Introduction

Toward a Genre Study of Black Male Death and Dying

*Addressing the Caricatures
that Serve as Theory in the Study
of Black Males*

I SEE DEAD BLACK MALE BODIES, Black men and boys, in the streets. Dead Niggers made into YouTube sensations. I see their executions on the Internet: the corpses of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, little Tamir Rice cycled for eternity. I hear Jordan Davis's music and Sean Bell's vows. I feel Black male death all around me and I am scared—scared that one day I will be forced to not speak. They shame me when I speak about Black men and boys. They threaten me with the names of white men. I hear: patriarch, sexist, misogynist as they condemn me for identifying the murderers and lynch mobs of Black males. They wear hoods with disciplinary embroidery whispering *Nigger* under their breaths. These Black and white faces stand guard at the gates of the academy, and I fear they will make me be still; they will kill me. They will force me to remain silent. I write this knowing that my words will not outpace the bullet of another gun transforming living flesh into rotting meat. I know as I write this that another Black man or boy will die. I know as I think about their deaths, the end of their lives is coming to be. This America makes corpses of Black males. It is simply the reality of our day that Black males die. This death, however, is shunned, cast out of the halls of the university, and avoided at all costs by disciplines. This reality has not transformed any of the decadent theories that tie Black manhood to the caricatures of the 1970s. Black men are thought to be latent rapists—the Black Macho of old—violent patriarchs, a privileged Black male, craving the moment he is allowed to achieve the masculinity of whites. These mythologies, of decades long gone, remain the morality of disciplines and the political foundation from which racist caricatures become revered concepts.

I write this book from a twenty-first century in which Black men and boys are still being lynched in America. Otis Byrd was found hanging from a tree on March 20, 2015, in Port Gibson, Mississippi,[1] and Lennon Lacy's seventeen-year-old body was found on August 29, 2014, hanging from a children's swing set in Bladenboro, North Carolina.[2] I write from a twenty-first century in which Black men such as Matthew Ajibade are hit in their genitals with a Taser and beaten to death.[3] I write to you from a twenty-first century where a Black man named Kevin Campbell, a father stopped for driving on a suspended license, was confined to a cage for hours and anally sodomized by a Detroit police officer.[4] I write to you from a world where an innocent Black man can be deprived of decades from his life and convicted of rape because his face came to a woman in a dream as her rapist.[5] This is the precariousness that has come to define what Black men and boys endure as life. I write this book to give voice to the Black male coerced into silence: his experiences denied within disciplines and his realities refused by theory.

Theory is a fickle thing. The proliferation of discourses around sexuality over the past several decades has done little to clarify the relation between socially constructed gender categories (such as race and sex) and the biological bodies that possess them. Likewise, despite decades of debate, the category of masculinity remains indeterminate and somewhat vacuous, referenced almost solely by one's genitalia.[6] The appearance of more complex theoretical advancements articulated by the crest of race, class, and gender has come to conceal rather than reveal significant and empirical aspects of Black (sexual) life. Imposing analytic categories on bodies as substitutable for depicting actual social or historical relations obscures both the quotidian and the repetitive phenomena that materialize as various social stratifications. It is not uncommon for (complex) theories of masculinity to stand in stark contradiction to the actually observable positions of the groups they aim to reference.

Whereas masculinities studies outside the United States have begun the arduous task of assessing the presumed linkage among maleness, patriarchy, and domination, feminist theory in the United States has come to emphasize masculinity as primarily patriarchal and to claim those masculinities that do not coincide with this dominant gender hierarchy for itself—as progressive and feminist-inspired.[7] These masculinity scholars from Europe and its past colonies have insisted on the difference between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities and argued for a more accurate account of (white) men that "further facilitates the discovery and identification of "equality masculinities: those that legitimate an egalitarian relationship between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among men."[8] They insist:

> Gendered power relations are dynamic, unstable and ambiguous, and dominant forms of masculinity do not always legitimize patriarchy. Therefore the question of men's patriarchal oppression of women must

remain an open empirical and contextual question. Gender and masculinity researchers therefore need to develop theoretical frameworks that can grasp changes, complexities, ambivalences, ruptures and resistance.[9]

While the male descendants of colonizers are recognized for the naturally occurring varieties of masculinities within their group, this insistence on multiple masculinities has often been denied to Black men who are the descendants of slaves. Theories concerning Black masculinity revolve around a fixed political idea in the United States that is deemed progressive by the extent to which it is sufficiently feminist and deemed patriarchal by the extent to which it is not. Unlike in mainstream masculinity scholarship, there have been few efforts to verify non-hegemonic Black masculinities sociologically or conceptually separate from the already established norms in gender studies. Black males, who are stereotyped as hyper-masculine and violent throughout society, are intuitively marked as patriarchal within theory. Instead of being similarly disrupted by the critiques of hegemonic masculinity's failure to account for the class and cultural diversity within white masculinities, hyper-masculinity is proposed as the phylogenic marker of Black maleness. Consequently, Black males are thought to be the exemplifications of white (bourgeois) masculinity's pathological excess. In other words, the toxic abnormality of a hegemonic white masculinity becomes the conceptual norm for Black men and boys.

