

The Most Dangerous Place: Pro-Life Politics and the Rhetoric of Slavery

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ABSTRACT:

In recent years, comparisons between abortion and slavery have become increasingly common in American pro-life politics. Some have compared the struggle to extinguish abortion rights to the struggle to end slavery. Others have claimed that Roe v Wade is the Dred Scott of our time. Still others have argued that abortion is worse than slavery; it is a form of genocide. This paper tracks the abortion = slavery meme from Ronald Reagan to the current personhood movement, drawing on work by Orlando Patterson, Hortense Spillers, and Saidiya Hartman to develop a discourse of reproductive justice that grapples with the wounded kinship of slavery and racism.

In 2011, a series of billboards began to appear in urban areas across the United States.

February, New York City: "THE MOST DANGEROUS PLACE FOR AN AFRICAN AMERICAN IS IN THE WOMB." The image is a young black girl in a pink dress.ⁱ

April, St. Louis, Missouri: The same slogan on a baby blue background, beside the face of a young black boy.ⁱⁱ

March, Chicago's South Side: "Every 21 minutes our next possible LEADER is ABORTED." The image is a stylized version of President Obama's face.ⁱⁱⁱ

June, Atlanta, Georgia: "THE 13TH AMENDMENT FREED US. ABORTION ENSLAVES US," against the backdrop of a tattered American flag. Another reads: "THE 14TH AMENDMENT MADE US MEMBERS. ABORTION DISMEMBERS."^{iv}

June, Oakland, California: "BLACK & BEAUTIFUL," above the image of a sleeping black baby. "BLACK & UNWANTED," above the face of a black toddler. "BLACK CHILDREN ARE AN ENDANGERED SPECIES," beside the face of a black toddler, apparently on the verge of tears.^v

These billboards were designed and marketed by two different pro-life groups: Life Always and The Radiance Foundation. Life Always was founded by Stephen Broden, an African-American pastor and political commentator on FOX News; the board of directors consists of two black men (both pastors), a white woman who used to work for Planned Parenthood but is now a pro-life activist, and a white man "looking to give back blessings."^{vi} The Radiance Foundation is the brainchild of Ryan Scott Bomberger and Bethany Bomberger. Ryan – who presents as black – describes himself as the son of a woman who "was raped yet courageously chose to continue the pregnancy, giving him Life. He was adopted as a baby and grew up in a loving, multi-racial Christian family of 15... His life defies the myth of the "unwanted" child as he was adopted, loved and has

flourished.”^{vii} Bethany – who presents as white – describes herself as “an educator – encouraging and empowering others to pursue their life goals.”^{viii} Both groups represent Planned Parenthood as the central instrument of an ongoing black genocide.

While Life Always and the Radiance Foundation were putting up billboards in cities from Oakland to New York, the personhood movement was picking up steam in states across the South and Midwest: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Mississippi, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Virginia, and Wisconsin. The personhood movement seeks to abolish the right to abortion, not through the courts but through a constitutional amendment. As I will argue at some length in this paper, this strategy is based on an implicit, and sometimes explicit, but inherently opportunistic and misleading comparison of the struggle to ban abortion with the (apparently successful) abolition of slavery through the Thirteenth Amendment. The first formulation of a personhood amendment at the state level was Mississippi’s Proposition 26, which sought to redefine personhood to “include every human being from the moment of fertilization, cloning or the functional equivalent thereof.”^{ix} Proposition 26 was defeated on November 8, 2011, with a vote of 58 to 42, but three months later, on February 14, 2012, Virginia’s House Bill No. 1 passed in the General Assembly (66 to 32). This bill declared that the “life of each human being begins at conception,” and ensured that “unborn children at every stage of development enjoy all the rights, privileges, and immunities available to other persons, citizens, and residents of the commonwealth.”^x A similar bill was passed by the Oklahoma senate on February 15, 2012, with a vote of 34 to 8.^{xi}

The leaders and spokespersons of the state-based personhood movements are almost invariably white and male. But this does not prevent them from connecting their cause to the liberation of black people. In a video posted on the Personhood USA website, called “A Day to Advance,” a white-sounding male speaker declares that “Personhood is the new civil rights movement for the twenty-first century,” while a video image of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. flashes onto the screen; an audio track of Dr. King’s voice murmurs in the background, almost indiscernible. After the first Personhood Amendment was defeated in Mississippi, the founder of Personhood Mississippi, Les Riley, compared his own struggle to extinguish women’s reproductive choice with William Wilberforce’s struggle to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire:

For nearly twenty years, [Wilberforce] fought against bigotry, financial interests, personal illness, legal maneuvering, apathy and global politics until the slaved [sic] trade was abolished – and even then, it wasn't until 1833 that slaves were emancipated [*in the British empire, we should note – although Riley does not; slavery would not be abolished in the US until 1865*]! The fight for the right to life is not over – neither in Mississippi, nor in the USA, nor in the world at large.^{xii}

Riley is not the only leader in the personhood movement to compare their struggle to ban abortion with a white man’s struggle to abolish slavery. In an interview with the *Huffington Post*, Bryan Longworth, the director of Personhood Florida, also compares himself to Wilberforce, adding: “Slavery is virtually ended around the world now. Where

do you go to buy a good slave today? You can't get one. Why? Because people now see slavery as abhorrent, and one day people will see abortion as equally abhorrent if not more abhorrent.”^{xiii}

What is going on here? For decades, conservatives such as Ronald Reagan, Supreme Court Judge Antonin Scalia, and pro-life legal scholars such as George Swan and Charles Rice, have compared the abolition of slavery with the proposed abolition of abortion.^{xiv} The argument goes something like this: If we respect and defend the civil rights of all persons, black or white, then we should respect and defend the sanctity of all human life, from the fertilized egg to the patient on life support. But since the election of a black president in 2008, comparisons between abortion and slavery have both intensified and mutated from “the struggle to end abortion is like the struggle to end slavery” to “abortion is like slavery” and “abortion is worse than slavery.” Moreover, this meme has been taken up by black pro-life groups who compare abortion, not only to slavery, but also (with reason) to the eugenics movement, and (beyond reason) to a new black genocide. And it has entered mainstream American political and media discourse – with some hiccups – through remarks made by would-be presidential candidates such as Mike Huckabee and Michelle Bachmann. What are the implications of the abortion = slavery meme for the politics of race, gender, sexuality and reproduction in the US? How did the fight against slavery become intelligible as a fight for the right to life? Where are the battle lines being drawn in this fight? Who is the enemy, and what is the prize?

In what follows, I track the abortion = slavery meme from Ronald Reagan to the current personhood movement, drawing on critical resources from Orlando Patterson, Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, and others. My argument, in a nutshell, is that we cannot understand current pro-life discourse without situating it within a history of slavery that it both invokes and disavows. In the end, what we need is not a return to the liberal feminist pro-choice politics of the 1970s and 80s, but rather a discourse and a practice of reproductive *justice* that takes the wounded kinship of slavery and racism seriously, not just as a related concern but as a central issue – perhaps *the* central issue – in American reproductive politics today.

