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Readers' Room

The Talk

Interviewer: Nicole Gipson
Interviewee: Professor Tommy Curry
Interview Date: 2 April 2024
Featured text: *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017)
Editors: Nicole Gipson and Ahmed Honeini

Nicole Gipson: The *Journal of American Studies* would like to welcome Professor Tommy Curry to the launch of our new JAS strand, "The Talk." In this new online interview series, we have difficult yet important conversations with members of the academy as well as activists and community leaders on subjects relevant to Americanists. Prof. Curry joined the Philosophy Department at the University of Edinburgh in the fall of 2019. His research interests are in Africana philosophy and the Black radical tradition. His areas of specialization are nineteenth-century ethnology, critical race theory, social political theory, and Black male studies. He is the author of *The Man-Not: Race*, *Class*, *Genre*, *and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (2017), which won the 2018 American Book Award, and is the subject of today's rather unconventional interview, in which I will ask Prof. Curry to discuss and/or analyse a series of sources, such as an image of an editorial cartoon, the cover of a graphic novel, a political attack advertisement from the 1988 presidential campaign, a newspaper clipping, and a poem from a film. Each of these sources corresponds to a chapter of *The Man-Not*. Links to all these sources will be provided in the transcript. So, let's begin. Good afternoon, Professor Curry.

Tommy Curry: Good afternoon.

Nicole Gipson: Image link: /www.meisterdrucke.ie/fine-art-prints/Victor-Gillam/1422027/%27The-White-Man%27s-Burden%27.html

The first source I would like to show you corresponds to chapter 1 of your book, entitled "On Mimesis and Men: Toward a Historiography of the Man-Not; or, the Ethnological Origins of the Primal Rapist." We are looking at an editorial

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cartoon called "'The White Man's Burden' (Apologies to Rudyard Kipling)." Here, we see John Bull represented as Britain and Uncle Sam as the United States. These countries are personified as white men transporting people from the global South to civilization. The people in the basket carried by Uncle Sam are labeled Cuba, Hawaii, Samoa, Porto Rico, and the Philippines. John Bull is carrying a basket with people labeled Zulu, China, India, Soudan, and Egypt. The author of the cartoon is Victor Gillam. The cartoon was published in *Judge* magazine on 1 April 1899. It was inspired by Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden," published on 4 February 1899. Now over to you for your analysis, Prof. Curry.

Tommy Curry: Thank you so much. Nineteenth-century ethnology is a fascinating area and one that is largely overlooked in intellectual history. When I was writing the book, *The Man-Not*, I was trying to understand how Black men were situated within the hierarchies of races. And in examining some of the texts of ethnologists, be they in the United States or in the UK, you find that ethnology was a science trying to explore racial inferiority. It questioned the origins of races but, most importantly, the ultimate purpose that these races had. Now, following the work of historians like Melissa Stein, you see that ethnology had a very specific focus. It marked the hierarchy of races based on the achievements and the status of the men of the perspective race, who it was seeking to analyse. Now it's interesting to me because it suggests to us that when we start looking at how racialized men were analysed and how racialized men were thought of during the nineteenth century, it avails something about the construction of white patriarchy. Unlike the mid-twentieth century, the concept of gender was not something that was stamped upon individual bodies. It was an adjective or a descriptor of races. So the white race, being the most civilized, was the most masculine, and this really speaks to Kipling's idea that they had a burden, a duty, to civilize the other races. So the masculine race thought that it had a God-given right to rule over feminine races.

And what's important about this is that the white women of the white race also saw themselves as more masculine than the men of the more feminine or savage races. You see this in the work of someone like Charlotte Gilman, for instance, where she suggests that the white woman retreating to the home was a way to create a white patriarch that understood its bond to other white races. And now the white patriarch had come out to rule to take up the white man's burden and made the world safe for the white woman to rule alongside him. Next, in a world full of savage racial men, this was the oppression, right? This was the oppression of the white woman not being given her God-given right to rule as a white person. So that tells us something about the hierarchies of racial men. When we look at the articulation

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of racial inferiority, the idea was that Black men were less evolved, that they embraced the savage nature, they were less intelligent, and they couldn't control these kinds of primal instincts.

This is so severe that various studies, like William Lee Howard's, for instance, argued that once Black men underwent puberty, they had no higher mental or spiritual functions, that they retreated, in fact, to their savage bestial nature and became the rapist. So this idea that Black men rape, that Black men don't have controllable sexual urges, that Black men are purely sensuous, that they had no intellect, this comes from nineteenth-century ethnology, and we see this adopted not only by white racists and sexologists, but also by white suffragists. So in the chapter, I speak a lot about how feminists took on the science of ethnology during the nineteenth century to explain why they thought that, as white women, they were more civilized, more involved than Black men who were given the right to vote. So this dynamic of trying to control this kind of savage presence gave justification to the rise of lynching, castration, and the debates as to whether or not lynching was too cruel and that they should prefer medical castration as a more humane way of taming the bestial nature of Black men.

The point, though, is that we actually look to the text. So this is one of the pieces about *The Man-Not* that I think is *so* important for us in Black studies, and looking at a kind of American intellectual history we see that the notion of race and racial inferiority really targeted men. They were trying to figure out whether or not these were real men, were they capable of civilization? They measured things like, you know, penis size, the amount of ejaculate that a man gave off, even body hair, you know, at certain points, they measured the length of a Black man's beard. These were all metrics to see if they were real men, to see if they deserved citizenship. And what we've often done in our attempt to, you know, kind of create a nice, politicized view of history, we've overlooked these nuances. We've overlooked how racialized men were part and parcel of the stairs and the ladders to civilization and to savagery. So part of *The Man-Not* is trying to bring attention to this science of ethnology and the way that racialized men, specifically Black men, were utilized as the marker of civilization for the whole race.

It really gives a different view of the kind of routine notion where we say, well, they were the men of their times. Well, that's not exactly it. Black men were always thinking about masculinity and manhood because it was the basis on which the whole race would be judged. And this is something that runs contrary to our at-large, kind-of-liberal and feminist interpretations of how nineteenth-century racial discourse actually went.

Nicole Gipson: Image shown:
Donald Goines, *Daddy Cool: The Graphic Novel* (Los Angeles: Holloway House, 1984).

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Thank you. Excellent. Let's move on. For chapter 2 of your book, entitled "Lost in a Kiss? The Sexual Victimization of the Black Male during Jim Crow Read through Eldridge Cleaver's *The Book of Lives* and *Soul on Ice*," I have selected the cover of Donald Goines's graphic novel *Daddy Cool*. The actual novel, *Daddy Cool*, was published in 1974, the year of Goines's death, along with five of his other novels. However, what we are looking at here is the graphic novel *Daddy Cool*, published in 1984. The text of this graphic novel was written by Don Glut, and the illustrations are by Filipino artist Alfredo Alcala. This graphic novel was released under Goines's name, which makes it the first graphic novel released under an African American author's name. Prof. Curry? Over to you.