Black males are often theorized as defective. As the gender theorist Arthur F. Saint-Aubin explains, "Even when [B]lack men are the ostensible subjects (they are, in fact, objects) of workshops, special journals editions, etc., they are still marginalized theoretically and compared to a norm by which they are usually judged lacking."[10] Because Black men are not subjects of—or in—theories emanating from their own experience, they are often conceptualized as the threats others fear them to be. This fear has been used to legitimize thinking of Black males as degraded and deficient men who compensate for their lack of manhood through deviance and violence. As the social scientists Andrea G. Hunter and James Earl Davis explain, "Studies of Black women emphasize how out of oppression a unique definition of womanhood was forged, one in which adversity gave rise to strength. However, the discourse around men and oppression focuses on the stripping away of manhood. It is a perspective that casts Black men as victims and ignores their capacity to define themselves under difficult circumstances."[11] This paradigm is far too prevalent to not warrant remark. Racist accounts of Black males depict them as lesser males who are lazy, unintelligent, aggressive, and violent toward women and children and who abandon their families physically and cannot provide for them economically, while nonetheless requiring coercive legal and extralegal sanctions to control their hyper-masculinity and predatory inclina-

tions. Racism against Black men often results in their emasculation, criminalization, and death. Black men have not only survived but developed rich analyses of this oppression under the capitalist ethno-patriarchal regime we call white supremacy. However, their thoughts are not spoken of as positive programs capable of actually addressing their suffering. The concepts emerging from Black male experience are often described as pathological coping mechanisms fixated on Black males' achieving their manhood at any cost, rather than liberatory ideas applicable to all Blacks.

Consequently, Black men's experiences of racism are framed as one-dimensional, narrow, and devoid of any analyses that understand the horrors of sexual violence. Such claims, however, severely underestimate the complexity of Black male subjugation under racist social systems and within periods of colonialization. As early as Calvin Hernton's *Sex and Racism in America,* there has been a realization that "racial hatred is carnal hatred . . . sexualized hatred"[12]—a phallicism or process that criminalizes Black males as sexual threats like the rapist, while simultaneously constituting them as the carnal excesses and fetishes of the white libido. Racism is a complex nexus, a cognitive architecture used to invent, reimagine, and evolve the presumed political, social, economic, sexual, and psychological superiority of the white races in society, while materializing the imagined inferiority and hastening the death of inferior races. Said differently, racism is the manifestation of the social processes and concurrent logics that facilitate the death and dying of racially subjugated peoples.

At the center of this complexity, the regenerative arc, so to speak, of this ideology is the caricature of racialized men as threats to the social and biological reproduction of white order. Simply put, "One of the motivations behind European-American racism—as discerned for example in certain racial myths and stereotypes, in certain civil and criminal statutes regarding miscegenation and rape, and in the history of racial brutality like lynching—is a fear of [B]lack male sexuality and a need to control [B]lack masculinity."[13] For the idea of an all-powerful white male figure to achieve cultural institutionalization and buy-in from the masses, "the dominant culture needs its 'nigger boys,' its ugly inferior, its 'other' in order to construct itself as superior and beautiful 'men.'"[14] The Black male—the Nigger—was constructed as the white race's antipodal monstrosity, a sexual threat to the very foundation of white civilization if its savagery was not repressed. These speciations from the ideal (white) male type are examples of the *testeric* condition that plagues Black maleness generally in the United States.[15] Because *testeria* emerges from the disjunctive isolation Black maleness has from the normative maleness that is represented as white, the *testeric*, or the cool poser, or the eunuch manifests the repression of the social order corporeally—in his flesh—as Pavlovian peculiarities to stave off death. The death of Black males is meant to prevent *his* reproduction, and impede his ability to reproduce. This is the boundary

between the abject and the corpse the Black male inhabits. It is the peculiar genre Black males occupy and the place from which their perspectives emanate.

The Man–Not as a Philosophical Grounding for a Genre Study of Black Male Death and Dying

Black male death and suffering is thought to be generic, captured solely by the category of race. Race, however, is not an efficacious category of analysis under our present intersectional and poststructural arrangement. Race is a category under constant disciplinary surveillance, exposing it to a seemingly infinite number of attacks for being overdetermined and essentialist and therefore in need of any combination of experimental antiessentialist solutions. This dispersion/deconstruction/dismissal of the race category has concrete consequences for Black males attempting to situate and describe their experience and history, because race has been the only category offered by disciplines through which Black men can theoretically articulate their experience. Consequently, Black males find themselves articulating their concerns through alien theories rooted in this displacement. Because race is accepted as socially constructed, all cultural and experiential products from a racial perspective remain suspect. Race consciousness is problematized and rejected prima facia as narrow and masculine, while gender, as Oyèrónké Oyewúmì reminds us, remains inextricably tied to biological notions of the female despite the performative and cultural-situatedness of the term.[16] Black and female allows for standpoints, histories, and experiences that serve to ground (gender) theory, while Black and male is taken to be the historical perspective that must be disowned to free these other-gendered, not-male voices.