Ronald Reagan, Father of a Meme

Ronald Reagan's text, "Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation," was published as an article in *The Human Life Review* in 1983, republished as a book in 1984, and republished again as an article in 2004, on the occasion of Reagan's death. Like the leaders of Personhood Mississippi and Personhood Florida, Reagan compares the pro-life movement to Wilberforce's fight to end slavery, attributing to the latter an anachronistic belief in "in the sanctity of human life."^{xv} He also compares the exclusion of blacks from constitutional protection in *Dred Scott v Sandford* (1857) to the exclusion of the fetus from (what he takes to be) this same sort of protection in *Roe v Wade* (1973).^{xvi} What is at stake in this comparison?

Dred Scott was a slave who sought legal redress when the wife of his deceased master refused his offer of \$300 for the manumission of himself, his wife, and their children. Scott argued that, since he had lived with his former master in states where slavery was illegal, such as Illinois and Minnesota, he could not be considered the legitimate property of his master or his master's widow. Scott lost the case – not because the court decided against his claim, but because it decided that, as a negro and a slave, Scott *was not a citizen*, and so he did not have the right to bring a legal claim to court. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney argued that blacks “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect;” they were “not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word "citizens" in the Constitution.”^{xvii} This decision was eventually overturned by the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to the US constitution, which abolished slavery and revised the terms of citizenship, due process and equal protection under the law.

What does the Dred Scott decision have to do with the politics of abortion? Or rather, how was this decision taken up by the pro-life movement, in such a way that it *became* relevant to abortion politics in the 1980s, and again in 2011? At issue in Dred Scott was not the slave's humanity, nor even the slave's legal personhood, but rather his or her inclusion or exclusion as a *citizen* of the United States, with the rights that citizenship entails. But in spite of this explicit reference to citizenship, Reagan invokes the Dred Scott decision, as he also invoked Wilberforce's speech, as a contribution to the debate over the value of human *life*:

This is not the first time our country has been divided by a Supreme Court decision that denied the value of certain human lives. The Dred Scott decision of 1857 was not overturned in a day, or a year, or even a decade. At first, only a minority of Americans recognized and deplored the moral crisis brought about by denying the full humanity of our black brothers and sisters; but that minority persisted in their vision and finally prevailed. They did it by appealing to the hearts and minds of their countrymen, to the truth of human dignity under God. From their example, we know that respect for the sacred value of human life is too deeply engrained in the hearts of our people to remain forever suppressed. But the great majority of the American people have not yet made their voices heard, and we cannot expect them to—any more than the public voice arose against slavery—until the issue is clearly framed and presented. (2)

We know that a respect for “the sacred value of life” is engrained in the hearts of Americans. And yet, the American heart and the American mind are not always connected to the American mouth. A majority declaration of the sacred value of life was still at an embryonic stage in 1983. Like a fetus in utero, the American people lacked a public voice with which to declare the sanctity of life, and it would continue to remain silent “until the issue [was] clearly framed and presented.”

By framing the issue of citizenship in Dred Scott as an issue of personhood, and framing personhood as (sacred life), Reagan exploits the emancipation of the slaves – by a Republican president, no less – as an “example” of how a “minority” can appeal to the

hearts and minds of Americans in order to secure “the truth of human dignity under God.” Reagan elaborates this example with a quote from Abraham Lincoln’s own reframing of the framers’ intentions in the wake of the Dred Scott decision. In a speech delivered in Lewiston, Illinois, on August 17, 1858, Lincoln argued that blacks were included in “the whole great family of man” (qtd. in Reagan 4). This is clearly a reference to the language of the Dred Scott decision, which excluded blacks from “the whole human family” on the grounds that the framers of the Declaration of Independence would have been “utterly and flagrantly inconsistent with the principles they asserted” if they had continued to practice slavery while recognizing blacks as “men” who were “created equal” and so endowed by their Creator with “certain unalienable rights” such as “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”^{xviii} Blacks could not be considered citizens, and the framers could not have intended to include them as citizens – not because of anything present or lacking in black people as such, but rather because the Founding Fathers would not be worthy of the respect that we citizens grant them, if they were found to act in such flagrant contradiction with their own principles. The integrity of “the whole human family” – or at least, the “family” of citizens of the United States of America – depends on the integrity of its Fathers, and if some of our brother and sisters must be excluded from the family in order to show that Father was right, then so be it.

Abraham Lincoln took a different approach to the founding document of the United States, which Reagan cites approvingly:

I should like to know if taking this old Declaration of Independence, which declares that all men are equal upon principle[,] and making exceptions to it[,] where will it stop. If one man says it does not mean a Negro, why not another say it does not mean some other man? (qtd. in Reagan 4)

This is the example provided by the negro: it's the classic example of "the thin edge of the wedge." If you refuse to admit the negro into the family of man, then why not also exclude some other man? And if you exclude some other man, then how will you prevent yourself from being excluded at some point? If you – a (white) citizen – respect yourself, then you must also respect the negro.

Reagan reframes Lincoln's claim about dignity of "man" as a warning "of the danger we would face if we closed our eyes to the value of life in any category of human beings" (4). With the shift from "man" to "life," the example of slavery becomes useful to pro-life politics in the '80s: If you refuse to admit that the fetus is a person, then why not also the newborn, the three-day old infant, the toddler – or the adult African American, for that matter? If you respect the personhood of "our black brothers and sisters," and if you respect Lincoln as the Great Emancipator, then you must also respect the personhood of the fetus.^{xix}

In current pro-life discourse, however, the logic of exemplification becomes more complicated. On one hand, the pink fetus provides the example for African-American personhood via the black fetus (who, as if testifying to his membership in universal humanity, appears pink in the womb). We know in our hearts that the (white)

pink fetus is a person, so we must extend to unborn African Americans the same enthusiastic protection as unborn white Americans, lest the black fetus become the thin edge of the wedge for pro-life politics. White pro-life activists must reach out to their “black brothers and sisters,” and to join forces in the battle to defend the sacred value of human life.

But on the other hand, and at the same time, the African-American adult provides the example for the pink fetus, again via the (pinkened) black fetus. We all know – if not in our hearts, then at least in our minds and in our mouths – that African Americans are persons. We have proof of this in the form of a black president. If you respect the personhood of African Americans – if you would even go so far as to vote a black man into the presidency – then you must extend this respect to the black fetus, and through it, to the fetus as such, the pink fetus.