Tommy Curry: Yes, you know the image brings so much to mind. Goines is making an argument about (I remember reading this a long, long time ago) Black men, street culture, and the overall circumstances that Black men find themselves in – even the hero is born of the street and an assassin trying to save his daughter from a pimp. But what's fascinating to me about this story is the profundity that we have from Black men, who are usually seen to be street men, or the criminal element, and the most deviant in a society battling rapists. You know, when I wrote chapter 2 of *The Man-Not* with Eldridge Cleaver, I knew it was going to be controversial because Cleaver is a figure that is easily hated. His admission, his admitting that he was a rapist, that he was a criminal. When you look through some of his papers, you know his descriptions of early child abuse, right? You know, these are horrific images. So, he does become a figure that many people love. And of course, he's become the macho premier par excellence. And many of the interpretations offered by bell hooks as the toxicity of Black militancy. But I wanted to choose Cleaver because, you know, like Goines, I think there's something to be said about *that* which we turn away from about something that we're supposed to be disgusted by. And it led me to reading a lost manuscript that Eldridge Cleaver wrote called *Book of Lives*. And that's what I really used to base the chapter on.

You know, it's funny. I want to give a little context here. I think for a lot of readers. When someone looks at Eldridge Cleaver, he becomes an irredeemable figure. He becomes the example of a Black man that we're supposed to all agree to hate. And despite his trauma, despite the brutality that he went through, I dared to look deeper beyond *Soul on Ice* to see what he was trying to tell us about the prison. In his unpublished manuscript entitled *The Book of Lives*, he gives a beautiful story of love within the prison that exposes the sexualized nature of incarceration. And I want to say beautiful because it's under the most grotesque conditions of imprisonment and the

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horrors of prison rape that Cleaver explores the existential dimensions of captivity. There are moments of beauty and clarity for Cleaver where he comes to the realization of love that he has with the character that he calls Little Jesus. His real name is Richard. Throughout *The Book of Lives*, Cleaver discusses the brutality of the prison guards and the dehumanizing conditions of the prison system. How the prison is meant to change men into disposable flesh. As he says throughout the text, the prison changes Black men from human beings into convicts. Cleaver describes the brutality of guards vividly. He eulogizes innocent Black men who lose their lives simply for offending white women on the street. He discusses how you're nothing more than a number and nameless Black male flesh. There's one graphic piece of *The Book of Lives* where he discusses how Black men within the prison are subject to sexual torture and how the wardens and guards use the threat of rape as a way to discipline Black inmates. One particular section of that book talks about "the chapel," which is a place the guards and the warden designated for male prisoners to have sex with one another. The prison officials would view and listen to this activity going on in the prison. So, Cleaver really does articulate a conceptualization of the prison as an institution of sexual violence and a storing house of Black male flesh. So, he's thinking about the erotic nature of dehumanization within the prison's walls. And what's fascinating about Cleaver is how he understands imprisonment as an arena where homoeroticism of white sexual desires are exercised freely against Black men trapped within the prison.

Prison rape and the racist pathologization of Black homosexuality by white social scientists have a complicated history that many people are not familiar with. In 1972, the Bureau of Justice commissioned a pamphlet entitled *Homosexuality in Prisons*, and it was written by this guy named Peter Buffum. Now, what Buffum argued in this short manual – it's about 40 pages – was that the prison was a place that was not representative of all the men of society. It was for the people that were subcultural. And what Buffum meant by that is that these are people who come from poor environments that see violence as the way to mediate everything. So you can't really expect them to just be your everyday person. These are lower class of men who often don't have much to offer society, but when he comes to the Negro, he has a special chapter on the Negro inmate. He wants to make a few arguments. He wants to suggest that the idea of prison rape isn't so much built into the institution of prison, but from the sociology and the sexual experience of the masculinity of the people who come into prison.

During this period of time, men who were from lower classes that came from fatherless homes were thought to be less masculine than middle-class men. They were thought to be feminine

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and hyper-masculine. What Buffum means by this is that the masculinity of lower-class white men and Black men is fundamentally deficient, and because of this, he argued, it had the tendency to lead these groups of men towards same-sex relationships. So, in this world, you have a racist social science that pathologizes same-sex love, or homosexuality, as a reactive and pathological expression of a lack of masculinity.

What I find so refreshing in Cleaver's chapter is that he's trying to reclaim love in the midst of the prison system. So, Buffum, for instance, makes this argument that says that, for Black men, they have an ambivalence towards a homosexual experience. He's like he thinks that there's a lack of strong or negative effect in Black homosexuality because Black men are not real men, their masculinity is completely compensatory. So, whether or not they're rapists of men or women, whether or not they sleep with men or women, these things have no real moral worth to them. He in fact says that the motivation of the negro prisoner to have homosexual contact is more directed by dominance needs and sexual access than any kind of actual effective investment in love a Black man would have. So Cleaver writes a story of a same-sex relationship with Richard and discusses two things. Because Richard was a man who was a preacher and had a family. He loses that family when he is imprisoned for allegedly robbing a white woman. Cleaver talks about the way that the prison effeminizes Richard, as a God-fearing man. But at the same time, Cleaver says, well, I understand myself as a lover of men. And I love Richard. So rather than the dominance that Buffum asserts Black men enforce through rape, Cleaver wants to reclaim Black male same-sex relationships from the dominant view of Black men simply being the rapists of other men. Cleaver challenges this enduring belief in Black men as rapists throughout history. Many scholars are simply not studying the science of what whites asserted about Black men. This leads many scholars to misunderstand the myth of the Black rapist. Under white racist social sciences, the Black man was a rapist because he was a savage. According to many white social scientists throughout the twentieth century, Black males had not evolved the higher qualities of civil society. Mistakenly, many scholars have always read the Black rapist as merely a heterosexual dynamic, and all the evidence is telling us that Black men experience the oppression and dehumanization of sexual orientation as a spectrum. Whether or not you're straight or gay or queer or binary or polyamorous, these sexual orientations didn't matter given the imposition of white power and dominance. So what Cleaver's illuminating is *both* the process by which an institution could take a church-going family man like Richard and make him into a queer Black man, given that he's having sex with other men in prison, and the phenomenology of how Cleaver identifies himself as a

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Black same-sex-loving man, looking at this process of other men becoming convicts who trade their flesh for pleasure or survival with other men. In this world, Cleaver asserts that he finds love with Richard. This resists the savage rape myths associated with imprisoned Black men and asserts, contrary to the dominant views of the time denying that Black men can love within prison, that same-sex relationships, that homosexuality among imprisoned Black men which Buffum is talking about, isn't a pathological and effectively disinterested relationship, but one that Black men actually can feel love in rather than dominance and savage sexual instinct. And this background of what's being debated about Black men within prisons and the ability of Black men, or the supposed ability of Black men, simply to go into prison with the idea of raping other men becomes a really, really important moment in how we think about Black masculinity.

When I'm confronted with Cleaver – I say this in my book – let's not be distracted by the spectacle of Cleaver being a gay Black man or engaging in same-sex relationships during prison, during incarceration. Let's look at what Cleaver tells us about the homoeroticism of the institution and how he believes he found love *even* within that dehumanizing practice, right? That's something that we often don't hold on to. We don't hold on to the moments where Black men tell us something different than what we expect from them. And that's why I really did approach Cleaver, because more than just being the rapist, more than just being the criminal, more than just being the macho, he's telling us about a sexual vulnerability and asking us to see Black men as vulnerable within the prison. So, in *The Book of Lives*, he has this great piece. You know, he uses the F-word, but I'll spare that, given that [this is an] interview. But he says that we have to reexamine sex and sexual reproduction. And if we don't look at sex and the expectation of sex, the way that male bodies are produced, and what women, specifically white women, think they gain by holding on to the white male penis, we never undo the hierarchies that sustain society. Now, if that had come from Foucault, who we know identifies as a gay white man, who's had questionable relationships with various populations in colonial spaces, people would think it's profound. But because it comes from Cleaver, and we're supposed to hate Cleaver and be disgusted by Cleaver, we don't take heed of what Cleaver's telling us about the hierarchies of sexual differentiation that exist within a racialized society.