It is routinely insisted that race and gender are socially constructed and illusory. Yet it is only race that is displaced, while gender, *being synonymous with female*, is centered as the dominant theoretical voice of Black subjectivity and vulnerability—a centering technique that depends on the sustaining anthropological assumptions of white gender categories, not those disfigured within the negation of Black(ness)—the nonhuman/nonbeing matrices authored within chattel slavery and colonialism. Gender becomes the symbolic representation of bodies—their intent—while race simply acts as a modifier and operates to overdetermine or lessen the power position of *maleness.* Consequently, gender studies becomes discourses about women, where racialized men are interpreted by the lack of power they have compared with real (white) men. Black men simply do not exist as viable social subjects or reflective entities, given their disfigurement within the established gender order. Rooting gender within the biological confines of the female body makes thinking about gender synonymous with thinking about women—the *who and what they re-*

late to. In this bio-mythos, the female is taken to be the taxonomic origin of gender(ed) knowledge and history, where that which is defined as *not female* can only be outside and barred from creating gender theory.

Because *maleness* has come to be understood as synonymous with power and patriarchy, and racially codified as white, it has no similar existential content for the Black male, who in an anti-Black world is denied maleness and is ascribed as feminine in relation to white masculinity. If whiteness is masculine in relation to Blackness, then Blackness becomes relationally defined as not masculine and feminine, because it lacks the power of white masculinity. Thus, Black maleness is, in fact, a de-gendered negation of white maleness that is feminine because of its subordinate position to white masculinity, but *not female*, because Black maleness lacks a specific gender coordinate that corresponds to either white maleness or white femaleness—and, as shown later, relates to the white female primarily as rapist. Maria Lugones similarly emphasizes the anachronism of attributing gender to the colonized and enslaved bodies we now think of through the frameworks of Black masculinity and Black femininity. As she remarks, "Under the imposed gender frame work [of colonial modernity] the bourgeois white Europeans were civilized; they were fully human. The hierarchical dichotomy as a mark of the human also became a normative tool to damn the colonized. The behavior of the colonized and their personalities/souls were judged as bestial and thus non-gendered, promiscuous, sexual and sinful."[17] The colonized/racialized subject was denied gender precisely to define the boundaries between the content of the human and the deficit of those racially speciated. This is not to say there was no sexual differentiation between bodies and the roles assigned to them. Rather, it highlights that "colonized people become male and female. Males became not-human-as-not-men and colonized females became not-human-as-not-women."[18] The Black man, deprived not only of an identity but also a history and existence that differs from his brute negation, experiences the world as a *Man-Not.*

Man-Not(ness) is a term used to express the specific genre category of the Black male. *Genre* differs from *gender* by this distance Black males share with Western man a priori, and, by consequence, patriarchy. Whereas gender asserts that historical and social orders, defined by the biologic marker of sex, are in fact synonymous with the historical and sociological location of Black males, genre expresses how the register of nonbeing distorts the categories founded upon white anthropology or that of the human. Popular categories of analysis such as class, gender, and even race suppose a universal human template upon which they imprint. But what is the applicability of human categories on the nonhuman? The Black male is negated not from an origin of (human) being, but from nihility. Frantz Fanon's reflections on objecthood and nonbeing are not simply descriptions of negation; they are not terms of proxemics but terms of register. Nonbeing expresses the condition of Black

male being—the nihility from which it is birthed. Away from the bourgeois order of kind expressed by man, genre is specific to the kind, the type of existence expressed by the Black male. For Sylvia Wynter, *genre* indicates the disruption of the order founded on European MAN and WOMAN, which is expressed by the term of gender. The contact of Europe with non-Europeans reordered the gender schema, because "the primary code of difference now became that between 'men' and 'natives,' with the traditional 'male' and 'female' distinctions now coming to play a secondary—if none the less powerful—reinforcing role within the system of symbolic representations."[19] Insofar as Blackness expresses the indeterminacy of being as nonbeing, gender too is reformulated. This is why Wynter coined the word *genre* to replace *gender*. She writes, "'genre' and 'gender' come from the same root. They mean 'kind.' . . . [W]hat I am suggesting is that 'gender' has always been a function of the instituting of 'kind.'"[20]

The Man-Not grows from the incongruity I observed between what theory claims to explain and the *actual* existence of Black men and boys—an *actual* reality that remains excluded from its purview. Simply stated, analyzing Black males as the Man-Not is a theoretical formulation that attempts to capture the reality of Black maleness in an anti-Black world. Because it is rooted in the colonial formulation of sex designation, not gender, the Man-Not recognizes that racial maleness is not coextensive with or synonymous to the formulations of masculinity, or patriarchy, offered by white reality. The Man-Not is the denial not only of Black manhood but also of the possibility to be anything but animal, the savage beast, outside the civilizational accounts of gender. To suggest that Black males are, in fact, gendered patriarchs is an erasure of the actual facts of anti-Black existence and a substitution of the white anthropological template at the core of negating Black (male) existence as its end. Michael Brown's death, like that of Vonderitt Myers, Oscar Grant, John Crawford, Jordan Davis, Alton Sterling, Philandro Castile, and Stephen Watts, represents the accumulation of an intellectual failure to grasp the complexities and the motivations implicated within the genocidal logics of American racism beyond the categories of modern taxonomy. The Negrophobia that drove white America to endorse lynching as a technology of murder is the same anxiety and fear that now allow the white public to endorse the murder of Black men and boys as justifiable homicides. Black males are often killed by police officers because the officers claim they fear for their lives— that Black men have life-threatening weapons or guns. This phobia is a normalized and institutional program used to justify police violence, ostracism, and incarceration; it is a fear that is given so much weight in individual cases precisely because it is a fear that both white America and many nonwhite Americans share. The vulnerability of Black men and boys lies in this consensus, and it is one that extends beyond the borders of white psychopathology. It is an American maxim propagated through the mass media and the

assumptions of liberal progressive gender politics and internalized by the populations—Black, white, male, or female—that consume these mythologies and images.

