

**Auschwitz and the Plantation:
Labor and Social Death in American Holocaust and Slavery Fiction**

BY

DANIELLE CHRISTMAS
B.A., Washington University in St. Louis, 2005

THESIS

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Defense Committee:

Walter Michaels, Chair and Advisor
Madhu Dubey
Nancy Cirillo
Jennifer Ashton
Matthew Lippman, Criminology, Law, and Justice

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SUMMARY

After the introduction, this dissertation is comprised of three main chapters. The first considers William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* and *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, as well as the historians that most influenced Sytron's point of view, to provide one account of the relationship between slavery and Holocaust representations. Their collective account is decidedly economic: slavery and the Holocaust are both forms of capitalist exploitation, and the separate fiction and nonfiction narratives depict these events accordingly.

The second main chapter brings Orlando Patterson's novel *Die the Long Day* and his sociological history *Slavery and Social Death* into conversation with the novel and film *Mandingo*, to uncover an alternative understanding of slavery: for Patterson and Onstott, slavery is not labor exploitation, but is actually social death manifested as sexual exploitation.

The final main chapter looks at novels about Nazis, by Robert Shaw and Ira Levin, to discuss what is here called the privatization of evil as it opposes the prevailing socioeconomic good; for them, Nazism is a disease of exceptionalism and criminality is decontextualized from the socioeconomic conditions that at the least framed it and at the most motivated it.

Taken together, these separate chapters tell a story in which slavery and Holocaust narratives sometimes speak directly to one another and sometimes settle on gesturing at the

SUMMARY (continued)

same logic. But this all works (with the exception of Styron and his comrades) to a common end: that end being the reproduction of a moral worldview for which criminality is a disease of the individual and not the capitalist state, and the desire to make money operates to protect human dignity rather than violate it. The central point of this dissertation, then, is to argue that, in the period from the late 1960s through the 80s, labor-based explanations of both American slavery and the Holocaust were advanced at the same time as they were consistently, and often angrily, rejected. To the starting questions—what motivated Nazis and slaveholders in American literature—the answer turned out to be some combination of race-hatred, evil, or madness, as opposed to any form of material or political self-interest.

1. INTRODUCTION: LUCIFER IN AMERICA

Following the 1978 premiere of the television miniseries *Holocaust*, literary scholar Eric J. Sundquist describes how “some African Americans charged that *Holocaust* was the Jews’ way of stealing their spotlight.”¹ More specifically, these critics begrudged NBC’s admitted attempt to mimic the overwhelming and unexpected success of ABC’s 1977 eight-night television event, *Roots*, with their own ethnic melodrama. And NBC not only appropriated what *Roots*’s 130-million large viewership and nine Emmys proved was a winning formula; the network collaborated with organizations like the Anti-Defamation League and American Jewish Committee, and partnered with media outlets like the *Chicago Sun-Times*, to promote the premiere, distribute millions of study guides, and coordinate complementary programming.² As the proverbial pilot for this kind of television production, commemorating the traumatic history of a demographic (African Americans) with far fewer resources, *Roots* had none of this publicity. Whereas NBC successfully had the day of their own premiere nationally dubbed “Holocaust Sunday,” those critical of the attempt to piggyback off of *Roots*’s achievement were left with the distinct sense that the critical success of the series about their own traumatic history, and more importantly the history that inspired it, was being pushed aside.

Before Toni Morrison, in the famous epigraph to her 1987 novel *Beloved*—to the “sixty million and more”—implied a kind of competitive comparison to the refrain-like familiarity of the “six million” Jewish victims of the Holocaust, these African American critics of the *Holocaust* miniseries protested this perceived attempt to eclipse the national crime that was plantation slavery. There is indeed a frequent contest between purveyors of African American and Jewish history over the consequences of slavery and the Holocaust—

i.e., the problem of “who had it worse.” However, the works of fiction that have been created about these events, particularly from the 1960s–70s, have increasingly implied a different link between them: a similarity of motive—the idea that however many Jews or Africans were killed, they were killed for the same reason.