And it's that hatred that I wanted people to confront in chapter 2. I wanted them to take a serious look at themselves and ask why they wouldn't listen to an incarcerated man who was a rapist, who was abused, who was poor, trying to think himself out of what society said he was in a Jim Crow society. But we'll listen to every other kind of white theorist, like a

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Nazi or an abuser or a pedophile, etc., if they have something to tell us about the state in power, right? So, the disgust and taboo on the Black man is what drew me to investigate closer how he's trying to analyse not only the prison but his ability to find love among men in a world where the Black man was just supposed to be a rapist of other men.

Nicole Gipson: Video link:
Willie Horton: Political Ads That Shaped the Battle for the White House | Retro Report

Excellent. OK. Thank you for that lesson in the tolerance of ambiguity. Let's move on, please. Now we're going to talk about chapter 3 of your book, entitled "The Political Economy of Niggerdom: Racist Misandry, Class Warfare, and the Disciplinary Propagation of the Super-predator Mythology." For this chapter, I chose the Willie Horton ad from 1988. "Willie Horton," whose real name is William Horton, is an African American convicted murderer who was cited during the 1988 presidential election for violent crimes he committed while out of prison on a furlough program from a life sentence he was serving in Massachusetts. During this provisional release, he was convicted for assault, armed robbery, and rape in Maryland. Republican nominee George H. W. Bush renamed William Horton "Willie Horton" and used his criminal record in an attack ad against then Massachusetts governor and Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis. Over to you.

Tommy Curry: I mean, there's so much to say. You know, these were campaign tactics utilized by Bush. I think his campaign manager was Lee Atwater, if I'm not mistaken, who utilized the idea of a dangerous Black man to build up support for Bush's presidency. This isn't exclusively used by Republicans during the same period of time … You know, I talk about the use of the superpredator mythology that was developed around the same time and utilized by the Clintons throughout their election campaigns in the 1990s. You know what's always, I guess, both frustrated me and inspired me to create Black male studies was the way that racial or racist propaganda often targets Black men: as a way to build consensus for state violence, and also producing consensus of legitimacy among the population for their extermination. When I wrote this chapter, and there's a lot in this chapter, I was focussed on three primary issues. The first, of course, was the criminalization of Black men. The ways that crime and criminal genesis specifically, for people like Dilulio are even subculture violence theorists, were utilized to talk about an almost cultural or genetic tracing, a heritage of criminal activity. You know, always think back to, you know, when I read the Dorothy Roberts book, *Killing the Black Body*[*: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*], and they talk about the sterilization of Black women as a way to limit poverty and control deviant elements through deliberate eugenics.

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You know, one of the things that's never highlighted in that, is when you read John Dilulio's work on the Black male superpredator or you're reading Wolfgang and Ferracuti's subculture violence theory, Wolfgang and Ferracuti, is they were interested, or they were dedicated to not having these women produce more men. They didn't want them producing sons because they thought that if you produce these kinds of savage Black men that are prone to deviance and crime, that would create populations within urban spaces that they couldn't control and would actually overwhelm both law enforcement and the white middle class. So, we're looking at the construction of Black men as a social threat, something to be dealt with, as we've talked about in other publications. Now misandric aggression, which is lethal violence, incarceration, or what James Stewart called institutional decimation, is the lessening of populations and numbers so they could be controlled within a society.

Now the second aspect of this is a little more insidious. It's the ways in which poor Black men who become targeted and criminalized by white supremacist systems are spoken about by upper-class Black people. And that's a very controversial and sensitive topic that we're really not willing to talk about. We often like to reduce and flatten Blackness to assert that all Black people are on the same side. But when looking at poor Black men and boys, you see a class division, and I don't want to take credit for that analysis. I've expanded on it, but this is something that you found even in Elaine Brown's work, *The Condemnation of Little B*[*: A New Age Racism in America*]. You see this in Sylvia Wynter's work *No Humans Involved* when she talks about police killings and the police brutality of the LAPD … You see this in Huey P. Newton's work "War against the Panthers[: A Study of Repression in America]," his dissertation, as well as *Soledad Brother*[*: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*]. The ways Black men and boys are targeted by police and written off by the rest of society because they have no jobs, they don't contribute to the capitalist reproduction of ideology or capital. So, what I wanted to do in this chapter was really focus on that disdain that the Black academic class had for working-class Black men that are very much the Black men that come from where I come from and the Black men that look like me.

They're the Black men I grew up with in Lake Charles, Louisiana. So my research interest in Black male studies has very much been around trying to explain the premature deaths, be it through lethal violence or premature weathering of these Black men and boys. When I was growing up, I didn't really see a Black man over the age of fifty. I saw so many Black men die. I saw so many homes run by grandmothers. You know, when you're from the Deep South, poverty is the first thing that you get accustomed to because you come to understand

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that your side of town in Lake Charles looks very different than other sides of town. I remember my first experiences of middle-class Blacks in the US academy. You know, I went up North to be educated. I saw these middle-class Black people. Unfortunately, it was ways that these northern Black folk, in places like in Kansas City, talk about Black people from the South that really offended me. Northern Black folks thought we were slower, we were unmotivated, and we weren't as civilized. You know, they used to make this joke: "Did they tell you slavery was over yet?" This was the mid- and early 90s. So I understood at a very visceral level that northern Black people and an aspiring academic class of Black people had a real disdain for poor Black people. What I try to explain in this chapter is that the problems associated with poor Black men – criminality, rape, drugs, unemployment – are things that identify them as undesirables and place them outside of the moral community, so to speak. And what we have throughout gender theory is an attempt, and this is whether or not you read [Kimberlé] Crenshaw or bell hooks, whether you read white, liberal feminists, whether or not you read white progressives, is an attempt to justify the disdain for working-class Black people that are thought to be a danger. Those working-class Black people that are thought to be threats are usually poor Black men. So what we do is we don't think about them in theory. They don't have very rich or nuanced accounts of their lives. When we talk about poor Black men, they're toxic, they're hegemonic, they're dangerous, they're compensatory, and they do harm to others. So what I wanted to expose in this chapter was the way that theory operates as a means to distance the Black bourgeoisie away from the Black problem, the poor Black male population. And I say that this is the current way of thinking, where Black men are unthought. Poor Black men are represented as numbers. They're represented by statistics of police killings and have their deaths used for the political efficacy of other movements that create career opportunities for middle-class educated Black people. The deaths and suffering of working-class poor, uneducated Black people, which are the people that I come from, are usurped by Black elites who want to gain audience with white liberals.

So in the last point that I made in this chapter, which is perhaps the most controversial, since no one wants to kind of engage this section despite the dozens and dozens of reviews of the book, is the discussion about child abuse and domestic violence in our communities. I grew up in a poor state, a poor city back then, and I saw domestic violence not in my own family, luckily, but in an extended family in the community, etc. I saw children who were harmed. I saw men who were beaten. I saw women who were beaten. This is part and parcel of the environment that I grew up in. But when I got to college, and as I was moving through, there was this denial that men were ever

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victims of domestic violence or even sexual assault. And coming from where I came from, even, you know, even in the interviews of subsequent research we've done now, where we know that Black men have extremely early sexual debuts with older women, we know that Black men are victims of physical and sexual abuse at the hands of women and also men in their communities. We know that men suffer. Black men suffer and sometimes are killed at the hands of female partners. But theory resisted those realities.