In academic philosophy, there has yet to be a text that deals specifically with the history and theorization of Black males. While there are accounts of Black men and boys throughout the social sciences, mostly focused on the obstacles facing this group, the discipline of philosophy has made no such efforts to investigate Black maleness beyond its alleged privileged position to that of the Black woman or its undesirability (hyper-masculinity, [Black] Nationalism, and so on). Heavily influenced by intersectional feminist accounts of race and gender, Black men are thought to exemplify a privileged *disadvantaged* status that obscures our viewing of gender when their reality or subjectivity is centered. Rooted in an idealist calculus, Black men are conceptualized as empowered by their male identity such that any asymmetry between intraracial groups, where Black men, for example, are more visible or more represented than Black women, is attributed to patriarchy. This book aims for a closer interdisciplinary examination of this gender(ed) claim. Using history, sociology, and a range of social science findings, this book argues that Black men and boys are, in fact, *disadvantaged* because of their maleness. Taking the Black male experience seriously shows that what is now called gender is cumulative, not causal, and while certain problems may accumulate around male or female bodies, they are not isolated to those bodies or their histories. Hence, instead of being protected by patriarchy, Black men and boys are revealed to be its greatest victims under closer examination.

This book is not predetermined; it is not merely an articulation of a foregone conclusion. It was not written as the imposition of a theory onto Black males—as objects of study—in which the desired conclusion was decided before the research into Black men and boys as complex subjects even began. This book *theorizes Black male life* in the United States: its dying and the reality of its death. In other words, this text aims not only to use theory to draw tenable conclusions from the actual data on intimate partner violence, homicide, and incarceration as it pertains to Black men and boys but also to use data to inform the abstract themes that, according to gender theorists, explain Black males' social reality. Far too often, Black males are projected into academic projects as the stereotypes individuals perceive them as rather than how they actually exist in the world. This book was written to overwhelm the silence imposed on Black males through negative racial caricatures that become absolved of their moral offensiveness once they are called gender theory. Ideas of Black men as abusers of women and children, rapists, and power-hungry deviants run rampant throughout the academy and inform what is intuitively expressed as academic (gender) theory. Is there sufficient evidence, however, to ground these theories?

While there is tacit agreement among American institutions (courts, prisons, the press, and so forth) that Black males' deaths and the individuals

responsible for these murders will be ideologically supported in their ratio-nalizations and financially rewarded for their actions,[21] this is not the full scope of Black male vulnerability. Black males also endure societal discrimi-nation and social ostracism because of their maleness. In his personal life, the discrimination targeting the Black male in the workforce often results in his unemployment, which only confirms that he is undesirable and unwanted as a colleague or peer within universities, corporations, and many blue-collar occupations. He is assumed to be a deviant, so his history of trauma and physical or sexual abuse at the hands of men or women, which precipitates many of his interpersonal conflicts as an adult, is denied. He is interpreted as a violent and abusive individual in need of criminal sanction rather than as a victim in need of treatment and compassion. This book is concerned with the sociological, historical, and ontological weight of Black manhood. It explores how the myth of the super-predator is codified within the disciplinary prolif-eration of theories about Black masculinity and makes it seemingly impos-sible to conceptualize the Black male as a victim and disadvantaged when compared with other groups. This book shows how theory and stereotype converge throughout the multiple exegeses offered to analyze the external conditions and internal motivations of Black men and boys. Academic theo-ry uses the same pathological explanations of Black male deviance, violence, and abuse that continue to haunt Black males and justify their murder in society. To advance theory, the vulnerability of the Black male is denied, and his disadvantage is obscured from a full viewing by scholars and the public. He is thought of only as a perpetrator, never a victim.

The Man-Not was thought of as a corrective of sorts, as a concept of Black males that could challenge the historical and theoretical accounts of Black men and boys that have proliferated throughout disciplines and are taken as gospel in academic research. This book is the first philosophical exploration of the oppression of the Black male that aims to synthesize the multiple find-ings and research concerning his condition across disciplines. Rather than simply reproduce sociological findings highlighting his societal disadvantage, I create a theory and operational paradigm by which we can understand the intellectual, historical, and sexual diversity of Black men. While such an ex-ploration will never capture the full experience of Black male homosexuality any more than the Black male's heterosexual experience or his denied and condemned polyamory, *The Man-Not* is an attempt to reflectively engage the conditions that dictate the formation of Black male sexualities and the his-torical vulnerabilities that obscure our viewing of them as actual realities of Black manhood. This is a reflection not on "identities" but, rather, the his-torical material—the problems and experiences—that contour how Black men have come to define themselves. This is a book to challenge how we think of and perceive the conditions that actually affect all Black males and why we choose to see some things but deny others.

