant that the townspeople "are good people," and when Delamere testifies, he says that when "they have an opportunity for the sober second thought, they will do nothing rashly, but will wait for the operation of the law, which will, of course, clear Sandy" (200). When Delamere confronts Carteret to declare Sandy's innocence, he explains that Sandy could never have committed the crime because he has been so loyal to Delamere. According to Delamere, Sandy, "like all the negroes … has been clay in the hands of the white people." He explains that African Americans "are what we have made them, or permitted them to become." Delamere claims that his "negroes … were well raised and well behaved" (210-11). This language anticipates Carteret's later explanation that the

lynching must be called off because innocent "negroes" who "behave themselves" should be spared.

As a member of the old generation of plantation aristocracy, whom Chesnutt renders with the familiar trope of the master and his contented slave, Delamere seems not to realize the ways lynching is used to impose order in the postbellum South. His word is not enough to guarantee Sandy's innocence and safety because Sandy no longer belongs to him, or to any white people. Carteret explains that the "negroes are no longer under our control, and with their emancipation ceased our responsibility." Instead, their "insolence and disregard for law have reached a point where they must be sternly rebuked" (212). Delamere sees Sandy as his loyal slave, defined by his personal relationship with him but also by the belief that Sandy's devotion and dependency on Delamere render him harmless. Carteret, however, views Sandy through the post-Emancipation anxiety that demands lynching as social control. Because Sandy is no longer a slave, he is a potential danger, but more importantly his murder is the spark that can start the coup. As in lynching itself, Sandy's guilt or innocence is not at issue. Even if Sandy is innocent, he can still serve as a scapegoat and therefore an example to others. Further, Carteret is most concerned with how calling off the lynching will play politically, since the "white people of the city had raised the issue of their own superior morality, and had themselves made this crime a race question." They have played directly into Carteret's hands, and they are unaware of Carteret's design to exploit their race hatred. For Carteret, the "success of the impending 'revolution' … depended in large measure upon the maintenance of their race prestige, which would be injured in the eyes of the world by such a fiasco" (228).

More than their reputation, though, Carteret and his men risked the failure of their coup, as there "would be great disappointment if the lynching did not occur" (230). Delamere discovers his grandson actually killed Polly Ochiltree, and in exchange for the protection of his family honor by hiding this fact, the Big Three allow Delamere to swear an oath that he was with Sandy during the time of the murder, thereby securing Sandy's eventual freedom. Chesnutt satirizes the white supremacists' appeal to the sanctity of the law throughout this scene. General Belmont says that they will not "interfere … with the orderly process of the law, or … advise the prisoner's immediate release" (231). Sandy's freedom will only be granted after the spectacle of a trial built on Delamere's false testimony is complete. Ironically, the Big Three's ruse of justice through the law constrains them in their response to Sandy. If Delamere tells the truth and admits he lied to provide an alibi, the farce of the legal proceedings is laid bare. On the one hand, the law is merely a tool for political expediency. But it is also powerful enough to deny political agency to Sandy and to justify his lynching. Sandy is a citizen by the spirit of the law but not its application. This moment echoes Chesnutt's concern that the law for African Americans is still defined by *Dred Scott*, and while African Americans lack protection, white supremacists continue to use the law to entrench racial hierarchy and undo the progress of Reconstruction. Chesnutt's narrator notes the arbitrary nature of the law in the final words of the scene: "Thus, a slight change in the point of view had demonstrated the entire ability of the leading citizens to maintain the dignified and orderly processes of the law whenever they saw fit to do so" (232).[155] In

[155] Upon Sandy's release, Chesnutt's narrator also notes the "fickleness of a mob" that would greet Sandy with "congratulations" when "some … would cheerfully have done him to death a few hours before" (232). The narrator notes that the "workings of the

this case, seeing "fit to do so" involved Carteret's political calculation for how best to play white resentment against the black population of Wellington.

As the white supremacists are shoring up their claim to moral superiority with a vacant appeal to the process rather than the substance of the law, the African American citizens of Wellington feel the effects of the near lynching as a technology of power, even though a particular murder has been thwarted. Chesnutt's narrator explains that "the charge against [Sandy] Campbell had been made against the whole colored race." The spectacle of the lynching and of the actions of the "black brute" that necessitated it, even though it did not actually take place, "had been displayed in large black type on the front pages of the daily papers" across the nation (233). In contrast, the news that it had been called off and Sandy released "received slight attention" (234). Consequently, the damage had been done, and the mere sign of a lynching had further endangered African Americans nationally. The white supremacists' vacant appeal to the law signifies for Chesnutt the false claims that justify lynching and yet its complicity with the law. This ambiguous position allows the men flexibility in deploying the technology of power as Sandy's case proved too costly politically and yet the net effect was the same. White supremacists retained their claim to the law by demonizing and intimidating African Americans. The Big Three's political aims remain possible because they cathect the resentments and political assumptions of white racists in terms of lynching onto the riot that follows, furthering their goals of political domination at the expense of African Americans.