Either way, the pinkened black fetus – or the blackened pink fetus – becomes the middle point through which the personhood of the pink fetus and the personhood of the black adult is secured.^{xx} It functions not as the limit case of personhood, but as the point of intersection between two of its most powerful examples. The black fetus is both a beautiful, desirable, valued member of the “whole great family of man,” and also a victim of legalized child abuse and murder, a life threatened with extinction, an “endangered species” (toomanyaborted.com).

Not All in the Family

Who will protect the sacred life of the black fetus? And against whom must the Lincolns and Wilberforces of today defend it? Already in a 1976 speech, Reagan provided a “clear framing and presentation” of this threat:

She has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards and is collecting veteran's benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands. And she is collecting on Social Security her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income is over \$150,000.^{xxi}

If the welfare queen did not exist, she would have to be invented – as it seems she may have been, since Reagan never names the woman, and no one matching that exact description was ever found.^{xxii}

Like the fetus, the welfare queen is dependent on others for her survival and flourishing. But unlike the fetus – whom, thanks to Lennart Nillson’s photographs in “A Child is Born,” we are able to imagine as an autonomous being floating in the impersonal environment of the womb – the welfare queen is exorbitantly, improperly dependent. She’s like a vampire feeding from the open veins of the state, taking more than her fair share, exploiting the generosity of those who pay their taxes and play by the rules. She is an ungrateful child, a spoiled brat in the family of man – and even worse, she has the capacity to reproduce herself.

As Andre Bauer, Lt. Gov. of South Carolina from 2003 to 2011, explained in a town hall meeting in January 2010, during his unsuccessful bid for the Republican nomination for state Governor:

My grandmother was not a highly educated woman, but she told me as a small child to quit feeding stray animals. You know why? Because they breed. You're facilitating the problem if you give an animal or a person ample food supply. They will reproduce, especially ones that don't think too much further than that. And so what you've got to do is you've got to curtail that type of behavior. They don't know any better.^{xxiii}

Bauer offered this anecdote in support of his view that the parents of children receiving free lunches or lunch subsidies should be subject to mandatory drug testing and required to attend PTA meetings and parent-teacher interviews. He added: "I can show you a bar graph where free and reduced lunch has the worst test scores in the state of South Carolina."^{xxiv} Feeding leads not only to breeding, but also to stupidity, which leads to even more breeding – and so on. When the scandal broke nation-wide, Bauer insisted that he did not mean to imply that people who receive social assistance were "were animals or anything else." He clarified that "he would penalize only adults and that he never advocated taking away a child's free or reduced-price lunch."^{xxv}

The child – like the fetus who is interpellated as already-a-child, already-a-person, already-a-citizen or even (as in Lauren Berlant's analysis) the ideal American citizen – has a right to be dependent.^{xxvi} It is an innocent victim of its family's own

failure to provide the basic essentials of life. In the child, as in the fetus, we can recognize “the sacred value of human life.” But the grown woman – the grown *black* woman – the grown, economically unproductive, and hyper-reproductive black woman who fails to attend PTA meetings: Is she a person? Is she an example of sacred life, or is she an example of the threat posed to sacred life by a sovereign master with the power to kill or let live? Like the slave whose personhood was recognized in law first and foremost when she committed a crime, the welfare queen was born to be punished. Was she ever a child? Can we imagine her as a fetus? At what point does the member of an endangered species become a breeding stray whose overpopulation threatens the sanctity of life and the whole human family?

The black woman, understood as an emancipated slave, as one of “our black... sisters,” is a useful example for the personhood of the fetus. But the black woman, understood as a welfare queen – as a big baby sucking at the teat of the state and breeding like a stray animal – offers a different kind of example: not of the sacred value of life, but of both the degraded powerlessness of the slave and the sovereign power to kill and let live. She is not an example to follow, like Lincoln and Wilberforce, but rather a site of inversion and convergence between illegitimate dependence and illegitimate sovereignty. She is a *welfare – queen*.

This image of the welfare queen sets the stage for a new set of Great Emancipators: a generation of Mike Huckabees, Rick Santorums and Michelle Bachmanns who are poised to liberate the black woman from her own grotesque

power.^{xxvii} For example: In a March 2009 fundraiser speech in Jackson City, Missouri, Mike Huckabee, former Governor of Arkansas and one-time frontrunner for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination, warned his audience that civilization might come to an end if “one group of people have life and death control over another for no particular reason other than their own conveniences and, in that case, prejudices.”^{xxviii} Huckabee asked:

What are we saying to the generation coming after us when we tell them that it is perfectly OK for one person to own another human being? I thought we dealt with that 150 years ago when the issue of slavery was finally settled in this country, and we decided that it no longer was a political issue, it wasn't an issue of geography, it was an issue of morality. That it was either right or it was immoral that one person could own another human being and have full control even to the point of life and death over that other human being.^{xxix}

He continues: “Before laws get changed, we have to change minds and hearts of all the American people, but especially those who will ultimately make the decision as to whether or not they will give an unborn child life or whether they will give it a death sentence.”^{xxx}

What does it take to imagine the pregnant woman as a sovereign “owner” of the fetus, her quasi-slave? What sort of “conveniences, and in that case prejudices” must we attribute to this slave-owning woman in order to understand abortion as a “death sentence” – in the only Western democratic nation still to practice capital punishment?

What must be happening in my heart and my mind for these comparisons to make sense to me? What must I know, and what must I forget?

In order to engage with these questions, we need to reflect more carefully on the personhood of the slave and on the slippages between person, citizen and “life” that have greased the joints of the “Abortion = Slavery” meme from Ronald Reagan to the Personhood Movement. What is a person? What is a citizen? What is sacred life?

The Trauma of Natal Alienation

In *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson argues that the slave is defined not by the denial of personhood but rather “*the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons*” (13; emphasis in original). Natal alienation is the systematic isolation of the slave from its kin – in other words, from a network of others who are socially obliged to come to one’s defense. Without kin, the slave is confined to a single (legitimate) social relation: to the master who owns her, and to whose arbitrary violence she remains exposed, even if the master happens to be kind or even fatherly. For this reason, the fictive kinship of slave ownership – however sincerely felt by the master or even by the slave – is not enough to compensate for the social death produced by natal alienation. If the master chooses to sell a slave’s parents, children, lovers or friends, they will be sold; if the master chooses to recognize a slave’s claim to kin, this claim will be recognized – for as long as he chooses to recognize it. All of the slave’s social relations hang in suspension from this single

legitimate social relation, and they remain in suspension at the pleasure of the master.^{xxxii} In effect, the slave is “born” or “reborn” as the dependent of the master: as a permanent minor or child, excluded from the inheritance of the father’s name but bound to the inheritance of the mother’s slave status. Patterson calls this relation “a peculiar reincarnation on the margin of his master’s society” (66). Claude Meillassoux goes even farther, describing the natively-alienated slave as “non-born” or “born outside birth” (40, 107, 121).