What I wanted to do in this chapter as well was to talk about the internalized vulnerabilities that the Black race suffers from the dehumanization imposed by American society at large. So rather than reproducing the trope that men abuse for patriarchy, I actually used national data to better understand how violence was operating in our communities. I pulled forty years of data summaries from the CDC and other sources, such as the Bureau of Justice Statistics, to talk about bidirectionality in domestic abuse and the rates of child abuse within our communities. And how, over life course, starting from a young child all the way to an adult, the exposure to violence, being physically beaten as a child creates the conditions by which one becomes an abuser or a victim of abuse in their adulthood. And I wanted to speak about this in the case of Black men, because despite Black men being shown, from the 1976 National Family Violence Survey to the Bureau of Justice statistics in 1993, to be the largest number of intimate-partner homicide victims in the Black community, there is practically no acknowledgment of their victimization at the hands of women in their homes and communities. We have decades of data on this, but despite the evidence, we don't want to theorize or talk about the violence Black men and boys experience at the hands of Black women. We don't want to explain or think about why these Black men were killed by their girlfriends or their wives. How Black boys are abused by their mothers? These patterns of violence were used in racist social sciences like the subculture violence theory or even, you know, *Tally's Corner*, which gathered ethnographies from these Black couples to show that Black people were more violent than whites. But we, as Black scholars, don't want to talk about this kind of violence in our communities. We refuse to use science or even social work research to better understand how violence operates in Black homes and neighborhoods. Instead, many liberal-arts scholars scapegoat Black men and insist that practically all violence is perpetrated by Black men. So, I wanted to talk about the violence Black men and boys experience at the hands of their caretakers or companions as part of the erasure of the problems and the suffering of poor working-class Black men and boys. Why does no one hear their voices? Why does no one want to theorize their suffering? These are the silences that we all know happen if you come

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from Black communities, various Black communities in the United States. So, in doing this research, I found that Black men literally have been half of the victims of domestic violence and a significant majority of Black victims of intimate-partner homicide from the mid-70s to the 90s. And, of course, I received no response when I presented this data. And what was worse to me is not the lack of engagement, but the lack of care for these men that are suffering, right? So, I really wanted to show how theory operates to unthink [or] undertheorize Black male suffering. This silence imposed upon the lives of Black men and boys permits the stereotypes of criminality, compensatory masculinity, and lack, that serve as the basis of interpreting Black men, to remain unchallenged.

You know, one of the most frustrating things that I face in studying Black men or boys in the academy are the mythologies behind their deviance. This chapter really points out that many of our contemporary gender theories, be they feminist or intersectional or otherwise, still depend on racist social science. The idea that Black men victimize other people because they're trying to reclaim their manhood starts with a pathological account of Black men being deficient or lacking manhood and economic opportunities. Violence is thought to be a coping mechanism; a way of compensating for the manhood and economic privilege denied to them by the larger society. This is just subculture violence theory. And we see this theory utilized throughout the writings of bell hooks. We see subculture of violence theory quoted in Kimberlé Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins" when she quotes *The Second Assault[: Rape and Public Attitudes*] by Joyce E. Williams and Karen A. Holmes. You know Williams and Holmes actually say there is this compensatory mechanism that makes Black men want to rape Black women, right? Contrary to many Black feminist theorists, the focus and study of the Black intra-racial rapist was introduced by Menachem Amir in *Forcible Patterns of Rape* and developed by criminologists. These white criminologists were interested in the rates of intra-racial rape, because they wanted to show that Black men were more prone to homicide and sexual violence than white men. This research led white criminologists and white feminists to hypothesize the cultural and racial drives leading Black men to commit certain types of violent crimes. And even though Williams and Holmes in *The Second Assault* said they have absolutely no evidence for this theory, it became a popularized belief system, kind of pop-culture psychology, associated with Black masculinity that remained unquestioned until Black male studies intervened.

So we have an issue of how we pathologize our own people. And what I try to do in this chapter is show not only the political economy of how Black men are suffering, locked out of jobs, undereducated, or discriminated against when they do apply for

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employment, but also how Black males are demonized by the very scholarship that should be trying to redeem and explain their suffering, right? We've fallen short on how we've humanized Black men. And we've left them to be merely a relic or object that's a consequence of our prevailing theoretical apparati. Just because we assume a notion of patriarchy, doesn't mean that Black men aspire to patriarchy or that patriarchy causes Black men to commit sexual violence. The behavior of this extremely small population of Black men, who commit rape or homicide against their partners, could be victims of previous trauma. They could be victims of statutory rape. They can be psychologically maladjusted. See, that moment of compassion in thinking why the Black man does something or creates violence is fundamentally different than the assumption that Black men commit violence because they're Black men. One's a sociological claim, the other's an ontological claim. And what I wanted to do in this chapter was give all the evidence for the epidemiology and sociology of intra-racial violence, where Black men are both perpetrators and victims of abuse, rather than making the claim that Black males are *only* perpetrators and hardly ever victims of intimate partner violence because of their savage masculinity, their compensatory masculinity.

Nicole Gipson: Image link: African American Soldier With $2 Venus, 1942, WWII, Italy

For your chapter 4, entitled "Eschatological Dilemmas: Anti-Black Male Death, Rape, and the Inability to Perceive Black Males' Sexual Vulnerability under Racism," I sent you a propaganda poster from 1942 named "African American Soldier With $2 Venus, 1942, WWII, Italy." This poster is from an exhibit called Black Bodies in Propaganda: The Art of the War Poster at the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, OK (7 April 2017–16 July 2017). This exhibition was organized by the TZ Production Company from the collection of Tukufu Zuberi, a professor of race relations and of sociology and Africana studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Over to you.

Tommy Curry: Yeah, I mean, there's a long-standing mythology that Black men sought freedom or equality for access to white women. And much like, you know, the classic great-ape representations of the monster holding the white woman associated with the white damsel and King Kong, we see the same imagery in the soldier holding the white Venus and the cheapening of white culture and civilization that comes alongside his freedom. You know, I'm always reminded of … it's a cultural joke … But, you know, in the United States, Black communities laugh. They say any time a Black man holds a position or comes up with something, it's always of lesser value. And we looked at what happened with Obama. A Black man held the presidency, so that means that the most unsophisticated, uneducated white man can now

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hold that position. The position that Black men occupy in the imagination of the West is one of dread and doom. And what *The Man-Not* tried to do, especially in chapter 4, is talk about the Black man as a symbol of negativity and death. And it wanted to explore that but didn't want to overdetermine Black men on that basis. So, with contemporary theories like Afro-pessimism, you have this idea that Black people are all slaves, that there is no positive program that changes the metaphysics of that being. And I'm sympathetic to that reading, given my relationship with Derrick Bell before he died, on the permanence of racism. But I also have a slightly different bend.