There is a tension in the historiographical literature that provides causal accounts of slavery and the Holocaust in particular. The controversies of representation that uniquely grew up around the time of ABC’s and NBC’s epic broadcasting achievements tended to cluster around two explanatory modes for these atrocities: the first having to do with money, and the second with identity. As I discuss in this project, it is no coincidence that explanations focused on economics and on identity became prominent at this historical moment. After all, the atrocities being brought back into public consciousness in the narratives of *Roots* and *Holocaust* coincided with the moment when a new economic philosophy was elevating money to a sacrosanct status in the budding American values system; this emerging economic theory was turning profit motive into a mechanism for virtue and identifying state regulation as the instrument of crimes, including those that took place on the Mississippi cotton field, as well as the nightmarish Treblinka concentration camp.

While this is not a work of historical archival scholarship, and where historiography is considered it is read as a form of evolving narrative, the merits of each competing account—fictions concerned with economic explanations for the Holocaust and slavery vs. those invested in decidedly non-economic explanations for these perpetrators’ motives—are important inasmuch as deliberate deviations from the historical record—on the part of revisionist historians as much as novelists—reveals the nuances of a simultaneous shift in the way we understand atrocity in general, and slavery and the Holocaust in particular. Slavery

represents some special historiographical challenges, given the proximate but distinct modes of slavery in the wider Americas, and the frequency of Caribbean plantation representations in the wider Anglophone slavery literature. (Although there was an equal variability in the quality-of-life at concentration camps, Auschwitz looms so large in Holocaust fictional memory that the same kind of qualification is not as necessary.) The contrast between American and Caribbean slavery is, where documentary evidence is concerned, rather straightforward. The fact that West Indian and American chattel slavery were in many crucial ways different—but as we will find on the Jamaican and American plantations of Chapter 2, were often understood as one-in-the-same—is itself a significant revision of history. American slaveholders generally did, as a means of protecting their labor force, practice what some slavery historians (as discussed in Chapter 1) describe as a (comparatively speaking) more “benign” approach, in an effort to preserve the health of their slaves, i.e. the means of production. However, West Indian plantation slaveholders set an early example for bureaucratized brutality that systematically treated African slaves as expendable commodities.

Lest we interpret this as evidence that regional West Indian slavery was itself driven by a commitment to racism rather than money, in fact slaveholders concluded that exhausting and replacing their work force was, over time, cheaper than allowing slaves to survive and reproduce. For example, former slave ship captain and abolitionist John Newton (of “Amazing Grace” songwriting fame) provided an account of one such Antiguan slaveholder who “said that calculations had been made...to determine which was...the most saving method of managing Slaves: ‘Whether to appoint them moderate work, plenty of provision,’ and “treatment” intended to “protract their lives’.... Or, ‘By rigorously straining their strength...with...hard fare, and hard usage, to wear them out.’”³ In other words, this

slaveholder was solving a math problem to find out if it was, in fact, cheaper to work his slaves to death “and then to buy new ones, to fill up their places?”⁴ As it happened, the master’s bookkeepers identified this expend-and-replace model “as [the] much...cheaper” option.⁵

Contemporary historian Adam Hochschild quantifies this for the wider Caribbean writing, “So rapidly were slaves worked to death...on the brutal sugar plantations of the Caribbean, that between 1660 and 1807, ships brought over three times as many Africans across the ocean to British colonies as they did Europeans.” Comparing these statistics to American plantation slavery, Hochschild goes on to say, “Caribbean slavery was, by every measure, far more deadly than slavery in the American South.”⁶ Proponents of a historiography of slavery that used it as the defining example of evil and the egregious mass crime to which no event can measure—as I begin to discuss in the next chapter—would almost certainly take issue with the unwelcome implication that “Southern masters” were somehow more “kind and gentle” than their Caribbean (or any other) counterparts; however, Hochschild makes a point to explain how much of the differences between these competing incarnations of slavery had to do with the uniquely brutal nature of “cultivating sugar cane by hand,” which he calls “one of the hardest ways of life on earth.”⁷ In a grim tally reminiscent of the more ubiquitous post-Holocaust survival statistics—the dismal reality of how many Greek Jews were sent to Auschwitz compared to how many actually came home, for example—Hochschild offers numerical evidence that West Indian slaves “were systematically worked to an early death.”⁸ In the United States, on the other hand, the “less than half a million slaves imported over the centuries” had reached “nearly four million” by the passing of emancipation.⁹ By contrast, at the termination of British West Indian slavery, “total slave imports of well over two million left a surviving slave population of only

about 670,000.”¹⁰ Hochschild finishes adding, “More than twice as many slaves were shipped to the island of Jamaica alone than to all” of the United States colonies combined, making West Indian plantations the statistical equivalent of the most efficient Nazi death camps.¹¹