Far from *excluding* slaves from personhood, then, every slave society has carefully *inscribed* the personhood of the slave within the law as a way of foreclosing their claim to the rights of a citizen.^{xxxiii} How did natal alienation shape the scene of American slavery? In his 1858 *Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery*, Thomas Cobb describes the peculiar “birth” or “rebirth” of the slave:

When the law, by providing for his proper nourishment and clothing, by enacting penalties against the cruel treatment of his master, by providing for his punishment for crimes, and other similar provisions, recognizes his existence as a person, he is as a child just born, brought for the first time within the pale of the law’s protecting power; his existence as a person being recognized by the law, that existence is protected by the law. (qtd. in Dayan 13)

Colin Dayan offers an insightful commentary on this passage:

The slave, once recognized as a person in law, becomes part of the process whereby the newborn person, wrought out of the loins of the white man’s law—

in a birth as monstrous as that of Victor Frankenstein's creature—can then be nullified in the slave body . . . [W]e begin to see how the law, invoking the double condition of the unborn and the undead, can eject certain beings from the circle of citizenry, even while offering the promise of beneficent protection. (13)

The slave is “born” in law as a person who is natively alienated and socially dead. She lives, she works, she breeds – and yet she has “no rights that a white man is bound to respect.” Even the right to a family – to a lineage of ancestors and descendants in relation to whom one's own life gains meaning beyond the trajectory of fertilized egg to corpse – is undermined by the fictive kinship of slave ownership. The slave is born to be punished: not as a citizen with rights, but as a person whom the law holds criminally responsible and for whom it makes certain “provisions.” Even the “law's protecting power” exposes the slave to natal alienation and social death; even when it includes him in the “family of man,” it is as a child of the master rather than the kin of her kin. As such, the slave is neither a full person nor a non-person, but a remnant of personhood, or what Dayan calls “a negative personhood” (23). We could put this in the language of Agamben's biopolitics: the slave is inclusively excluded in the law as bare life or sacred life, as life that can be extinguished without consequences. He has not been “raised up” by the father and recognized as a legitimate heir. Rather, the slave's *bios* or biographical life is suspended, while her *zoe* or biological life – including her productivity and reproductivity – is inscribed into law as the object of sovereign power (see Agamben on inclusive exclusion, 17-29).^{xxxiii}

I have used the pronouns “he” and “she” interchangeably to refer to the slave, and yet it is not clear that this grammar applies. In “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” Hortense Spillers argues that the standard grammatical distinctions, as well as standard psychoanalytic stories about the psychic investment in grammars of kinship, desire and gender identity are rendered incoherent by the practice of antebellum slavery. Consider, for example, the white slave master who rapes a black female slave. A child is born, but who is the father? The child is sold as a commodity: So who is the mother? The child is a good, strong worker: Is it therefore a man? The child gives birth to more children: Is it therefore a woman? What is the grammatical, social and psychic framework that will make sense of this child, and in relation to which the child may make sense of itself, himself, herself, themselves?

For Spillers, the slave is ambivalently feminized *and* ungendered. He cannot be a man because, like a woman, he is barred access to the name of the father; he has nothing to inherit and nothing to pass down to his kin. And yet she cannot be a woman because she is not exchanged in the way that (white) women are exchanged, passing from the protection of a father to the protection of a husband who, in turn, becomes the father of her children.^{xxxiv} The commodification, rape, torture, forced labor, and forced reproduction of slave women produces a “materialized scene of unprotected female flesh – of female flesh ‘ungendered’” (68). And yet this *flesh* remains irreducible to the *body* of the slave, which is stolen and divided into parts – legs for ploughing, arms for hoeing, hands for picking cotton – each part to be used and used up. The stolen body is interchangeable with any other body; it can be sold, traded, and discarded

without regard for particular differences between bodies or for the singularity of each body's experience. But the flesh is different; it remains in the "vestibule" of the history of stolen bodies, neither outside of history nor captured wholly within its terms. Flesh is "that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography" (67). The wounds inflicted by slavery's "high crimes against the flesh" leave durable marks on the body, literally tearing into the skin and ripping out bits of flesh. "These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color" (67).

Black skin, as the mark of racialization in the wake of the Middle Passage, does not disclose the violence against the flesh of slaves, but conceals it behind a permanent essence, an inferior type of being, a brute body that may or may not feel any pain. To "see through" the cultural meanings of black skin after slavery is not, however, to grasp the simple truth of slavery and the violence that it inflicted on captive bodies. Rather, the scars left by the whip – by the literal and symbolic whips of slavery, which include natal alienation – remain "undecipherable markings," "hieroglyphics" readable by an ancient African culture for which we have no Rosetta stone. And yet, these markings call out for interpretation, if only as the zero degree of social conceptualization.

Spillers asks "if this phenomenon of marking and branding actually "transfers" from one generation to another, finding its various symbolic substitutions in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments" (67). In order to respond to this

question – or even to ask it – we need to find a way of talking about “flesh and blood” entities in a different way, not as carriers of racial essence, but as affective, material, relational beings who are not outside of history, but not quite inside history either. Flesh is the least remainder of a corporeality that can be *understood* as that which *resists understanding*. Any “theory” of the flesh would have to trace the resistance of the flesh to the theft and violation of bodies, without pretending that the flesh does not hurt or is not marked by that violence. The zero degree of social conceptualization that the flesh imposes on discourse promises to hold open a site of resistance to the inexorable, irreversible terms of history and biology, nature and culture.

Spiller’s critical concept of the flesh helps to shed light on the psycho-sexual dimensions of the current slavery = abortion meme. As Spillers notes, the legal principle of “*partus sequitur ventrem*” attaches the “condition” of the mother to her children, such that her status as free or enslaved is “forever entailed on all her remotest posterity” (qtd. in Spillers 79). To be born to a black woman, even today, is to be branded with the sign of illegitimate parentage and perverse sexuality; the flesh of the mother sticks to the child, while the name of the father slips off, refusing to take hold. Even in *Dred Scott*, Justice Taney cited laws against miscegenation, and the asymmetrical punishment of mulattos born to white women and to black women, as evidence that the founding fathers never intended black slaves (implicitly understood as children born to black women) to be citizens, and permanently disinheriting them from “the whole human family.” The rape of black slaves by white masters was not only permitted by law, it was underwritten and even institutionalized by laws that affirmed

both the white slaveholder's sovereign power over the black slave – a power to kill or let live – and also his biopolitical power over the black slave *woman* – a power to make live and let die, a power to reproduce his own property through the bodies of black women and, to a lesser extent given miscegenation laws, black men. Take, for example, the 1705 Virginia Code:

XXXIV. And if any slave resist his master, or owner, or other person, by his or her order, correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction, it shall not be accounted felony; but the master, owner, and every such other person so giving correction, shall be free and acquit of all punishment and accusation for the same, as if such accident had never happened.