In chapter 4, I talk about the study of Black men being burdened by an eschatological dilemma because when you speak of Black men, you often speak of Black men in relationship to the process of death and dying. So, one of the first articles that I published in Black male studies was about Michael Brown and the need for a genre study of Black male death and dying because I wanted to discuss how the particular schemes and narratives surrounding the Black male were always justifications for his extermination, right? If a Black man in Jim Crow stepped out of his place, he could be lynched or killed. If a Black man looks at a white woman, he could be lynched or killed for eyeball rape. If a Black man walks across the street, he could be killed for offending white people, right? So the existential terror surrounding the existence of Black men is one's premature death. So I wanted to explore how Black men represent that and how their being has an extremely sacrificial cost. But I didn't want to end there. I felt that linking Black maleness to death was not superficial or important, but a very general reading of how we could understand Black male being. I also wanted to understand the history of sexual vulnerability that Black men had in the process of dying. And I started off with slavery, exploring how Black men were raped under institutions of slavery in the United States. At the time, there wasn't really any published data on this. Thomas Foster's article just came out about the sexual abuse of Black men during American slavery. There was James Hoke Sweet, who had a very, very short passage about the mass rape of Black men, I think in Brazil. But everything else … that was the only two primary sources that I had to draw on. So much of the work that I did was trying to track down different mentions or different analyses or narratives of Black men suffering rape at the hands of, at that time, I initially thought it'd be other men. But then, when I started looking at the accusations of rape during slavery and Jim Crow and saw the participation of white women in this kind of sexual abuse, it changed my thinking. It made me start thinking about the white woman as a rapist.

Then I ran across Rosa Parks's autobiography. She talks about Jeremiah Reeves, a young Black boy. He was a milk boy, fourteen,

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fifteen years old, who delivered milk to a white woman, and she would rape him. And when the neighbors found out, the white woman accused him of rape. He became the rapist, despite being a victim, and then was executed for the rape of a white woman. I looked closely at the case of Willie McGee, who was killed by the Mississippi traveling electric chair, where there's testimony of him resisting a white woman, her forcing herself onto him, and then when he was discovered, he was called the rapist.

These practices of white women imposing themselves on Black men are something that we have a long record of. J. A. Rogers talks about it in the 1950s in the second volume of *Sex and Race*, where he says that if it wasn't for anti-miscegenation laws, white women would have raped Black men more than white men were raping Black women during Jim Crow and during slavery. He says [that] throughout the world, we knew this. So, in theory, right, and this is what *The Man-Not* keeps pointing out in theory, the production or abstractions that are trying to explain Black life, death, or suffering, we don't appreciate the nuance of Black male vulnerability because we don't think about the Black male. He is unthought. He is predetermined as pathology. We already claim to know all we need to know about Black males. We assert that we know what his suffering and oppressions are going to be, what his pain is claimed in "thought" to be, despite the historical evidence to the contrary. So this chapter really wanted to talk about the vulnerability that Black men have suffered from slavery [and] then in Jim Crow, under a racially repressive regime. So in that section of the book, I utilize James Baldwin. And this is where I think Baldwin's notions of homoeroticism and white male patriarchy become so useful for how we analyze the criminalization and murder of Black men.

Baldwin gives a long narrative of a white man, Jesse, who was basically impotent. He couldn't have sex with his wife or became aroused from her naked body. So, he can't get it up, so to speak, but he becomes sexually excited when he and some other guards start beating up a Black male prisoner. The brutalization of this Black man brings him back, according to Baldwin's narration, to the time that he was a young boy and he saw a Black man be lynched. In "Going to Meet the Man," Baldwin describes the details of Jesse seeing his first lynching as a young boy. Baldwin draws the reader to the eroticism whites associate with the lynching of Black men. How white men and women become sexually aroused from the violence inflicted upon Black men and boys. Baldwin describes how Jesse's white [hand] cupped the Black man's genitals and cut off his testicles and penis. Baldwin explains that Jesse's memory of seeing the castration and mutilation of a Black man, was not only about how a white boy became a "man" that day, but how the sexual maturation of white men is ignited by the barbaric ritual of lynching naked Black men. There's one

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moment, and I talk about this in that text as well, where Jesse reflects on the sexual excitement by his mother. He says his mother was the most beautiful that he'd ever seen her. So, the whole event, the whole spectacle of lynching, is an exercise in eroticism of the white imagination through the severing, dehumanizing, and castrating of the Black male body. Previous literature has discussed lynching as a spectacle, a racial event of sexual violence, etc., but what we don't think of is the ways that violence against Black men plays a psychological and ontogenic role in the maturation of whites as sexual fantasy. We've talked about the horror of the event, but what is it in whites that desires that horror? What is it about burning Black male flesh? What is it about his dismemberment? What is it about his castration – the keeping of his testicles and penis? What does this horror symbolize for whites, and how they think about their relationship to Black men? What about the lynching of Black males creates beauty in the mind of whites?

It's funny because, you know, Helen Hacker, she's one of the premier theorists in the 1950s that's responsible for creating the modern concept of gender. She wrote the article "Women as a Minority Group." In that article, Hacker makes a justification for why women are an oppressed group. But what people often don't realize is that she also wrote other essays on race and gender besides that one essay, that's often quoted. In other essays, like "The Ishmael Complex," she talks about how psychoanalysis and the development of white psychology in America are fundamentally different than the Freudian notions that come out of Europe. She says that in Europe, Freud makes sense because you're talking about basically a homogeneous white society where the father introduces authority and law by taking the child away from the mother. Hacker says, but in America, psychological development doesn't happen through patriarchy. It happens through the Black male. And in her text, she says [that] the Black male psychologically matures whites through what she called the Ishmael complex. This happens to both white men and white women. For white men, she uses Huck Finn as an example. White men see a Black man as the ideal male type. His physicality, his body becomes something the white man wishes he could imitate. So, the young white boy attaches himself to someone, to a Black man, as a way for him to learn manhood and learn how to engage the world in nature. So that's the paternal quality, right? It's the Black man who shows maternal care, but the figure of masculinity. For the white woman, the Black man becomes not the over-dominating man that becomes the husband, but the forbidden fruit. So the white woman in the Ishmael complex becomes sexually awakened by the freedom she has to experiment and desire with the kind of man that she knows exists only in fantasy. A superhuman being that's purely devoted to sex and her pleasure that she can never have.

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Now, I've always found Helen Hacker's reflection on the Ishmael complex instructive because it suggests to us that, within the American context, the Black male represents something fundamentally different than just a mimetic patriarch. The Black male becomes the symbol of a kind of negativity, or forbiddance or taboo, using Freud's words, that develops the unconscious, but, at the same time, he doesn't allow the white person to actually have and possess a real understanding or perception of his being, because to the white mind he is purely symbolic. His actual existence has to be suppressed. So when you think about what Helen Hacker says about the Ishmael complex and then what James Baldwin's talking about in the lynching of Black men in "Going to Meet the Man," you see that the notion of eroticism is not simply desire. Violence against Black men is the mechanism by which white man and white women become delineated in their relationship to the Black male body that they both are trying to dismember or dominate. So saying that lynching is sexual violence is descriptively correct, but the symbolic role that that sexual violence, dismemberment, and the burning of the Black male plays within the white psyche suggests that Black male death is also about the maturation of white power and white sex roles. So that's why sexual vulnerability becomes so interesting to me. I wanted to move beyond simply asserting that rape and sexual violence were almost exclusively the provinces and descriptors of women and thereby should apply to men as well as a form of gendered violence. We've talked about rape that way for over a century. Now that we see this evidence of Black men being sodomized, Black men being raped in Jim Crow and slavery, it forces us to rethink the ways that racism actually operates on male targets. I wanted to show how the category and entailments of gender are broken by the sexual vulnerability of the Black male over the centuries.

