Sorcery & Terror: White Supremacy

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Under the dominion of white supremacy, terror takes on a nearly magical quality. As Joan Dayan notes in '*Legal Slaves and Civil Bodies,*' the law acts as a conduit for terrorism. In this context, the law becomes like a wizard's wand, endowing those with 'whiteness' the power to define others (Dayan, p. 53). This "sorcery of law" allows terror to pervade all aspects of life for Black and Brown individuals. White supremacy uses familial, interpersonal, and societal dynamics as platforms for its proponents to commit heinous acts, targeting those who cannot claim the privilege of 'whiteness.' This notion, shrouded in its romanticized yet sadistic narratives, has an almost mystical appeal.

Since ancient times, rulers have called upon divine authority to validate their laws (Chrisp et al., p. 11). Hebrews 4:12 in the Bible underscores this, describing God's word as "alive and active," capable of dividing "soul and spirit, joints and marrow" (Bible, NIV). In the sphere of white supremacy, which views itself as divinely mandated to 'civilize' the world, legal practice combines symbolic control with its actual imposition on living bodies (Dayan, p. 56). The concept of "corruption of blood," introduced after the Norman Conquest, labels an individual's bloodline as 'corrupt,' preventing them from passing down assets to heirs, effectively severing familial lines (Dayan, p. 58).

For individuals like Mumia Abu-Jamal and Assata Shakur, the oppressive atmosphere of prison visiting rooms is painfully familiar. Sentenced to death row in 1983, Abu-Jamal experienced the acute distress of his young daughter, who yearned to break the Plexiglas separating her from him (Abu-Jamal, p. 22). In Assata Shakur's case, she became a living barrier: "All I can feel are these little four-year-old fists banging away at me. Every bit of her force is in those punches; they hurt." Trying to console her daughter, she offers, "Mommy understands."

However, her words are obliterated by her daughter's heart-rending scream: "You're not my mother!" (Shakur, p. 257).

Joan Dayan's words, "The law giveth and the law taketh away. The law kills and the law resurrects" (Dayan, p. 56), aptly sum up the grim reality faced by those considered "guilty." What cannot be inherited or passed down as wealth is transformed into sin. Family members, bound by association, share the agony experienced behind prison walls, categorized under labels of "maximum and minimum security" (Shakur). Assata Shakur points out the Catholic Church's teachings on sin, equating mortal sins with being Black and venial sins with being white (Shakur, p. 41).

Angelo Herndon's autobiography provides an alternative lens on the concept of the "corruption of blood." For Herndon, a glimmer of awareness blossoms into a disheartening understanding of his circumstances. He recounts, "It was only at the age of six that I first became conscious of the world, and the experience that initiated me into it was a tragedy" (Herndon, p. 3). At such a young age, he confronts the harsh reality that despite his family's abundant love, they are impoverished. His parents go to great lengths to provide him medicine. Subsequently, he recognizes his "unreasonableness," a sentiment arising from the hunger that comes with poverty. He knows crying is futile; they are impoverished, after all.

Unbeknownst to the young Angelo, worse revelations awaited him. Revitalized by health, his childhood curiosity propels him into the wider world. However, in a fleeting moment, this innocence evaporates under the unyielding cloud of racism. When called a 'nigger' for the first time, he asks, "What does 'nigger' mean?" The suffocating silence breaks when a white child retorts, "Let me show you." As stones pummel him, each blow transforms into indelible ink,

forever coloring his perception in stark black and white. Through this bleak rite of passage, Angelo learns that not everyone is treated as an equal. Stripped of his innocence, he realizes he bears not just the weight of poverty but also the permanent mark of being a Black individual.

Secondly, the philosophy of the "corruption of blood" perpetuates the idea that Black individuals are predestined to criminality. In his 'Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave,' Douglass laments, "Learning to read was more of a curse than a blessing. It revealed my miserable condition without providing a remedy" (Douglass and Jacobs). Yet, Herndon's mother offers a counter-narrative, one deeply ingrained in Black households: the Curse of Ham from scripture. Herndon poignantly recalls, "She explained that we, as negroes, had sinned against God. A profound sense of guilt overcame me. I realized that I must be a sinner too. The white boys who had called me 'nigger' must have been acting according to God's will" (Herndon, p. 11). Imagine the horror of being a child and learning that your earthly suffering is divinely sanctioned, and that salvation can only be attained in death. No silver lining exists here; destiny was never yours to mold. Even more unsettling is the realization that the very God who sustained you in illness is also the architect of your misery.