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human heart are the profoundest mystery of the universe," Chesnutt's sarcastic satirization of white supremacist appeals to moral superiority through higher law.

In an interesting departure from the historical record of the Wilmington riot, Chesnutt positioned the coup in *Marrow* before the election. In Wilmington, the election occurred and the white supremacists swept the Republicans out of office before the Manly editorial was printed and the riot erupted. Chesnutt figures the riot as prior to the election, however, and Sundquist reads this choice as important. According to Sundquist, "Chesnutt subtly collapsed the two actions, placing the riot before the election and thereby revealing the violent logic of disfranchisement and Jim Crow as it was bound up with the existing legal processes of United States racial justice" (420). Additionally, I contend that positioning the failed lynching before the coup is significant in this causal chain because the failed lynching illustrates that the logic of disfranchisement is inextricably tied to the *illegal* processes of racial "justice" in the form of lynching. It also shifts the potential function of the lynching onto the coup itself, solidifying the fact that the ruse of spontaneous violence that is historically used to justify lynching is merely cover for its political design to disempower and intimidate African Americans. The coup is effectively a lynching, even as the plan to lynch Sandy goes unfulfilled. But the coup does not represent frustrated violence redirected spontaneously into another act of violence. To believe that would be to accept the rationale of apologists who claim that lynching is an atavistic yet justified expression of communal rage. To render the racist violence of the coup through the images of lynching is to illustrate the programmatic nature of that violence, its political purposes, and the problems it creates for black resistance. Like a literal lynching, the coup warns black citizens against any resistance, all under the guise of a just response to

exceptional conditions, and it makes clear that white supremacists have legal and extralegal means of power at their reach.

Chesnutt describes the coup from William Miller's point of view as Miller frantically makes his way through town attempting to find his wife and child. He sees the body of a man with "blood oozing from a ghastly wound in the forehead." He observes that the "negroes seemed to have been killed, as the band plays in circus parades, at the street intersections, where the example would be most effective." The narrator describes the scene with the imagery of a lynching, with its "gruesome spectacle" and the bodies positioned as "examples." Even the comparison to the "circus parade" echoes the terminology of lynching (287).[156] The white leaders of Wellington stage this spectacle of violence to communicate a particular message to the black citizens. Like the political function of a public lynching, designed to disempower the individual and terrorize the group into political passivity, the Big Three orchestrate the "race riot" to caution African Americans against political agency and economic success and to seize power back from Republican control, all the while laying the responsibility for the violence at the feet of the black citizens of Wellington. The sovereign power of white supremacy appears to be insurmountable, always threatening to assert social

[156] The notion of lynching as "entertainment" is a central issue in much of the scholarship on the subject. Part of Goldsby's argument regarding the distinctly modern spectacular function of lynching is that it benefits from the technologies that allow its dissemination through the national press as well as through the sale of postcards with images of lynchings, phonograph recordings of the suffering of the victim, etc. In the buildup to Sandy's near lynching, Chesnutt's narrator describes the crowd's preparations, a common occurrence during Southern lynchings: "Some enterprising individual had begun the erection of seats from which, for a pecuniary consideration, the spectacle might be the more easily and comfortably viewed" (219). See also Amy Wood's *Lynching and Spectacle*.

control through its own expressions of violence. The coup is the site at which the various strands of the novel come together in a consummative event, and an unlikely potential hero is charged with bringing about its conclusion.

Josh Green, the dock laborer who attempts to face down the angry crowd at the end of the novel, is one of Chesnutt's most interesting characters.[157] Sundquist calls him a "folk hero" in his willingness to face the aggression and threats of the white supremacists with defiance and violence if necessary.[158] His overt rejection of the assumptions of white supremacy is obvious throughout the text, as he refuses to play the role ascribed to him by white supremacists.[159] Returning to Wiegman's reading of lynching, Green represents for the white supremacists of Wellington the "hypermasculinized threat of the black rapist," as they displace onto Green their anxiety from the attempted lynching over the murder of Polly Ochiltree (13). Fundamentally, Green represents a threat to white supremacist power as a potential black revolutionary. During the coup, he leads a group of armed men to protect Dr. William Miller's hospital, a symbol of African American economic success in the community and therefore a threat to the white supremacists. Green makes his final stand defending the

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[157] Josh Green has a personal vendetta against Colonel McBane, the most provincial of the Big Three. McBane, a leader in the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, killed Green's father when he was a child, and his mother never recovered from the experience. Green has made it his mission to seek retributive justice by killing McBane, and Chesnutt revisits this subplot numerous times throughout the text.