XXXVI. [A]ll children shall be bond or free, according to the condition of their mothers.^{xxxv}

How does this psycho-sexual legacy of slavery continue to haunt American politics and American grammar, particularly in the current reanimation of the abortion = slavery meme? In “Whiteness as Property” and “Finding Sojourner’s Truth,” Cheryl Harris explores the implications of these laws for the continuing fusion and confusion of whiteness with property in the US today, arguing that “the law’s legitimation of the use of blackwomen’s bodies as a means of increasing property” both incentivized the rape of black women and “facilitated the merger of white identity and property” that continues to structure the intersecting meanings of race, class and gender in the US (“Whiteness” 279).^{xxxvi} Given this fateful merger, it seems impossible to make a

coherent connection between the personhood of the slave and the personhood of the fetus, nor between the slavemaster's sovereign power to kill or let live and the woman's right to terminate or continue a pregnancy.

But nothing is impossible at the level of what Reagan calls "the heart." Either the black woman is not quite the person we have in mind when we think about slaves or about women, or she is destined to become the new target audience for a change of mind and a change of heart. Is the black woman excluded from the group of those who, in Mike Huckabee's words, "will ultimately make the decision as to whether or not they will give an unborn child life or whether they will give it a death sentence"? Or is she its new, and even privileged, member?

In the 1980s, the aborting woman was imagined as a successful, middle-class, masculine and potentially-emasculating white woman. This is the woman who decides to get an abortion because her pregnancy interferes with her ski vacation. It was her heart that films like "The Silent Scream" was hoping to change.^{xxxvii} But in current pro-life rhetoric, the aborting woman is increasingly imagined as a black woman. She is both a murderous sovereign, a master who wields the power to kill and let live over the fetus who is trapped in her dangerous body, and also a vulnerable ex-slave (for whom the (pinkened) black fetus provides the prime example of humanity and sacred life). As an illegitimate sovereign, the black woman must be punished and controlled; as an ex-slave, however, she is "our black sister," a valuable part of the "whole family of man."

As such, she must be saved from her own bad choices and ignorance, lest she inadvertently plunge her race back into a condition worse than slavery.

But even when the black woman is privileged as a target for pro-life discourse, this does not necessarily mean that she is the intended audience of this discourse. If she is addressed by this discourse at all, it is as a *part* of the family of man – a sister, a mother, a wife, a womb. She is the belly that I kiss, the mother of our future leader, the hinge between freedom and slavery, the wellspring of black & beautiful life.^{xxxviii} On the rare occasions that she appears as a speaking subject, such as in a pro-life video by Dr. Alveda King, niece of Martin Luther King, it is as a chastised and ashamed woman, eyes lowered as she speaks of her personal knowledge of the horrors of abortion, set against a stark white background.^{xxxix}

As an emancipated slave and a repentant woman, the black woman offers a unique example for pro-life politics: She is the part that sustains the whole, even while she threatens it; she is both the most perfect object of salvation and the most perfect target for punishment. If you can reach the black woman, if you can change her heart, then you can unite the great struggle against slavery with the great struggle for sacred life. Even better, you can acknowledge the horrors of slavery, without having to bother too much with its economic, political, social and sexual legacies. If abortion = slavery, then you can be a Wilberforce for your own time, rather than an ambivalent inheritor of racial privilege. If abortion = *worse* than slavery, then even the descendants of slaves

are not immune to the criticism that they pose a greater threat to themselves and to their race than slavery or white supremacy ever did.

This is where things get tricky. Because the most enthusiastic disseminators of the abortion = slavery meme are not the white leaders and supporters of the personhood movement, but rather black pro-life groups such as Life Always and the Radiance Foundation.

Lose Your Mother, Punish Your Mother, Mourn Your Mother, Let Your Mother Be

[I]t is only when you *lose your mother* that she becomes a myth.

- Saidiya Hartman

Why is the fetus such a powerful image in the United States? Without being able to prove this point – without even knowing what would constitute a “proof” in this case – I want to suggest that it has something to do with mothers. It is difficult to imagine yourself at one and the same time as a radically independent individual and as the child of a woman upon whom you were once radically dependent, and without whom you would not be here. The traumatic awareness of dependence on the mother’s body both suggests a (misleading) analogy with slavery, and also touches the nerve of this other, historical trauma of slavery itself, and the blatant contradiction of practicing slavery in a republic founded on individual freedom. This trauma reverberates differently for black Americans and white Americans, and many white Americans would not recognize

themselves as “traumatized” by the shame of having inherited racial and/as economic privilege through slavery; but this may be a case where the *lack* of recognition offers a more eloquent testimony than its presence.^{xI}

How does the trauma of slavery reverberate in the black pro-life movement? As a white woman (a Canadian, no less!) living in a fairly segregated city in the American South, I can only note what I have observed and invite critical feedback. A video produced by The Radiance Foundation and co-sponsored by the National Black Pro-life Coalition claims that the number one killer of black persons is not heart disease, diabetes, HIV, homicide, or any other problem related to poverty and systematic racism. It is Planned Parenthood, and the black women who are “targeted” by the “abortionaries” that Planned Parenthood has installed in urban black neighborhoods.^{xii} The termination of pregnancies by black women amounts to a “genocide” of the unborn, and black leaders who support reproductive choice – and who are named in the video – are guilty of having “sacrificed 15 million babies for political or personal gain.” Another video by The Radiance Foundation, called “Epidemic,” appropriates the image and words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”^{xiii} It supplements these words with the claim that “Abortion never reduces poverty... It reduces US.” This statement echoes the message on billboards installed in Atlanta in time for Juneteenth: “THE 13TH AMENDMENT FREED US. ABORTION ENLAVES US.” Or “THE 14TH AMENDMENT MADE US MEMBERS. ABORTION DISMEMBERS.”

Part of the affective power of these advertisements is the felt, but obscured gap between the freedom promised by the abolition of slavery, by the civil rights movement, and even by the election of Obama – and the ongoing reality of racial inequality, poverty, hyperincarceration, and all the other forms of what Ruth Gilmore calls exposure to “premature death” (28).^{xliii} However dubious the claims made in pro-life media campaigns, this is a very real issue, and the pain expressed in videos such as The Radiance Foundation’s “Lies,” must be taken seriously whether or not one agrees with its interpretation of the ethical and political implications of this pain. “Lies” begins with a sequence of “un-” words: unplanned, unintended, unimportant, unloved, unwanted – all of which, a young woman’s voice assures us, are “untrue.”^{xliiv} In his bio for The Radiance Foundation, Ryan Bomberger describes himself as “once considered “black and unwanted” but instead was adopted and loved.”^{xliiv} But there is no room here for the expression of the pain of finding oneself pregnant and not wanting a child, or wanting a child and knowing that you do not have the resources to raise it, such that the most responsible choice may be not to give birth. Bomberger’s song, “Meant to Be,” thanks his birth mother for carrying her pregnancy to term, even though it was the result of a rape:

I know it wasn’t easy

I know it changed your life

I imagine no words could console

The woman he had defiled

But somehow you found the courage

And the grace to carry on

When everyone around you told you

This child should not be born^{xlvi}

Organizations such as Life Always and The Radiance Foundation express a sense of natal alienation, or what Saidiya Hartman calls “wounded kinship” (“Time” 764), that needs to be acknowledged if we are to get any closer to understanding what motivates the impassioned outcry of pro-life black men (and some women) against the “black genocide” of abortion. But this by no means justifies their political positions or tactics, which are just as misleading and manipulative as the positions and tactics of Wilberforce-identified white leaders of state personhood movements.