Black Masculinity as Buck Studies: Documenting the Links between Hegemonic Masculinity and the Reality of Black Males

The mimetic thesis, or the idea that Black males seek to emulate and ultimately realize themselves as patriarchs next to white men, has been a central feature of Black feminist ideology since the penning of Michele Wallace's *The Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* in the late 1970s. The emergence of the Buck—the mythological heterosexual Black male figure that emerged from slavery—as the basis of Black male political aspiration in the twentieth century has been a central feature of Black masculinity studies for the past four decades. Wallace's text reduced the complexities of political economics, racism, history, and class mobility to the genital level. She maintained that Black men had internalized the white man's obsession with his penis. As she said, "[w]hite men were perversely obsessed with the [B]lack man's genitals but the obsession turned out to be a communicable disease and in the sixties [B]lack men came down with high fevers."[22] More than simply offering one perspective of the Black Power era, Wallace's text created a bridge between white patriarchy and Black male political aspirations that allowed the racially specific accounts of white patriarchal power isolated to white feminist theories of dominance or hegemony to extend to Black males. The Black Macho, the "male chauvinist that was frequently cruel, narcissistic, and shortsighted," was birthed by Black men accepting the sexual primitivism of the Black male presupposed by whites.[23] The Black man of the 1960s lost himself in the image of this brute, according to Wallace, making "himself a living testament to the white man's failures."[24] He suffered poverty, deprivation, and unhappiness "because his [B]lack perspective, like the white perspective, supported the notion that manhood is more valuable than anything else."[25] Wallace makes a distinction between an organic and a mimetic Black manhood: "As long as [the Black man] was able to hold onto his own [B]lack-centered definition of manhood, his sense of himself was not endangered." The longer the Black male stayed in this country, the more "he would get the [B]lack and white perspectives confused."[26]

Largely influenced by the adoption of Freudian psychoanalysis and the idea of Black male assimilation into American society, contemporary Black gender frames continue to understand Black masculinity as striving to fulfill its oedipal drive toward the father right of white masculinity. Under this paradigm, Black males are reduced to their phallic aspirations for selfhood and seek to dominate others to compensate for their subjugation. Gender theorists in the 1990s asserted that phallocentrism, patriarchy, and Black males' *lacking* (be it of power, recognition, or a symbolic phallus) were a viable interpretive frame through which Black maleness could be understood. Even today, Black males are depicted as the absence of themselves for one another, having few attributes worth emulating. Their lack of Black fathers, their lack

of power in America, their lack of employment, their lack of manhood—all sociological phenomena—become the markers of their incompleteness, demonstrations of their definitional-ontological failures as Black males rather than proof of their subordinated male status and existence in a completely different register of sexuality. Black males are not only defined by this lack; they are also thought to be complete only when they stand side by side with white men. Consequently, Black masculinity is theorized through this psychoanalytic (unconscious) yearning for the world of the white man, his power, and his possessions, which often include the white woman.

By disregarding the historical examples of Black male resistance to white supremacy, as well as the traditional expectations of hegemonic masculinity supported even by Black women at the anthropological level as Christian, capitalist, homophobic, and so forth, the Black male is attached to patriarchy at a biological level, such that every action of self-defense, politics, or love becomes an exercise of his attempt to realize the patriarchy denied to him. Aaronette M. White summarizes this position in Black gender frames quite well:

> Though most African American men do not experience the same level of power as most [w]hite American men, patriarchy produces pecking orders across different groups of men and within different subgroups of men. Each subgroup of men defines manhood in ways that conform to the economic and social possibilities of that group. However, even marginalized men (e.g., poor men of color) accept the system because they benefit from the "patriarchal dividend," which is the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women, particularly the women in their subgroup.[27]

Accounts similar to White's thinking can be found throughout Black masculinity literature,[28] but the evidence that subordinated masculinity is of the same species as hegemonic masculinity such that it can be of the kind that obtains this ideal is sorely lacking. To substantiate the view that Black men benefit from patriarchy despite their inferior social, economic, and racial status, White appeals to Raewyn Connell's first edition of *Masculinities* as evidence for the claim that Black men would be rewarded in a patriarchal society as men.[29] This grounding of patriarchy in Black male interest and his desire to be, or be like, the white male is suspicious. It suggests that while Black men can articulate themselves as oppressed subjects to myriad structures and ideologies, from racism to classism, imperialism to colonization, and religion to atheism, gender remains unknown to them despite their role and history as subordinated men positioned outside the masculinity of ruling-class whites in the United States.

The lure of white patriarchy is a common trope used to explain the mimetic urge of Black males, but why do we find no assumption of this imitative

character in Black feminist accounts of Black womanhood, despite the vast historical works demonstrating the internalization of various Victorian gender ideals and social Darwinist theories, as well as their support for patriarchy as the basis of racial uplift during the nineteenth century? Black men and women have been subjected to the same cultural, ethnological, and anthropological theories rooted in racial evolution, yet only Black males are thought to have internalized these historical views to such an extent that their sociological realities have been transformed into Black masculine ontology. While much of Black feminism historically has appealed to democratic reform and continued integration into institutions, or to protection and recognition by the law (attempts to codify Black female vulnerability into societal institutions so that rape, domestic abuse, and discrimination are understood as violence to a living, breathing person), these appeals are recognized as calls for progressive change rather than a desire for the positionality and power of white womanhood, despite appeals to the same concepts and apparatuses that historically have sustained white women's (and men's, for that matter) economic and political power. There is no scholarship asserting that Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" proves that she aspires to the powers, recognition, and status of white women denied to her, but a litany that criticizes Black men for the slightest similarity to white thought or rhetoric concerning manhood.