[158] Sundquist goes on to place green in the tradition of popular black folk heroes (425).

[159] As a physically imposing black man with a penchant for drunken street fights, Josh Green is an easy mark for the prejudices of the white townspeople obsessed with the perceived threat of black sexual violence. Ironically, however, it is Sandy, the loyal servant to old Mr. Delamere, whom Tom Delamere's crime implicates. This choice supports Chesnutt's suggestion that playing the "proper" role will not save African Americans in Wellington.

hospital and at the same time gets vengeance by killing McBane, the Klan leader who murdered his father and a member of the Big Three. Green dies a hero's death, as the narrator describes him charging through a hail of bullets to find his retributive justice and kill McBane. The narrator notes the crowd's reaction. Some "paused in involuntary admiration of this black giant, famed on the wharves for his strength." In a final display of power, Green charges the crowd of white men with "a smile on his face, his eyes lit up with a rapt expression which seemed to take him out of the mortal ken." He seems impervious to "the shower of lead which less susceptible persons had continued to pour at him" (309). The lionization of Green in death is immediately interrupted, however, as Chesnutt's narrator wonders aloud, "One of the two died as the fool dieth. Which was it, or was it both?" (309-310).

The implications of Green's death have been a popular subject of criticism regarding *Marrow*.[160] Some critics have considered Green's death in terms of its effect on Miller, who is the voice of middle-class restraint, in contrast to Green, who represents one pole of the contemporaneous debate about the appropriate nature of black response to white violence in terms of accommodationism or militancy.[161] For example, Dean McWilliams in *Charles W. Chesnutt and the Fictions of Race* identifies Green both as "the return of society's repressed" and as "the embodiment of the urbane

[160] Jerry Bryant observes that "for all his personal satisfaction, Josh dies a futile death" (111).

[161] In "Charles Chesnutt's Dilemma: Professional Ethics, Social Justice, and Domestic Feminism in *The Marrow of Tradition*," Susan Danielson writes, "Given the context that the novel has so carefully presented, Miller's refusal to assume leadership in the midst of chaos rests on his conflation of assimilation and accommodation and can not be mistaken for naivete" (82). As I argue, Miller is indeed naive about the extremity of white supremacist violence, and Chesnutt's lynching imagery emphasizes Miller's response.

Miller's suppressed rage" (150). In "Violence, Manhood, and Black Heroism: The Wilmington Riot in Two Turn-of-the-Century African American Novels," Richard Yarborough explains that for Miller, Green represents an "embodiment of black rage and vindictiveness," and Yarborough notes the "ideological tension" between the two men (232).[162] In *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles Chesnutt*, Matthew Wilson argues that Dr. Miller and Josh Green seem to represent separate parts of the same whole, as opposed to an "unresolved binary opposition" (117). Richard Yarborough notes the "ideological tension" between Miller and Green and suggests that while Green embodies rage and righteous anger, Miller remains rational and controlled (232). Yarborough argues that Miller "survives as the embodiment of what Chesnutt sees as the most rational and constructive posture for blacks to assume" (238). Critics agree that these two characters illustrate something about a proper course of action for black resistance in the face of white supremacist violence. More interesting than the potential ideological opposition of the characters is the way the sign of lynching specifically disillusions Miller regarding the nature of white supremacist violence. Rather than radicalizing him, the coup achieves its intended effect, further marginalizing Miller and pushing him away from political empowerment.

Miller urges restraint as the resistance to the coup becomes more violent and as Green implores Miller to lead the fight. Miller tells Green that he had "better be peaceable and endure a little injustice, rather than run the risk of a sudden and violent

[162] In "Keeping an 'Old Wound' Alive: *The Marrow of Tradition* and the Legacy of Wilmington," Jae H. Roe argues that a white reading public would be resistant to Josh Green and any notion of heroism. Roe writes, "Ultimately, Josh's concrete commitment to, and leadership in, the struggle against the white mob are what make him tower above the other black characters in the novel … [and] this obviously did not appeal to the genteel tastes of Chesnutt's white readers" (241).

death" (110). Miller sees the attempted revolution as impossible, even as the narrator explains that "every manly instinct" pushed Miller "to go forward and take up the cause of these leaderless people." But Miller is left with the question, "to what end?" (282). Miller tells the men they are overmatched and that violent resistance will only result in their "throwing [their] lives away." He calls back an appeal to the law that demonstrates how he understands the current conflict. He says that "[i]n the minds of those who make and administer the law, [they] have no standing in the court of conscience" and therefore they face certain doom if they respond with violence (282). Miller says he "may be of some use" to the men, but only if he is alive. He compares the "riot" to a war and says that though current conditions suggest that an armed offensive would be foolish, their "time will come,—the time when [they] can command respect for [their] rights" (283). He recommends, therefore, that they wait. At this point Miller understands the white supremacist Democrats as any other political enemy. If they bide their time and reason carefully through their options, they can avoid wasting their lives, since Miller notes how "those who have been done to death in the Southern States for the past twenty years" seem to have been forgotten (283).