Thirdly, the origins of white supremacist evangelism can be linked to the ideology presented in "*The White Man's Burden.*" Although penned in 1897, this concept embodies attitudes that stretch back to the imperial era. The poem urges those who identify as white to take on the so-called duty of civilizing non-white races globally. It portrays them as "half devil and half child" (Kipling), suggesting innate inferiority. Ironically, those professing to bring civility and Christianity to non-whites were the very perpetrators of rape, murder, and even cannibalistic threats. Their claims of enlightenment were cloaked in hypocrisy, as they failed to scrutinize

their own acts of barbarism. As Douglass aptly stated, “The man who wields the blood-clotted cow skin during the week fills the pulpit on Sunday. He who sells my sister for prostitution purposes stands as a pious advocate of purity” (Douglass and Jacobs). This illustration lays bare the deceit of white individuals posing as saviors while enacting cruelty. They used the veneer of evangelism to mask their own savagery. Africans, like Olaudah Equiano, already had familiarity with Christian practices, as indicated in his account where he mentions customs akin to those of the Jews (Equiano).

However, despite practicing the same religion, Black and white people inhabited entirely different realities. To the dismay of Black individuals, they often became the sacrificial pawns for those claiming to offer assistance and enlightenment. The duplicitous Mr. Covey, described as a “class-leader in the Methodist church” in Douglass’s narrative, epitomizes this grim reality (Douglass and Jacobs, p.66). Covey, a man of modest means, manipulated a female slave into pregnancy as part of a sinister scheme to augment his wealth. His plan bore fruit, resulting in the birth of twins—a macabre exploitation of human life. The atrocities didn’t stop there. Captain Auld, another former master of Douglass, demonstrated equally perverse beliefs. He would brutalize a young woman before breakfast and leave her bound for extended durations (Douglass and Jacobs, p. 64-65).

White supremacists ardently clung to their ideology of moral and ethnic superiority, even going to the extent of justifying the killings of those who defied their authority. The horrifying fate of a slave named Demby, killed for resisting further lashings, exemplifies this grim resolve. Another case involving the master manipulator Mr. Gore led to Demby’s murder, intended as a cautionary tale to discourage disobedience among other slaves. Mr. Gore believed that Demby’s

death would not only deter further rebellion but also avert the unlikely scenario of slaves rising to enslave whites. However, his reasoning was flawed; the unceasing abuse inflicted upon Black bodies only fueled the sadistic desires of men like Covey and Gore. Throughout, these individuals operated under the belief that they were executing God's will—an endeavor devoid of mystery or magic, but fully justified by their twisted interpretations of scripture, often citing the Curse of Ham.

Your conclusion elegantly ties together the themes of your essay, likening the mechanisms of terror to the artistry of magic while also highlighting the tragic reality for those caught in its web.

In summation, terror operates much like magic, beginning its narrative with suspense and weaving complexity into its fabric. Deception and smokescreens are tools embraced to engage both the magician and participant. Yet, when the smoke clears, leaving the participant bewildered, horror ensues. Disillusionment sets in, transforming individuals into trapped animals. Amid their altered circumstances, a single question persists: "How did this happen? How did I get here?" Such is the life of those whose freedom has been stolen. At some point, they were captivated by a seemingly innocuous novelty, only to become ensnared in a chain of events leading to bondage. Awareness, knowledge, and even divine intervention prove inadequate for liberation. Instead, their well-being becomes their undoing, rendering them mere props in the magician's— their master's—performance. White supremacy skillfully deflects attention from its own misdeeds while seeking redemption for its devastating impact. For those who are condemned, the only solace can be found in the rhythms and blues—a musical expression of their pain and struggle.

As we strive to free ourselves from mental slavery,

Our beautiful dark twisted fantasy, echos with songs of freedom,

The wailing of our redemption songs fills the air,

Conveying a single plea: Can I Live?

Only we can liberate our minds,

So we sing loudest in our deepest sorrow.

Freedom, at last.

- A poem by author

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