And lastly, in that chapter, I talk about police violence. Now, you know, again, you know, one of the things I always tried to capture was nuance. And in looking at how police violence happens, you often find high rates of sexual victimization and sodomy. So, I list a few cases, like Coprez Coffie [and] Abner Louima, men who experience sexual violence, sodomization, and forced penetration during police stops and in police brutality. And what I really wanted to show is that the precursor to death is a kind of sex-specific targeting of men. Their genitals could be mutilated, it could be tased, it could be stomped. They'll be sodomized or anally penetrated with guns, batons, [or] knives in some cases. But we missed this sexual vulnerability because we've often just said, following this kind of the intersection rubric that, well, Black men only experience racism. And what all these examples and this historiography is trying to show is, well, racism, because it's misandric, because it targets the male population as the dominant threat [and] involves a litany of various forms of violence that break our concepts of gender. And that's why the Black man is *The Man-*

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Not. He's not trying to reclaim any kind of masculinity because the supposed masculinity he possesses of the white world is all his negation. He is a testament to what dehumanization does in real time. So the eschatological dilemma is how we think about death, and then the process of dying. So if we think about death as the finality – and this is part of the critique that I'm making throughout the text – if we think about death as the finality of the Black male, then we only count and understand him as the corpse. We represent him as the corpse in theory, a lifeless object. There was that editorial in *National Geographic* entitled "Strange Fruit" back in 2020, where the Black mothers were carrying their sons out as dead corpses to America. And this was a prime example of this kind of metaphysics playing out in the real world that you present the corpse to the world as evidence of the brutality and then impending danger and suffering that's being carried by the race. But the thing is, those Black boys weren't dead, so why does the corpse become their representation? And even more important, the article was not about the suffering of the Black men and boys killed, but how America should empathize with the Black mothers who suffer from the deaths of Black men and boys. This is often what happens, even in theory, in the writing of the Black middle-class gender scholars. They represent the poor Black male body, the dead, the rotting flesh of Black men who were disenfranchised and subordinate, as the basis for their social mobility and uplift. So the disenfranchised, the detestable, the disgustable, poor, working-class, Black men that are thought to be dangers, they don't get the rewards of a life improved. They are simply the symbols that the middle class trample over in their attempt for upper mobility in academies and social spheres. So what does it mean, then, to think about death and the process of dying? The sexual vulnerability, the abuse as children, the disregard, when you find out that violence, that process of dying, is what I think has to be studied because it's in those moments that we can reclaim an aspect of life, right? And that's what I try to do. I try to talk about sexual vulnerability as an additional level of dehumanization that's not considered within our current episteme of knowledge.

Nicole Gipson: "Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in an Elevator," *Tulsa Tribune*, 1 June 1921.

For chapter 5, entitled "In the Fiat of Dreams: The Delusional Allure of Hope and the Reality of Anti-Black (Male) Death That Demands Our Theorization of the Anti-ethical," I chose the article "Nab Negro for Attacking Girl in an Elevator," which was published in the *Tulsa Tribune* on 1 June 1921. Dick Rowland, born Jimmie Jones, and Diamond Dick Rowland allegedly attacked a white girl in an elevator, which was the pretext for the Tulsa race massacre of 1921 (31 May 1921–1 June 1921).

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Tommy Curry: You know it's funny thinking about this now. A few years out, I guess what five or six now, maybe? After the publication of the book because when I wrote this chapter, I really wanted to convey the ways that Black male deviance was used as a justification for racial oppression. This article you selected is perfect because what it shows is that the idea of the Black male rapist is the threat that Black men are thought to pose to white civilization, white reproduction, and white femininity has been used to justify the mass extermination of Black men and women alike. You know, we know for more contemporary studies in social psychology that racial stereotypes are based on the perceptions the dominant group has of the danger of the men of a racial group, right, of an out-group. So, the racial stereotypes that we're talking about you know, violence, promiscuity, you know, things that are used to describe Black people, are usually based on the behaviours that white people have associated with Black men. And then from those behaviours the threat it poses to that group. So, we see this in, in race riots, white terrorism, and white vigilantism but we often ignore the social science that tells us this in favor of our particular identity politics or ideology.

In this chapter, I utilize social-dominance theory by the late Jim Sidanius. Sidanius studied practically all the Western patriarchal societies that were capitalist and found that within these societies, men from out-groups tend to face more direct discrimination, be isolated from societies more than the men and women of the in-group and their female counterpart, and, the most important part, are more subject to lethal violence. So, you'll find mass incarceration, white vigilantism, police violence, and higher incidences of death among the racialized or the subordinate male population. Now for Sidanius, he thought this was a general principle not limited to race. It applied to all subordinate men based on class, religion, national origin, etc. Sidanius calls this particular form of oppression arbitrary set discrimination, right? So, he says, in a given society, in given Western patriarchal capitalist societies, those societies have a threefold hierarchy. The first is age, where older people have more power than young people. The second is sex, our patriarchal system, where men tend to have more power than women. And there's an arbitrary set system that designates out-groups. Those are socially constructed categories or identities that harness the most forms of lethal violence. So, when looking at wars, genocides, human conflicts, he comes up with this idea that dominant in-groups – say, the white race – create stereotypes of out-groups, be they racial or religious, like Muslims, to justify exterminating the men of that group because they see that group [and] the men of that group as terrorists, rapists, criminals, etc. Now social-dominance theory utilizes evolutionary psychology; that's why it's criticized in most liberal-arts circles. But across the board, it's one of

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the most well-cited social-scientific theories of hierarchy in the Western world. Jim Sidanius was a [John Lindsley] professor [of Psychology] at Harvard University. So he built his career around studying human hierarchy, social-dominance orientation, etc. When I ran across this theory, I thought it was profound, but I thought it was incomplete. The incompleteness was around the sexual-vulnerability part. I was fortunate enough to have an interview with Sidanius that I'm still trying to transcribe, or I have to transcribe, where we're actually discussing this issue. He was actually going to lecture for my class here at [the University of] Edinburgh before he passed, around the question of sexual vulnerability, or what I call phallicism, and arbitrary set discrimination.

We were debating in the discussion whether or not his idea was complete, given what I found in genocides and wars about racialized subordinates being victims of rape and sexual mutilation. And it was, you know, in that small interview, the one thing he said was like, well, you know, Tommy, for me, it's just an empirical question, right? It's just obviously down to what the evidence says. And I really appreciated that brief conversation we had. But I used that to say that it's the empirical question about Black male death and the criminalization of Black men that really situates the question of anti-ethics. The anti-ethical suggests [that] if we think about ethics as a system or a set of rules by which we try to make moral decisions [about] what's good or bad, then there's an aspect of dealing with racism that requires us to almost elevate our oppressors to a mythical realm, to be compassionate listeners. Said differently, it's almost as if in our ethical deliberations concerning racism, specifically anti-Black male death, we pretend that the people killing Black men would also be compassionate to arguments about the life and the value of Black men. So, I argue for a perspective that looks at the brute realism of the brutality directed towards Black people and Black men specifically as the basis for proceeding with any racial analysis, be it conceptual or historical. And what I do there is, I say, well look, given that our normative system of ethics is temporal, I should act this way because others in the future will act this way or will benefit me in the future, [which] requires a temporal framework that Black men don't utilize or are not able to utilize. So, because so many Black men die prematurely, what use is a system of ethics that depends on futurity? And I talk about that as an expansion of the now.