Despite his pessimism, Miller feels "shame and envy" after refusing Green's plea. The narrator explains, "Miller, while entirely convinced that he had acted wisely in declining to accompany them, was yet conscious of a distinct feeling of shame and envy that he, too, did not feel impelled to throw away his life in a hopeless struggle" (285). In many ways this quotation embodies what critics see as the ambivalence at the heart of this novel, as both Dr. Miller and Chesnutt struggle to reconcile justified feelings of anger with the realities of their logical outcomes. For Miller, Green

represents the impossibility of revolutionary violence in the face of overwhelming odds, and the imagery of lynching in these final confrontations emphasizes the hopelessness for African Americans due to the white supremacists' political strategy. At the same time, Green's willingness to sacrifice everything for the cause garners Miller's respect. As Miller will learn, however, Green's death cannot be heroic in the context of white supremacist violence, and Chesnutt uses the sign of lynching to drive that point home.

Additionally, Miller is naive at this point in the novel. Despite his recognition that nothing will end well for Green and his men, he still insists that avoiding violence provides the possibility of a future. Miller assures Green and his men that the white supremacists will ultimately behave reasonably, that "they'll not burn the schoolhouses, nor the hospital" as those institutions "benefit the community." He says, "they'll only kill the colored people who resist them" and resistance "only makes the matter worse" (295). In fact Miller is wrong; he has underestimated the white townspeople. Like old Mr. Delamere, Miller believes restraint will prevail when whites realize that the black townspeople, like Sandy, are innocent. He does not recognize this modern incarnation of white supremacy with its focus on disciplining African Americans into political impotence and punishing aspirations for political rights, economic success, or social equality.

Gradually, the lessons of the coup dawn on Miller as he recognizes its purposes and methodology focused through the imagery of lynching. Miller sees a double standard applied to men like Green. The threat Green poses to the white race is not mitigated by the heroism of his willingness to die for a just cause. Miller recognizes the specific danger Green poses and that white supremacists construct that danger and

depend upon it. Miller sees that the "qualities which in a white man would win the applause of the world would in a negro be taken as the marks of savagery." If a black man died for glory, his "courage would be mere desperation" and "his love of liberty, a mere animal dislike of restraint." Ultimately, even if "forced to admire" this man's heroism, "they would none the less repress" him. According to Chesnutt's narrator, "They would applaud his courage while they stretched his neck, or carried off the fragments of his mangled body as souvenirs, in much the way that savages preserve the scalps or eat the hearts of their enemies" (295-6). Chesnutt uses the images of lynching to explain the harrowing cruelty of white supremacy, including by reversing the assumptions of savagery usually assigned to African Americans, but most importantly he aims to indicate how white supremacy operates. Green's act of ultimate sacrifice represents a political threat to white supremacists' power, but one that is easily dispatched. He also represents a danger in his potential influence on others in his role as a leader.[163] Green understands what Miller initially does not: white supremacist ideology leads to genocidal violence. Green feels that his only hope is to resist it by any means necessary, even if he must lose his life. He represents the ultimate "African American agency," as Matthew Wilson observes, and for that he must die in a spectacle of instructive violence (116). A metaphorical lynching, however, robs him of his sacrificial potential, as he is killed with impunity while white supremacist violence remains relentless. The burning of Miller's hospital leaves no doubt about the

[163] Like in the works of Sutton Griggs, the theme of leadership plays an important role in Chesnutt's novel. Chesnutt casts a debate between Miller and Green about resistant strategies as a referendum on what kind of leadership might prove most successful going forward. Like Griggs, he settles on no overriding and obvious choice, though Miller's pragmatic appeal for caution in the face of white supremacist violence, while ambivalent, survives the riot by novel's end, suggesting Chesnutt's own choice.

continuing threat of white supremacist violence and the seeming futility of Green's revolutionary resistance, but also of Miller's advice not to resist.