From the perspective of The Radiance Foundation, the fight to ban abortion is a way of continuing King’s legacy, where the fetus is invoked not just as an object to be saved by others but as a full person, a citizen, a brother or a sister in the struggle. This appropriation of King’s legacy requires a significant revision of his explicit support for Planned Parenthood. In his acceptance speech for the Margaret Sanger Award in 1966, King wrote:

There is no human circumstance more tragic than the persisting existence of a harmful condition for which a remedy is readily available. Family planning, to relate population to world resources, is possible, practical and necessary...

Negroes have no mere academic nor ordinary interest in family planning. They

have a special and urgent concern... Negroes were once bred by slave owners to be sold as merchandise. They do not welcome any solution which involves population breeding as a weapon. They are instinctively sympathetic to all who offer methods that will improve their lives and offer them fair opportunity to develop and advance as all other people in our society.^{xlvii}

The Radiance Foundation counters King's speech, both by suggesting that these were not his own words, but rather those of Coretta Scott King (since she delivered the speech on his behalf), and also by arguing that King was simply wrong on this issue:

He became enamored with the façade of Planned Parenthood and its glossy cover of family planning and the false assurance of eliminating poverty. Birth control promised equality. It failed. Instead, the divide that King fought so passionately to mend became a chasm filled with communities ravaged by out-of-wedlock births, exponentially high STD/HIV rates, and rampant fatherlessness.^{xlviii}

There is little doubt that Planned Parenthood, under the direction of Margaret Sanger, was complicit with, and even enthusiastically supportive of, a racist eugenics movement.^{xlix} The question is: What do we do with this legacy? How do we inherit both the pain and the promise of a history that has destroyed so many lives for the direct and indirect profit of others? How do we negotiate the social, political, economic and psychic legacy of slavery without punishing women for bearing some of the most painful

aspects of this legacy, and without repeating the rhetoric of “protection” that exposes the “protected” to almost limitless violence *within the law*?

Planned Parenthood, and the pro-choice movement more generally, belong to a wounded and a wounding history. One way to respond to this history is to reject reproductive choice as a sign of freedom, and to condemn it as a strategy of coercion and even genocide. This is not an unreasonable response, considering the millions of (fully-born) African Americans who *were* killed by the slave trade, the practice of slavery, the violence unleashed against them after the abolition of slavery, and in the everyday violence wrought by the legacy of slavery. But neither reproductive choice nor its cancellation adequately addresses this legacy or these millions upon millions of deaths. What we need is not a simple commitment to reproductive choice, with its white liberal baggage of self-ownership and the enjoyment of one’s body as one’s own “property,” but rather a commitment to reproductive *justice*, which involves a more complex set of demands for the social and economic support of women who choose to become mothers, and we as for those who do not. Reproductive justice cannot be accomplished by modifying the white, middle class, heterosexual pro-choice movement of the 1980s to “include” women of color; it must put the concerns of women of color *at the center* of its analysis and its political program if it is to address these concerns at all.¹

Whether the funding source is a black pro-life group or a white pro-life group, and whether the speaker of the author is a man or a woman, the assumed target of the

current abortion = slavery meme is the same: a pregnant, or potentially-pregnant black woman. It is her heart and mind that must be changed. But who is this woman?

The more passionately the pro-life movement – black or white – invokes “our black sister” as an emancipated slave and a carrier of sacred life, the more it positions her rhetorically as a sovereign threat to life whose personhood is recognizable only insofar as she is targeted for punishment. From this perspective, the comparison of abortion and slavery is quite apt – but not for the reasons that Reagan, Huckabee or The Radiance Foundation have outlined. It is not the fetus who is put in the position of a slave by the black woman’s right to choose; it is the black woman who is interpellated by pro-life politics as both a threatening slavemaster and a threatened (ex-)slave, and whose personhood is recognized primarily (but not exclusively) to the extent that she is targeted for punishment.ⁱⁱ The (pinkened) black fetus is put to work on billboards, TV and internet ads to connect the dots between the black woman as a parasitic sovereign or welfare queen and the black woman as “our black sister,” a valued member of “the whole human family.”

But what if we refused these alternatives?

In “The Time of Slavery,” Saidiya Hartman explores the sense of “wounded kinship” that motivates some African Americans to search for their roots in Africa, in an effort to overcome the natal alienation of slavery by “going home.”

Slavery denied the captive all claims of kin and community; this loss of natal affiliation and the enduring pain of ancestors who remain anonymous still haunt

the descendants of the enslaved... For these reasons, it is crucial to consider the matter of grief as it bears on the political imagination of the diaspora, the interrogation of U.S. national identity, and the crafting of historical counternarratives. In other words, to what end is the ghost of slavery conjured up? (762-3)

This is precisely the question we need to be asking in response to white and black invocations of the abortion = slavery meme. What forms of desire, and what forms of shame, are mobilized against black women, in the name of black women, for the sake of “protecting” black women – and how do these desires and shames both traumatically repeat the history of slavery and refuse to acknowledge its “high crimes of the flesh”? How do the materially- and symbolically-different positions of white men and black men affect the feelings of loss and wounding that motivate such impassioned defenses of the vulnerable, unwanted, but lovable fetus – who is threatened, not only by Planned Parenthood, but also by the illegitimate sovereign power of black women, and the highly-contested sovereign power of a black president?

Hartman situates the desire to reconnect with a lost or stolen homeland, and to recover broken or foreclosed kinship relations, within a history in which the promise of emancipation has not lived up to its name:

As W. E. B. Du Bois noted a century ago, despair was sharpened rather than attenuated by emancipation. In the face of the freed, not having found freedom in the promised land, could be seen the “shadow of a deep disappointment.”