Are only Black males envious of the position of the dominant classes? Take, for example, Truth's famous condemnation of Black men getting the right to vote, which has been quoted for years as evidence of the historical concern Black women have had about Black male political advancement:

> There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about the colored women; and if colored men get their rights, and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before. So I am for keeping the thing going while things are stirring; because if we wait till it is still, it will take a great while to get it going again. [w]hite women are a great deal smarter, and know more than colored women, while colored women do not know scarcely anything. They go out washing, which is about as high as a colored woman gets, and their men go about idle.[30]

Truth believed Black men were more brutal than the white men who orchestrated slavery and Black women were less intelligent than the white women who ruled over them. The historian Paula Giddings explains that "the difficult circumstances of [Truth's] life gave her a distorted view of [w]hites and Blacks."[31] Consequently, says Giddings, Truth shares a sentiment of Black men eerily similar to that of Elizabeth C. Stanton, who believed that "it would be better for a Black woman to be the slave of an educated [w]hite man than of a degraded,

ignorant, [B]lack one."[32] If Truth's quote remains a reminder of the danger Black male politics has posed since the mid-nineteenth century, then why are we not also suspicious of the allure white womanhood could have over Black women?

Think of Stokely Carmichael's statement, "The only position for women in the SNCC is prone," for instance.[33] This sentence has become not only representative of him or of the ideology of the organization he represented but also evidence of Black males' patriarchal political inclination throughout the centuries.[34] Mary King, a member of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the author of *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement*, offers a vastly different account of this oft-cited statement. Carmichael's comment pertained to a position paper circulated for the November 1964 Waveland meeting of the SNCC written by Mary King and Casey Hayden. The position paper spoke to the assumption of male leadership and the role of male and female workers of SNCC. The position papers were meant to get the leadership to think about foundational questions: "'What is SNCC[?]' 'What do we organize[?]' 'Where do we organize[?]'"[35] The position paper on women asked the representatives to think about the role women played in the SNCC's leadership and decision-making structure. Specifically, the paper asked members to "consider why it is in SNCC that women who are competent, qualified, and experienced are automatically assigned to the 'female' kinds of jobs such as: typing, desk work, telephone work, filing, library work, cooking, and the assistant kind of administrative work but rarely the executive kind."[36]

King fondly accounts that Carmichael made fun of everything that crossed his agile mind, and this position paper was no different. When he came to the not-so-anonymous women's paper in the meeting, King recounts, "Looking straight at me, he grinned broadly and shouted, 'What is the position of women in SNCC?' Answering himself, he responded, 'The position of women in SNCC is prone!'"[37] According to King, the now infamous statement by Carmichael was a joke. She remembers that "Stokely threw back his head and roared outrageously with laughter. We all collapsed with hilarity. . . . It drew us all closer together, because, even in that moment, he was poking fun at his own attitudes."[38] Instead of describing Carmichael as some raging patriarchal maniac, King says, "Casey and I felt, and continue to feel, that Stokely was one of the most responsive men at the time that our anonymous paper appeared in 1964."[39] Several years later, Hayden confirmed King's recollection of events in SNCC. Even in 2010, Hayden remembered the SNCC as a "womanist, nurturing, and familial" organization. In fact, Hayden went as far as to state, "Women's culture and [B]lack culture merg[ed] for me in the southern freedom movement, especially in SNCC, free of constraints and the values of white patriarchy."[40]

What is it that essentially ties Black manhood—its aspirations, ideals, and perceptions—to random statements or jokes made by Black males to sexism

and misogyny? What makes an individual's comments come to be understood as the historical consciousness of most, if not all, Black males? How does one Black man's thoughts in the 1960s come to represent the consciousness of them all, or even a majority of them, throughout time? Despite the prevalence of arguments to this effect, Black women were subjected to the sexist and misandrist ideas of the times no less often than Black men were. This is not an issue of masculinity or femininity as much as it is an issue of the assumptions of their day. Gender differences between Black men and women simply did not produce clear delineations of thought and attitudes throughout history. In fact, this is a position articulated by Wallace herself. She explains, "Black women would define their femininity (or their liberation, which was not, however, a movement) in terms of their lack of these same superficial masculine characteristics precisely because the myth of their inferiority, the [B]lack female stereotype, had always portrayed them as oversexed, physically strong and warlike."[41] Wallace actually argues that the Black Macho is only one side of the gender dynamic created by integration: "In the process of assimilation, integration and accommodation, [B]lacks had taken on the culture and values of whites in regard to sexuality and gender. This did more than make it inevitable that [B]lack men would be sexist or misogynistic: it also made inevitable [B]lack women's completely dysfunctional self-hatred." Yet there is not one exploration of this self-hatred taken on by Black women under the same conditions that allegedly created the Black Macho.[42] The Superwoman, literally the second half of the title to her book, has not generated any discussion in academic gender theory or Black feminism, despite the claim that, if we accept the Black Macho thesis, Black women aspire to the very same end.