After Green is killed, the white mob sets fire to the hospital, the symbol of progress that Miller believed would never fall victim to their rage. After the fire, the narrator describes the "handsome structure, the fruit of old Adam Miller's industry, the monument of his son's philanthropy, a promise of good things for the future of the city" that now "lay smoldering in ruins, a melancholy witness to the fact that our boasted civilization is but a thin veneer, which cracks and scales off at the first impact of primal passions" (310). Chesnutt's language parallels lynching apologists in assigning the violence a primal nature, but given his earlier description of the "savagery" of the violence of the coup, and what Miller has learned as a result, Chesnutt applies the metaphor of lynching to signify both its political expediency and the enormity of the white supremacists' threat. Chesnutt again reverses the poles of the trope of savagery and civilization to describe white supremacist violence and an ideology based on racial panic and resentment that is always only a moment away from revealing itself. Because Chesnutt takes pains to show its political calculus, the coup resists designation as an aberrant, emotion-filled event, and the imagery of lynching emphasizes the message white supremacists intend to deliver. The hospital symbolizes black success and political possibility, both of which threaten the sovereign power of whiteness. Therefore it must be destroyed.

At his most naive during the height of the coup, when he does not fathom the degree to which white supremacists will pursue their cause, Miller assures Green that the white supremacists merely suffer from "a fever" that will "wear off to-morrow, or

to-night" (295). Unlike Sutton Griggs's characters, and unlike Chesnutt himself, Miller conceives of the pathology of white supremacy as a temporary state, the kind of frenetic energy an angry mob might expend quickly. In fact, after they burn the hospital the mob does disperse, but only after their work is done. Though Chesnutt does not reveal the outcome until the final scenes of the novel, Miller discovers that, immediately after his warning to Green and his men, his son has been killed in the coup. On his way home, "his eyes fell upon a group beneath a lamp-post, at sight of which he turned pale with horror, and rushed forward with a terrible cry" (297). Chesnutt brings the violence of the coup home to his protagonist, and Miller can no longer convince himself that white supremacist violence can be avoided. He has learned the lesson lynching is designed to deliver. Everyone who has either urged restraint or tried to"behave themselves" has been a victim of violence, either through their own murder, or near-murder in Sandy's case, or through the murder of a loved one, as in Miller's case.

Ultimately, Chesnutt assigns Miller's wife the task of resolving the novel. She appeals for sympathy for Carteret's suffering, as his son faces death from an illness, but she first stands up to her sister and rejects the idea that she must be beholden to white ideology or a desire for white approval. She does what her husband cannot do: she resists white supremacy while also retaining her humanity. For Janet Miller, it is not a choice between passivity and revolutionary violence, as it is for her husband. Dr. Miller rejects Carteret's plea to help his son, and Carteret recognizes "Miller's refusal to go with him [as] pure, elemental justice" (321). Carteret's wife, who is also Janet Miller's sister, rushes to plead for help for her son. Dr. Miller tells Mrs. Carteret that she must ask Janet, and that he "will abide by her decision" (325). In this moment Chesnutt

moves the opportunity for resolution away from Dr. Miller and toward Janet. His attempt at reconciling his ambivalence regarding a path forward has failed, and Janet Miller represents a final chance. Chesnutt's narrator describes that Janet "towered erect, with menacing aspect, like an avenging goddess" (326). Her sister, who had "only now, for the first time" after twenty-five years, "called [her] so," finally admits that Janet is her "lawful sister" (327). By doing so, Mrs. Carteret recognizes Janet's right to half of their father's estate, which she had kept from her. By refusing to recognize Janet's identity as her sister because of her race, Mrs. Carteret also rejected Janet's personhood and agency, another example of a white person ascribing marginalized status to an African American citizen.

Mrs. Carteret's appeal to the law creates the "recognition for which, all her life, [Janet] had longed for," but the fact that it "had come, not with frank kindliness and sisterly love, but in a storm of blood and tears; not freely given, from an open heart, but extorted from a reluctant conscience by the agony of a mother's fears," fills Janet with rage. She rejects her father's name and her sister's recognition. She says, "But that you may know that a woman may be foully wronged, and yet may have a heart to feel, even for one who has injured her, you may have your child's life" (329). Mrs. Carteret's appeal to the law reminds Janet of the power Mrs. Carteret enjoys. Her privilege as a white woman allows her to choose to acknowledge Janet's existence, or not, and the law circumscribes Janet's ability to be recognized and denies her the inheritance that is rightfully hers. While the imagery of lynching is not present in this final scene, the sign of the law is. The sovereign power of whiteness that throughout the novel has made vulnerable African American citizens through the law has done so again with Janet

Miller. But in her defiance she asserts her agency independent of the law and Mrs. Carteret. Her sympathy for Mrs. Carteret in spite of what Janet has suffered shows that Janet is not limited by the "elemental justice" that traps her husband in an initially naive and now static position. The coup/lynching leaves Dr. Miller powerless with only his resentment remaining. By contrast, Janet represents a perhaps idealized justice independent of white supremacist power structures, the same ideals that should animate the Constitution and prove the protections of political personhood.