Tears and disappointment create an opening for counterhistory, a story written against the narrative of progress. Tears reveal that the time of slavery persists in this interminable awaiting— that is, awaiting freedom and longing for a way of undoing the past. The abrasive and incommensurate temporalities of the “no longer” and the “not yet” can be glimpsed in these tears. (769-70)

The “no longer” and the “not yet” – the vestibule of history, and the site of an affective, material flesh that can be wounded even while it resists, and resists even while it is wounded – this is the opening for a critical counterhistory in which the lost and stolen mother is no longer punished for the violence that has been done to her, but is granted the possibility of an afterlife, even in the midst of an ongoing history of natal alienation. The responsibility for holding open this possibility takes different forms, depending on how one’s body and one’s subjectivity has been positioned by this history. But the responsibility is shared among all the ambivalent inheritors of this legacy of slavery.

In the end, Hartman refuses the nostalgia for return, while acknowledging its affective allure. Instead, she affirms “a promise of affiliation better than that of brothers and sisters” (*Lose Your Mother* 172), rooted not in legal fictions of kinship, nor in biological kinship, but in a kinship of purpose based on the shared concern for “*what we might become together or the possibility of solidarity*” (231). This is the coalition we need to be building right now, while states across the South revise their abortion laws and, at the same time, celebrate the onset of the civil war, sometimes without even mentioning slavery.^{lii}

I leave the last word on this issue to “Trust Black Women,” a coalition of women with different religious affiliations and different views on reproductive *choice*, but who are nevertheless committed to reproductive *justice* – which they define as the view that “every woman has the human right to have a child, not have a child, and parent the children she has.”^{liii}

There are those who believe they should control Black women's reproduction like during slavery. They believe in population control and use false compassion for children to disguise a racist and sexist agenda... They claim that Black women can't be trusted. They accuse us of practicing genocide on our people when we stand up for ourselves...

We don't need fanatics to tell us what to do. Black women make decisions every day about whether to parent or not, not just whether to give birth. Those who think they should dictate our choices won't be there when the child is born, to help us fight for better education, increase child care, keep our kids out of jail, send our children to college, or get affordable health care. Black women fight for ourselves and we fight to uplift our people...

In our struggle for reproductive justice, African American women have a unique history that we must remember in order to ensure bodily sovereignty, dignity, and collective uplift of our community. The choices that women of color make are based on their lived experiences in this country and reflect multiple oppressions, including race, class, and gender, and their efforts to resist them.

We affirm that African American women have the human right to parent the children they already have. To ensure the full enjoyment of this right, they must also have access to the social supports necessary to raise their children in safe environments and healthy communities, without fear of violence from individuals or intervention by the government.^{liv}

This is what we need right now: a politics of the flesh that moves beyond the loss of natal alienation, and even beyond the mourning of this loss, by creating new forms of kinship, and new (or are they old?) forms of power.

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Notes

ⁱ Sponsored by Life Always in honor of Black History Month. The billboard was taken down after one day in response to widespread objections, including claims by the mother of the child that her image was not authorized for use in the billboard campaign (Holloway).

ⁱⁱ Sponsored by Life Always and Missouri Right to Life. Accessed on 02/16/12 at <http://www.nationalrighttolifenews.org/news/2011/04/missouri-rtl-sponsors-pro-life-billboard-%E2%80%9Cthe-most-dangerous-place-for-an-african-american-is-in-the-womb%E2%80%9D/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Thirty billboards in the Chicago area, sponsored by Life Always. Accessed on 02/16/12 at <http://abcnews.go.com/US/anti-abortion-obama-billboards-chicago/story?id=13251302#.T0Aq2syxMSU>

^{iv} Eighty billboards in the Atlanta area, co-sponsored by The Radiance Foundation and Georgia Right to Life. Accessed on 02/16/12 at <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?p=3839>.

^v Sixty billboards in the Oakland area, co-sponsored by The Radiance Foundation and the National Black Pro-life Coalition. Accessed on 02/16/12 at <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?p=3225>.

^{vi} Accessed on 02/16/12 at <http://thatsabortion.com/About%20Life%20Always.htm>.

^{vii} Accessed on 02/16/12 at <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/our-story/our-bios/ryan-scott-bomberger/>.

^{viii} Accessed on 02/16/12 at <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/our-story/our-bios/bethany-bomberger/>.

^{ix} Accessed 02/16/12 at <http://wedgewords.wordpress.com/2011/11/05/an-examination-of-mississippi-proposition-26/>.

^x Accessed on 02/18/2012 at <http://www.richmondsonlight.com/bill/2012/hb1/fulltext/#HB1>. The Senate has sent this bill back to the Education and Health committee for further consideration, which allows it to defer making a decision until 2013. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/feb/23/virginia-state-senate-personhood-bill>, accessed on 06/02/2012.

^{xi} Accessed on 06/01/2012 at http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=336&articleid=20120215_336_0_OKLAHO429356.

^{xii} Accessed on 11/30/2011 at <http://prolifenews.blogspot.com/>.

^{xiii} Accessed on 11/25/2011 at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/09/personhood-campaign-compa_n_1084984.html.

^{xiv} See Thredy for a comprehensive review of this literature.

^{xv} There is no mention of anything like “the sanctity of human life” in Wilberforce’s 1789 speech. Rather, Wilberforce paints a picture of human suffering and degradation in the slave trade, and in particular in the transport of slaves, because he was convinced that if investors in the slave trade knew what actually happened to slaves, they would find themselves unable to support it or to remain indirectly complicit with it.

^{xvi} A google search for “abortion + “Dred Scott”” yielded 678,000 results on 11/20/2011. For example, the website for Personhood Florida states:

Just as the wicked Dred Scot [sic] decision ruled that African Americans were non-persons and could be property, so Roe v. Wade has declared that the pre-born are non-persons and are considered property. As Dred Scott was never “overturned” but amended, that is what we are seeking to do: repent from the wicked decision of 9 people that brought death on our whole nation and amend our way, state by state, appealing to the people’s hearts to simply establish the personhood of the pre-born, the disabled and the elderly to protect their right to

life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness by love and by law. Their right to life, their personhood is self-evident and is inalienable. (<http://personhoodfl.com/>)

^{xvii} Accessed on 11/15/2011 at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2933t.html>.

^{xviii} Accessed on 11/22/2011 at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2933t.html>.

^{xix} By invoking Lincoln's argument against slavery as an authority in his own argument against abortion, Reagan exploits the power of "Lincoln" as a master signifier, even while his own active promotion of "states' rights" discourse directly contradicts Lincoln's political agenda. The figure of the Great Emancipator functions to stabilize the otherwise chaotic slippage of signs in the Great Communicator's text. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.

^{xx} The disabled fetus is arguably the other middle term in this equation. Personhood Florida includes the fetus (or "pre-born") in a series of other forms of "sacred life": "the pre-born, the disabled and the elderly" (<http://personhoodfl.com/>).

^{xxi} Accessed on 12/19/2012 at http://www.threatofrace.org/threatmap/single_element/234/.

^{xxii} Accessed on 12/19/2012 at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/19/opinion/19krugman.html>.