Reaching back very much into the work of Newton and Jackson and revolutionaries, to say well look, if we have a situation like police brutality, like premature weathering, right? Where Black men are dying almost a decade earlier than their female counterparts, in some cases twelve to fifteen years sooner than their white counterparts, is there an expectation that Black men are futural subjects? Can they project themselves and their will into the future so that they benefit from moral decision making in the present? And I say that it's this kind of temporal subjectivity

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that hasn't really been accounted for in how we think about racial logics, our racial decision making, and our attempts to ameliorate anti-Black racism. If we think, for example, of the kind of eschatological problem that Martin Luther King proposes for us, where he says I've worked my life for equality, right? But I'll lead you to the mountaintop, but I won't be there to see you over it, right? You know when people talk about him knowing that he was going to die, why does that become part of so many stories for Black men? Why is it that the Black male civil rights leaders [and] revolutionaries knew that they were going to die? So, what does that tell us about their decision-making process and how they formulated the question of what's good or bad, or more so, what were the rules that they operated by to understand a world that suspended ethics when dealing with them, but required it when they dealt with the white world?

This problem of death, this problem of terror, and this problem of horror is something that stimulated this chapter. That's why I said, in "The Fiat of Dreams," we often fiat a world where white oppressors who discriminate, kill, and celebrate the death of Black men and boys, somehow also are compassionate listeners who could undo that violence. In one of my early articles, when I was a young professor, I say [that] what my discipline in philosophy is interested in is not critical race theory but rather critical race therapy. It wants the Black professor to cuddle and coddle the white psychosis into a condition of acceptability, where we utilize our deaths as a conversation starter with populations that are either indifferent or benefit from our absence in the world. And all this chapter is saying is, well, when we look at the evidence, when we look at the social-scientific evidence, we see that lethal violence disproportionately targets racialized and subordinate men. When we see that, what do we do about it? Do we try to have a conversation with the oppressor and try to prove how much these men's lives are worth? Have some value that is not worthless? Or do we analyze that and say this is how the system operates, so our moral appeals may in fact be falling on deaf ears. So that's kind of the anti-ethical mood, or the anti-ethical mode, that I think's necessary for understanding the limited futurity of the Black male and the specific violence that's affecting him.

It's really this chapter that sets in motion my understanding of racism as misandric aggression and the development of the misandric-aggression thesis over the last several years, which is trying to show how the targeting of Black or racialized men is part and parcel both of lethal violence and sexual violence. I argue this is the way that racism operates. We see it in colonialism. We see it in apartheid. We see it in Jim Crow. We saw it in slavery. Despite the fact that the misandric-aggression thesis runs contrary to our in-vogue identarian theories, it has really strong correlative evidence across multiple geographies. What we are missing about Black men is how the process of masculinization is a process of

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demonizing racial groups more generally. Said differently, what we're finding out in the research is that dehumanization is very much the masculinization of a population, a masculinization that reverts a group all the way back to savagery. So, when you look at any image of dehumanized propaganda, be it from the Holocaust, the Armenian genocides, the racist caricatures of Blacks in South Africa, the Willie Horton ad, or the propaganda of the Black male rapist or criminal in America, these are all male faces and figures. And what we see is the association with maleness. This is especially important for Black women [because] the way that race operates is to masculinize and then desensitize observers to the humanity that's perceived in the Black subject. So Black women, when they're doing facial-recognition studies, are often perceived as Black men by whites. Philip Goff's research shows that Black women do not just resemble Black men according to white observers. Because of they are of the same race, Black women are perceived as Black men. So contrary to, I guess, current intersectional theories in liberal arts, the real value of Black male studies is that it's trying to understand that process of masculinization and its role in dehumanization, which is not something that we've really been honest talking about in previous iterations of race and gender theory throughout the twentieth century.

Nicole Gipson: For the Epilogue, "Black, Male, and (Forced to Remain) Silent: Censorship and the Subject/*Subject* Dilemma in Disciplinary Conceptualizations of the Black Male," I originally chose a scene from Barry Jenkins's *Moonlight*, but you came up with a much better example, Denzel Washington's directorial debut, *Antwone Fisher*. I specifically chose the poem recited at the end of this film, "Who Will Cry for the Little Boy," written by the real Antwone Fisher, upon whom the film is based. I will display it now.

Link to: "Who Will Cry for the Little Boy?"

Tommy Curry: So, there's this missing piece that, you know, I don't think I've ever talked about in print. But when I wrote *The Man-Not*, it kind of poured out of me. And I had this other chapter that I wanted to write. It was a chapter that I told my editor about. It was going to be a chapter analysing *Finding Fish*, which is the book that the movie entitled *Antwone Fisher* was based on. At the time, I was still a relatively young professor. I had gotten tenure because I went through it relatively quickly, but it was my first book. And the editor was like, given that it's your first book, you're already at three hundred pages. You don't need another chapter. They were always worried about word limit. Now I regret not putting that chapter in because Antwone Fisher talks about many of the issues that I think really are illuminated in Black male studies around Black boys who are victims of child physical and sexual abuse. I think

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that's so powerful. I'm always frustrated because I present a lot. And I present on this topic a lot. And I try to talk about this victimization. And at the end of it, a typical session will be people asking questions about the data, or maybe it's underreported or can we adjust intersectionality. No one ever asks, well, what about these little boys? And I read them stories of survivors. And I show them the data of survivors. And this is on multiple continents. They just can't empathize with the suffering of young Black boys and men. And you know, this is a real problem that I think happens for those that are outside of Black culture. When I talk to Black people outside of the academy, there is such a rich and compassionate understanding of the threat this poses to people's sons [and] to the kinds of violence that happened, maybe to people's fathers.

I remember I was at the Black Academics Conference. And I spoke about the sexual victimization of Black men and boys. This young woman came right up to me, you know, a Black woman in a crowd. She said, "You know what? After hearing you, I'm calling my daddy." She told me she just could not believe all the things she never thought to ask him about his life. There was another older brother that just gave me a hug with tears in his eyes. You know, for Black people outside of the academy that are not married to (gender) theory, these conversations matter so much because they explain either their victimization and their silences; what they couldn't talk about. And you know, I received letters from people. There was one from a brother who was victimized by his girlfriend and having trouble with his mother. He told me he was thinking about committing suicide. This was in a very long email. And he said he looked up Black male vulnerability and Black male pain, and my book came up. He said there was a copy at his local Barnes and Noble that he bought and spent the night reading. He said *The Man-Not* let him know that someone cared about what happened to Black boys. The hurt that overwhelms everyday people is not something that many academics really care about. *People* are not really cared about, so to speak. But when you see the hurt that Black males go through in the world that people can't even speak about, it changes how you think about the relationship between what theory claims and what the real world demonstrates. Antwone Fisher represents the courage and the resilience of fighting for a voice to speak and think about that silence.