Epilogue: The Persistence of Black Pathology Discourse

White supremacy in the United States continues to use black pathology discourse, and black artists, authors, and thinkers continue to resist portrayals of pathological blackness and to attack and expose the discourse. Two recent artistic works, Colson Whitehead's novel *The Underground Railroad* and Jordan Peele's film *Get Out*, offer resistant responses similar to the turn-of-the-century works I have explored in this project. In addition, Ta-Nehisi Coates, through his contributions to political discourse on white supremacy and black pathology, refuses convenient narratives of national progress and challenges the idea that the consequences of slavery and white supremacist oppression are black cultural deficiency. The political scene in the Trump era illustrates the importance of these challenges to the discourses of white supremacy, because those discourses have proven adaptable in different political moments. A new administration that emboldens overt white supremacist expressions highlights the historical ebb and flow of white supremacy in American popular and political culture and its reliance on black pathology discourse. Rather than representing a sudden shift in our politics, the last two administrations illustrate that a progressive view of history at the expense of uncomfortable truths about white supremacy only feeds the desires of white supremacists to insistently re-naturalize white supremacist assumptions. Current political movements like Black Lives Matter challenge this current phase of emboldened white supremacy, and future movements will no doubt challenge white supremacy and black pathology discourse directly. By pointing to the historical continuities in white supremacy across eras in the United States, as well as to the subtle ways that white supremacist thinking adapts to cultural change, resistant

voices persist in the work of writers like Pauline Hopkins, Sutton Griggs, and Charles Chesnutt.

In *The Underground Railroad*, Whitehead depicts an alternative history of the United States in which the Civil War and the end of slavery seem to have never happened. The novel is a nineteenth-century odyssey that explores racism and violence through the lens of slavery as well as through a depiction of a more modern-feeling America—complete with skyscrapers and a secret eugenics program—that rejects the spectacle of white supremacist violence in favor of a more acceptable moderate appeal to paternalistic racism. The protagonist Cora's journey through the South via the underground railroad—a physical incarnation of the historical metaphor—could have been lifted from the pages of Hopkins, Griggs, or Chesnutt. And it could describe a world Dixon imagines in his paranoid fantasies of white persecution, in which racist violence is required to save the white race from extermination.

Critics have praised this inventive novel for its imagination and its timeliness. Alex Preston calls it "brutal, vital, [and] devastating." Rebecca Carroll echoes the importance of the novel to our current age and calls it "timely and necessary." In an interview with NPR, Whitehead describes his strategy for creating an alternative history in the novel, one in which the setting at times feels imbued with the details of an early-twentieth-century urban America. White explains that "not sticking to the facts allowed [him] to combine different forms of racial hysteria" in the novel ("Colson Whitehead's"). He also explains that contemporary examples of racism and white supremacy illustrate the ways these hysterical attitudes migrate from spectacular and overt examples of racial violence—represented in the novel by the daily lynchings that

take place in North Carolina—to more accepted "scientific" approaches—described in the "living history" museum in South Carolina and in the forced sterilization campaign Cora barely escapes. Whitehead explains that in writing his novel, "it didn't take a lot of energy to find parallels for the language of the slave problem and the inner-city problem," as current issues of racial inequality benefit from "coded language" that mask their historical roots. Like other artists working today, Whitehead recognizes the continuities between past and current forms of white supremacy, and the urgency of identifying those forms and the mechanisms by which they operate.

Another important contemporary example of resistance is Jordan Peele's *Get Out*, the director's first major feature film. Peele uses the genre of the horror film—historically an effective mode of social critique as evidenced by, among others, George Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*—to explore the insidious realities of liberal racism and white supremacy in the post-Obama age. Film critic Ann Hornaday explains that *Get Out* takes "notions of assimilation, cultural appropriation, white liberal pieties and the fetishization of black bodies to their most existentially fatal extreme." In his review in *The Atlantic*, critic David Sims explains that Peele addresses "the fallacy of America being a post-racial society, and of the nightmares one can imagine under that benign surface." Sims calls *Get Out* "one of the most relevant films of the year." By speaking directly to white liberal beliefs in "post-racialism," Peele, like Whitehead, asserts that white supremacy persists in part because of its discursive adaptability and because of the persistence of entrenched beliefs about black pathology. Though white characters in the film insist on their *bona fides* as liberal allies to African Americans, they also believe in essential black physiological and cultural difference, culminating in

an obsession with black bodies as the future vehicles for white individual consciousness. The last third of the film combines the fetishization of black bodies of the plantation slave owner with the "scientific" experimentation on black bodies familiar to Sutton Griggs, parallelling the continuity Whitehead sees between white supremacist violence on the plantation and that shrouded by the polite racism of the present-day bourgeoisie.