Feminist-inspired theories of Black masculinity establish their legitimacy by racially profiling Black males. These theories assert a priori that Black males, as a group, are aspiring patriarchs, then surveil the individual behavior of Black men in society or, throughout a narrowly selected corpus of literatures accepted by disciplines, as evidence of that defect. This approach ignores the actual conditions and violence in American society that affect Black males and completely disregards the presence of the very same behaviors in other groups. Simply put, Black men appear to be explained by gender theory because they are the group most targeted by it. These accounts symbolically biologize Black maleness as the cause of seemingly endless pathologies that are actually expressed by any number of individuals regardless of their race or gender who find themselves in similar economic or political conditions. Contemporary thinking about patriarchy condemns Black male violence as an instrument of domination, while absolving Black women immersed in the same circumstances who display the same violent behaviors. It has simply become an accepted conceptual practice to construct Black males as malicious because their *excess masculinity* necessitates the domination of others, while women, regard-

less of multiple examples of violence, are constructed as ultimately good-intentioned and nonviolent because they are feminine.

Hegemonic Masculinity Theory and the Construction of the Black Male Threat: The Problem with Asserting Connell's Theory as Applicable to Black Males

The melding together of hegemonic masculinity theory and Wallace's account of the Black Macho within contemporary gender discourses is stunning. Sex role theory is heavily dependent on the political economy between men and women founded on the nuclear family in patriarchal societies, so it seems obvious that Wallace is not presenting the Black Macho as a sex role historically solidified by the relation between Black men and women within nuclear families. Wallace's rendering of history and slavery maintains that Black men and women have been denied the roles of white society because Black men and women were prevented from marrying and accepts that there was a Black manhood before the 1960s that was not Macho-istic. Wallace suggests that white masculinity was an ideal that Black men strived to attain, given their greater societal opportunities after civil rights. Allegedly, this newfound access to power led Black men to not only internalize white Americans' perverse hyper-sexual stereotypes of Black masculinity but also desire these sexual taboos politically for themselves.

Hegemonic masculinity theory resonates with many of the claims introduced by Wallace because Connell's first articulation of hegemonic masculinity was interpreted by scholars in the West as the aspiration toward which all masculinities tended. Hegemonic masculinity was a theory developed by Raewyn Connell in the 1980s. Connell's first work, *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture*, was a dense study of the Australian ruling class and its conflicts with the working-class population.[43] It is unsurprising, then, given Connell's interest in class theory, that Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony had some appeal to her evolving thinking about gender. As originally introduced, Connell conceptualized hegemonic masculinity as "a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women."[44] Hegemonic masculinity asserts itself as a heterosexual practice that seeks to dominate women and subordinated masculinities that challenge its definition, such as that of homosexuality.[45] Connell does suggest that Western imperialism and colonialism fundamentally change the configuration of masculinity and femininity in relation to Blacks, but this thesis is not fully explored in this earlier work or introduced as a reason that some racialized or impoverished men might not seek to emulate the hegemonic masculine ideal in a given society.[46] Connell is very specific in her deployment of Gramsci's idea of hegemony in this regard:

In the concept of hegemonic masculinity, "hegemony" means (as in Gramsci's analyses of class relations in Italy from which the term is borrowed) a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes. Ascendancy of one group of men over another achieved at the point of a gun, or by the threat of unemployment, is not hegemony. Ascendancy which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth, is.[47]

As a normative aspiration, hegemonic masculinity depends on socializing members of a given patriarchal society to an ideal form. Connell is very clear that "the cultural ideal (or ideals) of masculinity need not correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the majority of men. Indeed the winning of hegemony often involves the creation of models of masculinity which are quite specifically fantasy figures."[48] Because hegemonic masculinity is held at the ideological level, there is no need for it to conflict with the emphasized femininity of the society—in fact, they would complement each other.[49] Connell's theory asserts that society is always in a "state of play"—dynamic, struggling, and meeting challenges against ideology with reification and new ideological rationalizations to support the desirability of the asserted hegemony. Institutions, individuals, and social forces are in constant interaction within the hegemonic masculine culture. There is no stasis or fixity in this account.

Connell's subsequent work, *Masculinities*, begins with a historical and theoretical conscience that is not readily apparent in *Gender and Power*. From the outset, Connell is clear that some societies simply do not have the concept of masculinity, much less an ideology of hegemonic masculinity. It simply is not universal. Connell also recognizes that "'masculinity' does not exist except in contrast with femininity. A culture which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarized character types, at least in principle, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European/American culture."[50] Because it is a gender relation in society, masculinity is subject to social forces like any other relational phenomena. Connell outlines a three-tier model to understand the dynamics of masculinity. The first is power, or what is usually referred to as patriarchy or the subordination of women and dominance of men in Western/European societies. The second is labor, which includes not only wages but also the gendered division of wealth and work in these societies. Last but not least is cathexis or sexual desire. Extending her Freudian inclinations from *Gender and Power*, Connell asserts that the "practices that shape and realize desire are thus an aspect of the gender order."[51] As with her reading of Sigmund Freud in her first book, Connell is fascinated by Freud's explication of the "psychical and the social."[52] The motivations that drive how one constructs and

participates in the external through the permission of one's internal is central in *Masculinities*. In 2002, Connell created a fourth category, symbolization, to capture what is sometimes referred to as performances of identity or the meanings conveyed by individuals through speech, dress, and behavior to assert their gender meanings.[53]