^{xxiii} Accessed on 05/15/2011 at <http://www.greenvilleonline.com/article/20100124/NEWS/1240308/Bauer-criticism-grows>.

^{xxiv} Accessed on 05/15/2011 at http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-6139186-503544.html.

^{xxv} Accessed on 05/15/2011 at http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-6139186-503544.html.

^{xxvi} Berlant argues that, in the 1980s and '90s, fetal personhood or "superpersonhood" became the ideal form of American citizenship and subjectivity. "America follows the condition of the fetus" (173).

^{xxvii} In July 2011, Bachmann, along with her rival for the Republican presidential nomination, Rick Santorum, signed a document called "The Marriage Vow -- A Declaration of Dependence Upon Marriage and Family," drafted by a group called "The Family Leader" (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/59611653/Family-Leader-Pledge>). The

vow offers a point-form list of evidence for their claim that the “Institution of Marriage in America is in great crisis” (3). The first point refers to the “sad” state of African-American families: “Slavery had a disastrous impact on African-American families, yet sadly a child born into slavery in 1860 was more likely to be raised by his mother and father in a two-parent household than was an African-American baby born after the election of the USA's first African-American President” (3). For critical responses from the blogosphere, see Tommy Christopher at Mediaite (<http://www.mediaite.com/online/michele-bachmann-signed-pledge-says-black-children-worse-off-under-obama-than-during-slavery/>) and Jill Tubman (Cheryl Contee) at Jack and Jill Politics <http://www.jackandjillpolitics.com/2011/07/michele-bakkkms-pledge-that-black-folks-were-better-off-as-slaves-nytimes-quotes-jjp/>.

^{xxviii} Accessed on 05/15/2011 at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/24/huckabee-likens-abortion_n_178433.html. Huckabee had been invited to speak by the Jackson City-based Pro-Life group, Vitae Caring Foundation. He gave a version of the same speech two years later, in February 2011, at an event organized in Knoxville, TN, by the Center for Bioethical Reform: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/16/mike-huckabee-abortion-slavery_n_824020.html.

^{xxix} Accessed on 05/20/2011 at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/24/huckabee-likens-abortion_n_178433.html. See also www.that-abortion.com, the website of “Life Always”: “No mother, black or white, has absolute ownership rights over the child being protected and nurtured in her womb... Abortions reduce the child before birth to an object, a 'choice', a thing of less-than-human status, suspended in a slave-like state between life and death, pending an arbitrary decision by the 'owner' to abort or to keep the child. The decision to abort, robs the next generation of it's [sic] great potential.”

^{xxx} Accessed on 05/15/2011 at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/24/huckabee-likens-abortion_n_178433.html.

^{xxxi} See Victor Brown’s critique of this claim (2009).

^{xxxii} “No legal code I know has ever attempted to treat slaves as anything other than persons in law” (Patterson 23).

^{xxxiii} See Meillassoux for insightful reflections on natal alienation in the context of African slavery.

^{xxxiv} See Cheryl Harris’s analysis of the way that laws of inheritance and marriage have shaped the legal and social meanings of white and black femininity, in ways that

appropriated slave women's sexuality and reproductive power, and shored up the boundaries of white women's sexuality and reproductive power ("Whiteness" and "Finding").

^{xxxv} Accessed on 11/15/2011 at <http://www.virtualjamestown.org/laws1.html#49>.

^{xxxvi} Not only did the matrilineal transmission of slave status incentivize the rape of black slave women by their owners, but it also continues – to this day – to put black women in a series of double binds where they must make impossible choices: Are you a woman or are you black? Will you pass as white to feed your family, or will you identify with the race of your kin and risk losing your job? For a black woman to claim ownership of her body – *as black*, and *as a woman* – is a radical possibility, unthinkable during slavery, and apparently still scandalous now.

^{xxxvii} See Berlant's brilliant analysis of "The Silent Scream" and other anti-abortion documentaries in "America, 'Fat,' the Fetus."

^{xxxviii} See, in addition to the billboards with which this paper began: <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/fatherhood-begins-womb/> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBFy45CwcL0&feature=related>, both accessed 06/05/2012.

^{xxxix} Accessed 11/15/2012 at <http://www.blackprolifecoalition.org/portfolio/black-genocide/>.

^{xl} For a cogent analysis of the role that feelings of traumatic loss play in Rick Santorum's appeal to conservative women, see Ferguson.

^{xli} "Number One Killer," accessed on 02/10/2012 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rix6XHW7lxl&feature=related>.

^{xlii} "Epidemic," accessed on 02/10/2012 at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_YYw0_dRqQk&feature=related.

^{xliii} Gilmore defines racism as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (28, 247).

^{xliv} See the opening sequence of "Lies" by the Radiance Foundation: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOoJIQ_D1FE, accessed on 06/03/2012.

^{xlv} Accessed on 06/02/2012 at http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?page_id=379.

^{xlvi} Accessed on 02/10/2012 at <http://www.toomanyaborted.com/?p=1820>.

^{xlvii} Accessed on 02/10/2012 at <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/who-we-are/reverend-martin-luther-king-jr-4728.htm>.

^{xlviii} Accessed on 02/10/2012 at <http://www.theradiancefoundation.org/martin-luther-king-jr-and-the-injustice-of-abortion/>.

^{xlix} See, for example, Davis, Smith, Roberts.

^l See Smith for a fuller argument for and explanation of this position.

^{li} One of the anonymous reviewers of this essay made an intriguing suggestion which I cite here in full, because s/he expresses the idea much better than I could recapitulate it:

In a certain imaginary of the family within the black community, women's choices risk repeating the white slavemaster's denial of the black man's self-determination, by proxy through the mother of his children. If she aborts the child – and the meme clearly presumes that she is the aborting agent – then the father loses the opportunity to reproduce a patriarchal system of female dependence, and thus the opportunity to guarantee his position as an authority equal to that of the white man. Are the notional heroes lost to the black community because of rampant abortion (the lost MLKs or Obamas) ever imagined to be women? Admittedly, the semiotic elements and structures involved here are tangled and inconsistent, but I would argue, as variant of the author's central argument that what is imagined to be at stake if the black woman too freely exercises choice in her reproductive life is the (re)production of black male authority, and continued black male – or simply male – regulation of women's bodies. A black woman exerting her choice to not reproduce seems to me less like a slave-master than like a house-slave, viewed with dismay from the field: a potential facilitator or collaborator in the oppression of her people, and in particular the oppression of her father, husband, and brothers.

^{lii} See <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/30/us/30confed.html>, accessed on 06/01/2012.

^{liii} Accessed on 02/19/2012 at http://www.sistersong.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=41&Itemid=33.

^{liv} Accessed on 02/19/2012 at

http://www.sistersong.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=41&Itemid=33.