The details of today's political scene and that of the recent past affirm the codependent relationship of white supremacy and black pathology discourse. In a series of columns in *The Atlantic* during the second term of the Obama presidency in 2014, Ta-Nehisi Coates addresses the issue of black pathology discourse. Coates defines black pathology discourse by asserting that "there is an accepted belief in America—black and white—that African American people, and African American men in particular, are lacking in the virtues of family, hard work, and citizenship" ("The Secret Lives" 2). Coates echoes Khalil Gibran Muhammad in reorienting the timeline regarding the history of black pathology discourse long before Daniel Paul Moynihan's 1965 report on pathological black poverty, asserting that beliefs about black cultural inferiority are "much older" (3).[164] According to Coates, the "message" of black pathology "makes all our uncomfortable truths tolerable." He says that "[o]nly if black people are somehow undeserving can a just society tolerate a yawning wealth gap, a two-tiered job market, and persistent housing discrimination" (4).

[164] In "Black Pathology and the Closing of the Progressive Mind," Coates writes, "For some reason there is an entrenched belief among many liberals and conservatives that discussions of American racism should begin somewhere between the Moynihan Report and the Detroit riots" (8). As I discuss in the Introduction, Muhammad argues that the 1890s represent a key point in the origin story of black pathology discourse. See Khalil Gibran Muhammad's *The Condemnation of Blackness*.

In "The Secret Lives Of Inner-City Black Males" Coates also responded to Paul Ryan's designation of urban poverty as "a real cultural problem … that has to be dealt with" and to then-President Obama's manner of addressing poverty in a language of personal responsibility (2). Coates's comparison of Ryan's language with Obama's provoked a response from Jonathan Chait in the pages of *New York* magazine, as well as a subsequent set of responses by Coates in *The Atlantic*. Chait accuses Coates of "committing a fallacy by assuming that Obama's exhortations to the black community amount to a belief that personal responsibility accounts for a major share of the blame" (Chait 4). Chait asserts that Obama seeks not to ignore racial bias but to encourage "people to concentrate on the things they can control" (5). Coates responds by saying that Chait and "Obama-era liberals" like him echo Moynihan's belief in the "'tangle of pathologies' haunting black America born of oppression" ("Black Pathology" 2). In "Other People's Pathologies," another article in this exchange, Coates argues that Chait conflates black culture with "a culture of poverty," which assumes that the two are "interchangeable" (3). Moreover, Chait's commitment to black cultural pathology depends largely on belief rather than actual evidence, just as positions on black cultural difference did in the nineteenth century. Coates observes that while twenty percent of black children were reported to be born out of wedlock in the 1960s, today thirty percent of white children are born out of wedlock. Because "the reaction to this shift has been considerably more muted," according to Coates, it "makes sense if you believe that pathology is something reserved for black people" (7).[165] In "Black Pathology and

[165] In "The Black Pathology Biz," Ishmael Reed examines the central role played by the media in forwarding stereotypes and misinformation about supposed black cultural pathology. According to Reed, "Now that network news shows have become 'profit

the Closing of the Progressive Mind," Coates asserts that Chait's "theory of independent black cultural pathologies … can't actually be demonstrated in the American record" (3). He concludes: "There is no evidence that black people are less responsible, less moral, or less upstanding in their dealings with America nor with themselves." Instead, history points to white supremacy as the persistent threat the black survival, cultural or otherwise, "evidence that America is irresponsible, immoral, and unconscionable in its dealings with black people and with itself" (11). In the case of black marriage, according to Coates, it was "white terrorism, white rapacity, and white violence" that represented its most consequential threat, not any notion of black disinterest (5). Further, black pathology discourse excludes African Americans from American culture, and Coates argues that "[t]here is no reason to suppose that enslavement cut African-Americans off from broader cultural values" (7). As black pathology discourse demonstrates historically, white supremacy both occludes its existence as an operative influence on black suffering, and it further entrenches white supremacist assumptions that guarantee its survival by turning the blame back on black victims.