Unlike the assertions of many scholars who continue to use masculinity theory, Connell does not have a fixation on a specific politics as the solution to hegemonic masculinity and structures of patriarchy. As she concedes, "The formulation in *Gender and Power* attempted to locate all masculinities (and all femininities) in terms of a single pattern of power, the 'global dominance' of men over women. While this was useful at the time in preventing the idea of multiple masculinities from collapsing into an array of competing lifestyles, it is now clearly inadequate to our understanding of relations among groups of men and forms of masculinity and of women's relations with dominant masculinities."[54] In sharp contrast to the biologism operating within the premises of American gender theorists, previously highlighted by Oyewùmí's criticism of feminist gender analysis, Connell recognizes that "dominance in gender relations involves an interplay of costs and benefits, challenges to hegemonic masculinity arise from the 'protest masculinities' of marginalized ethnic groups, and bourgeois women may appropriate aspects of hegemonic masculinity in constructing corporate or professional careers."[55] Although Connell concedes that masculinity has established particular ways of using male bodies for work, there is no specific biological causality in which subordinated and subjugated masculinities necessarily aspire to embody hegemonic masculinity, any more than women of the dominant classes would seek to use that hegemony or emphasized femininity for their own interests. Perhaps more interesting, there is no suggesting that any one politic—feminist or otherwise—remedies the societal instantiations of hegemonic masculinity.

To escape the colonial paradigms of gender established on first world taxonomies, Connell herself has called for a shift away from Western concepts of gender altogether. This shift centers masculinities of the global South founded in anti-colonial struggle as radical departures from patriarchy. Connell maintains that formulations of Black and Indigenous masculinities birthed in conflict with colonialism and the imperial ruling class are nonhegemonic and offer models of resistance to patriarchy.[56] Such developments in Connell's thinking, which place Black men and other racialized males outside the purview of hegemonic masculinity, have been disregarded in American gender theories, which still rely on her much earlier formulations of hegemonic masculinity as well as a version of Wallace's theory of Black male assimilation into dominant white cultural norms. In short, Connell's theory excludes racialized males from the hegemonic masculinity paradigm, but in the United States the dominance of Wallace's assimilationist account of Black masculinity makes Black men de facto patriarchs.

In the United States, Robert Staples's decades-long work on Black masculinity and the Black family has been reduced to his debate with Audre Lorde and Michele Wallace in *Black Scholar* in 1979.[57] Connell, however, recognizes Staples's work as a serious challenge to hegemonic masculinity theory as originally proposed alongside James Messerschmidt's work on working-class masculinities.[58] Connell's use of hegemony is meant to explain how "gender relations underscored the achievement of hegemonic masculinity largely through cultural ascendancy—discursive persuasion—encouraging all to consent to, coalesce around, and embody such unequal gender relations."[59] For Black males who were racially and sexually excluded from the ruling class, such aspirations were unrealizable. The early work of Black women working on gender and Marxism in the United States made such delineations abundantly clear. Extending Angela Davis's argument in "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves" concerning the "objective equality between Black men and women," from slavery to the Civil Rights era,[60] Gloria Joseph, a Marxist Black feminist, argued that "the documented history of Black women and men in the area of labor thus reveals that the peculiar institution of slavery played a curious role in bringing about equality among Black men and women as opposed to the inequality that was fostered among white women and men."[61] Because Black males (in terms of class position and a caste position as racialized laborers) are structurally excluded from the ruling class, serious thought was given in the late 1970s and early 1980s to their gender orientation and whether or not they could even participate in the historical and economic system of white patriarchy.

Remember: Connell has been developing her theory of gender and hegemonic masculinity since 1982. Her preliminary theories were based on her initial study of Australian high school boys from ruling-class and working-class families and the class aspirations reflected in the curriculum of these schools.[62] It is a commonly articulated position with the advent of standpoint epistemology that gender theories demand specificity to their subjects. It is often assumed that works by Black women theorists entail some visceral social-historical-cultural connection to Black women, for example. In the case of heterosexual Black men, however, there is a belief that their intentions and motives can be adequately captured by generic theories of masculinity formulated on male children in colonial societies and upper-class settler culture. The asserted closeness that Black males, among the poorest, most uneducated, and most isolated (unassimilated) members of American society, are thought to have to hegemonic masculinity and white patriarchy is evidence not of their actual power or aspirations for (white) male domination, but of the extent to which theorists and scholars have internalized the negative stereotypes about Black males as hyper-masculine, violent, and dangerous. Instead of being specific inquiries into the attitudes, history, and destiny of Black men, theories concerning Black masculinity are merely an attempt to read Black men into

the legacy established by white masculinity and condemn their political or economic aspirations that do not share the political motifs of liberal (Black) feminism as patriarchal. Under current disciplinary perspectives, Black males are denied the courtesy extended to other males throughout the world: the ability to organically formulate and practice non-patriarchal forms of manhood that are not dependent on feminist political norms.