What frustrates me with a lot of people in the academy is that they see human suffering as a point for or point against their personal politics. *The Man-Not* and Black male studies just doesn't care about politics. It cares about the suffering and hurt that Black men and boys endure. And then how our communities are affected by that dehumanization. And that's why, when you seriously read *Finding Fish* and you see that he was abused by these women who were supposed to be his caretakers, it's

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not just the spectacle of the female abuser; it's the inability of a Black boy to ever be loved and to only experience sex as a form of violence. When he talks about his anxiety of loving or even making love to another woman in his life, he associates it with that pain. And we don't. We don't even imagine how young Black boys take in that pain of not consenting to sexual relationships. We don't think that rape or that made-to-penetrate violence damages the soul of these young Black boys because we don't politicize it. But that doesn't mean that there's not a humanity that is lessened and taken away by that moment. So Antwone Fisher is a testimony of a Black boy that was fighting against himself and the world for the violence and trauma that were instilled and taken from him as a young boy. He became a man that was still fighting for the Black boy that couldn't be heard, that was constantly hurt and rejected by the world. And the amount of racism he talks about in *Finding Fish* when he's in the Navy, right? The amount of racism that he has to deal with. What are the resources he has to create a positive manhood that's not only compassionate [but also] self-loving? Because to take that love and love someone else, right? So, when you read this poem, right when you read this question of who cries for the little boy, he diagnoses the apathy that the world has for the young Black male.

There's a section in the book where I say that the Black boy is insidiously despised because instead of being seen as a child he is perceived as a beast cub. The world fears what he'll become when he becomes the Black man. And here you have really a flip of how Fisher's looking at the effect of disorder, of being the Black boy behind the guise of Black manhood that has felt no affection, no love. Whose suffering and death inspire no outrage from a world that claims to say that all human beings are valuable. So, he's reflecting on what it means to grow up as a dehumanized being, right? And that's so powerful for me. I mean, when he talks about how the Black boy cried himself to sleep. He never had for keeps. He walked the burning sand, the boy inside the man, right? This notion of the young boy, the child trapped inside the Black manhood, that the world is constructed as the beast that is incapable of feeling, right? And the way he talks about how he died again. He knows his hurt and pain. You know, this is what we talk about in *The Man-Not*.

You know, *Antwone Fisher* is a tremendous story of resilience. It's a tremendous story of finding love despite the enduring trauma from childhood abuse. It brings a very lived reality to the kind of hurt that we have in our communities, where little Black boys are hurt sexually and physically by older Black women. And we have to start addressing this. You know the failure of Blacks in the academy; it's not that we don't have Black thinkers; it's that we have thinkers who are not courageous enough to honestly study Black life. And that means that we have

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to think beyond the representations of what we think we want to show to the white world. And that means we have to start interrogating this kind of sacrificial lamb, the ultimate sacrifice of the poor working-class Black male, as being a homophobic, misogynist savage that only exists to bring harm to others. As if we can all agree to hate that being so that you're not seen as that being. We have to be honest about what's being traded for social mobility and academic uplift, because theory has a price. And what Black male studies is trying to do is give voice to that little boy that cries inside of the man. It's trying to talk about trauma and the antecedents of violence. Not to engage in a new discourse pathologizing the pain of Black men and boys to pretend that the only violence, suffering, and pain Black scholars can theorize or study is the violence, suffering, and pain caused by Black males towards others. See, this way of thinking denies the sexual vulnerability of Black males because they are primarily framed as the cause of violence and harm against women, children, and sexual minorities. And I hate this about the academy, these gender wars that deny the evidence of Black male victimization for anecdotal stories of the terrors many whites and Blacks believe Black men to be. Our thinking and theorization of Black males should be about the truth. It is about the pain. It is about us being responsible for addressing what Blackness does, not only to Black people but [also] to the minds and souls of Black people under the spectrum of dehumanization. And you know, how many scholars were against me writing this book, when I was actually just starting to write this book. You know, it's not funny, but it makes me smirk now.

When I started writing about Black boys being victims of abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, etc., I had so many Black men telling me their stories when I presented this material. The first chapter I wrote of *The Man-Not* was chapter 4. It was about the rape of Black men during slavery and Jim Crow. At a conference, I had Black men come to me and tell me how they were victims of rape when they were children. I had no intellectual resources to respond to what they were telling me. I want people to really understand this. I had no resources to understand or explain what they were telling me because I didn't know much about Black men and boys who were victims of rape, sexual abuse, or made to perpetrate violence, so I set out to start researching this. And I found out [that] other people didn't know about this as well. So I'd find tidbits. And I had to say, well look, if you look at the child maltreatment data, you find tremendous numbers of Black boys who are killed by female caretakers. You know, five, six hundred. You find tremendous statistics of child abandonment [and] neglect. You find outright child injury in some cases by men or male caretakers. And no one speaks about this.

The controversy around *The Man-Not* is that it's talking about aspects of our community and our realities that we don't

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want to face. We don't want to talk about child abuse. We don't want to talk about child sexual abuse and assault. We don't want to talk about the ways that Black men have been sold down the river, so to speak, so a certain class of Black folks can rise up on their backs. Poor southern Black people understand this dynamic. And to talk about that is to indict some of our heroes and sheroes. But at some point, we have to make decisions about the humanity of all Black people, right? It doesn't matter what kind of Black person you are. It means that it matters that, as a Black person, you understand what it means to be Black because of the imposition and consequence of that Blackness. And that all Black people should be subjects of (Black) study. And I will say this really quickly: the one thing that I wanted to do, because I was tremendously humbled in writing *The Man-Not*, was to not make it another "-ism." I did not want anyone to come away with the idea that this advocates a certain politic. What I wanted to do was say, what happens if we genuinely studied a population? So, if I say I want to study Black males, all Black males, right, straight, gay, poor, rich, Muslim, Christian, etc. I wanted to know what it would mean to study Black men and boys without preconceived notions. I wanted to form theories by looking at their stories, looking at the evidence, [and] looking at their history? What kind of theory would we formulate? What theory could we formulate based on studying the history and stories from Black men's perspectives? *The Man-Not* was a product of that study. *The Man-Not* is what happened when I look at the facts and believe in the humanity of Black men and boys first and foremost, rather than something to be negotiated with based on my thinking that they're violent, toxic, or whatever the case may be?

So, Fisher really is an inspiration to me, just like George Stinney. You know the reason I chose him on the cover of the book was because he was the youngest boy, [the] youngest child executed. In an ideal world, where I got to write the "Finding Fish" chapter, I wanted to discuss the little boy who's crying and dying inside the body of a (Black) man. For Antwone Fisher, he became a man, without addressing the child – the little Black boy – harmed by his Black female caretakers and the world who hated him. On the other hand, George Stinney, was executed as the Black man he had not yet become. He was a child, a young Black boy, unable to even sit in the electric chair, falsely accused of crimes he physically could not commit. When I thought of *The Man-Not*, I conceptualized George Stinney and Antwone Fisher as two poles of Black male negation. For Black males, be they man or child, they are burdened by the harm and hatred the world has towards them. It was two poles of opposition that I wanted to end the book with, but it was a very emotional process because I had to deal with a lot of horrific facts. I've dealt with lots of criticism for trying to talk about the abuse,

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be it physical or sexual, that Black boys suffer and the domestic abuse that Black men suffer. And I know these are not conversations that are popular, but Black people are suffering, right? Our women suffer. Our children suffer. Our men suffer. And I don't believe that it is the right of any Black intellectual before us to say that certain Black people matter, and other Black people don't. I just think that in trying to analyze Black men and boys, we have to confront dehumanization [in a] straightforward and forward-facing [way]. And that's something that I think very few of us have the courage to admit to ourselves or to admit about what's happened in our communities. So that's ultimately why I wrote *The Man-Not*.

Nicole Gipson: My goal in organizing this exchange was to make your work even more accessible and to transform this interview into a teaching tool. I want people to take your book, take extracts from this interview, and teach with them. I hope that my dream will come true for your work, which is so very profound and necessary.

Tommy Curry: Thank you.

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