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centers,' news producers have found a lucrative market in exhibiting black pathology, while coverage of pathologies such as drug addiction, child abuse, spousal battering and crime among whites and their 'model minorities' is negligible." Reed published his article in 1989, but his conclusions about the role of the media still ring true, as the Kendrick Lamar song that frames the Introduction makes clear. Reed asserts that the "only difference between white pathology and black pathology is that white pathology is underreported." He also suggests a historical continuity between the twentieth-century and the nineteenth century and states that in order to maintain "the country's cozy fetal sleep" regarding the prevalence of white supremacy in America, "the shrill half-wits that [the country] elects" must "run the sort of campaign that former Confederate officers ran in the 1880s: They threatened whites with a black rapist in every bedroom."

Ultimately, black pathology discourse transfers the focus of racial inequality from white supremacy and trains it on black culture. Coates argues that, in the case of President Obama's comments on poverty and the black community, "removing white supremacy from the equation puts Barack Obama in the odd position of focusing on that which is hardest to evidence, while slighting that which is clearly known" ("Other People's Pathologies" 8). Coates contends that a liberal commitment to black pathology discourse relies on a progressive view of history that sees American race relations as increasingly improved, ignoring the continuities between the past and the present as well as the adaptability of white supremacy. Coates argues that "[w]hite supremacy does not contradict American democracy—it birthed it, nurtured it, and financed it." According to Coates, "[t]hat is our heritage," and we must stop explaining it or wishing it otherwise (13).

The Trump era validates Coates's argument and returns us to the past and to the white supremacist discourses that Hopkins, Griggs, and Chesnutt challenged. Coates's insistence in 2014 that the first black president unwittingly participated in black pathology discourse was provocative because it upset the narrative of racial progress. Today's political scene, defined by a president whom CNN's Don Lemon explicitly called "racist" on national television, confirms Coates's position: Our current moment does not represent a new nadir, nor did the election of the first black American president represent a new moment of reconciliation. Instead, recent history illustrates the continuity with the past that existed all along (Schmidt). Trump is the symptom of what Sutton Griggs calls "the virus of racial thinking," not the cause. It is true that more spectacular examples of racism feel prevalent now. For instance, Reverend Jaime

Johnson, director of the Department of Homeland Security's Center for Faith-Based & Neighborhood Partnerships was fired in the fall of 2017 for a 2008 radio appearance in which he said that "it's an indictment of America's black community that [they have] turned America's major cities into slums because of laziness, drug use and sexual promiscuity" (Rosenberg). But of course these beliefs are not new, and if there is any conclusion to draw at this point about the Trump presidency and the political climate of resentment that has produced it, it is only that this cultural moment allows more overt examples of racism to appear from the shadows. If they were not expressible in that form during the last presidency, or at least without such brazen confidence, our new age portends more emboldened responses and the return of a language of black pathology that could have more long-felt effects. A return to more extreme and obvious forms of housing discrimination, or to "stop-and-frisk" policing of Americans of color, or to new commitments to the private prison industry are all possibilities that black pathology language enables and naturalizes. At the same time, the evidence of white supremacy's flexibility in this project shows that resistance requires continued vigilance in identifying white supremacist logic and rejecting the operation and assumptions of black pathology discourse. While today might feel reminiscent of the past, the future promises further examples of adaptive white supremacist thinking responsive to shifts in cultural expectations.

New political movements like Black Lives Matter represent organizations committed to direct action as resistance to white supremacist violence. Police brutality benefits from and is protected by pervasive beliefs about black criminality, and Black Lives Matter makes that connection clear. Additionally, Black Lives Matter embodies

the important work by women in anti-racist movements and new philosophies that avoid excluding those committed to those movements. Black Lives Matter represents an influential political organization founded by women who "have always recognized the need to center the leadership of women and queer and trans people" in order to avoid "replicating harmful practices that excluded so many in past movements for liberation" (https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/herstory/). A particular sensitivity to avoiding continued marginalization within political movements may represent a new front in expanding opportunities for those who resist white supremacy and violence.

These resistant responses to white supremacy all share a commitment to exposing the dependent relationship between black pathology discourse and white supremacist violence. Historical continuities between nineteenth-century writers and thinkers and their modern counterparts emphasize both the persistence of white supremacy and the importance of resistant responses. As I concluded my work on this project, it seemed that numerous additional examples of black pathology discourse and white supremacist discourse would appear every day, only a small number of which have been discussed herein. An increasing catalog of examples can be overwhelming and risks causing complacency. But because white supremacist ideology depends on its adaptability and cultural amnesia, the lessons related by Pauline Hopkins, Sutton Griggs, and Charles Chesnutt regarding the urgency of the moment and the importance of a historicist cast of mind, as well as the mounting examples of overt and implied white supremacy, ring especially true today.

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