Like the savvy Antiguan planter who based his model of slave management on the pursuit of profit, there were some Nazis who claimed that the same expend-and-replace approach was the more economically efficient one for the purposes of the Final Solution; in other words, there were Nazis who, rather than uncritically following the mandate to kill Jews as an end in itself, conducted their own versions of a cost-benefit analysis (and reached the same conclusion) instead of uncritically following orders. In his April 30, 1942 report on the expansion of the concentration camps, head of SS economic administration Oswald Pohl documented this approach; according to historian Peter Longerich, Pohl “emphasized that ‘keeping prisoners on the grounds of security, reeducation, or prevention was no longer the priority’; the ‘main emphasis’ had ‘shifted towards economics.’”¹² In a separate order, Pohl sent orders to all Nazi camp commandants “‘responsible for labour deployment [that] in order to achieve maximum performance this deployment must be exhausting in the truest sense of the word.’”¹³ In the biography of Pohl’s superior, Heinrich Himmler, Longerich writes that “Himmler geared his organization to combine mass murder with mass production in the form of ‘extermination through labour’” in an effort to “counter the accusation...that the SS was pointlessly eliminating labour that was urgently needed.”¹⁴ In the spirit of the Jamaican sugar plantations, Himmler’s “plan explained the mass extermination of people who were ‘incapable of work’ as a ‘practical’ necessity.”¹⁵ Though this Nazi calculation probably happened with a preferred answer in mind—asking questions in a way for which the murder of Jews would always be the answer—the very

suggestion that these men stopped to think at all is, as we will see, an increasingly subversive idea indeed.

Those scholars who provide (at times, vehement) theoretical counters to this historiographical reading tend to share the analysis that we find in the work of religious scholar Beverly E. Mitchell, if articulated slightly differently. In her monograph, *Plantations and Death Camps*, Mitchell reviews the histories of both slavery and the Holocaust, acknowledging the vague possibility of economic motives just as she dismisses them in favor of an account based on ideology—what she identifies as a theology of racism that is the defining feature of these separate histories. She goes on to argue that, “modern racism emerged as...an afterthought—a consequence of the ideological justification of European political and economic domination over people of color.”¹⁶ While granting that “modern racism emerged as a consequence of particular economic and political circumstances,” Mitchell stresses that “racism developed as an independent phenomenon...[and] morphed into a complete system of meaning and value.”¹⁷ The short summary of the dissertation chapters that follows clarifies how my own inquiry makes sense of this “meanings and values” system as it emerges in contemporary American literature.

The first chapter is entitled, “The Plantation-Auschwitz Tradition: Reimagining Slavery in *Sophie’s Choice* and *The Confessions of Nat Turner*.” In William Styron’s *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967) and *Sophie’s Choice* (1979), as well as in the critical responses to them, two burgeoning discourses emerge: a commitment to the idea that economic motives can explain the histories of the Holocaust and slavery, and the different but equally-developing commitment to the idea that racial sentiments against blacks and Jews define these histories. After demonstrating Styron’s commitment to an economic explanation, this chapter describes the fate of that economic explanation in Engerman and

Fogel's controversial history of slavery, *Time on the Cross* (1974). All of these works were controversial because critics claimed they failed to take racism seriously and, in failing to do so, produced what critics regarded as exculpatory accounts of Holocaust and slavery perpetrators. Finally, then, this chapter explores the emerging consensus among literary and history scholars—and as the remaining chapters will show, fiction writers themselves; this consensus presumes that, because an account based in (an increasingly celebrated) financial self-interest risks exculpating these dual atrocities, what we understand to be racist crimes can only be understood through the lens of inexplicable and unpardonable evil.

This discussion of Styron moves into a look at slavery literatures in Chapter 2, “Pleasure me, you ebony wench!': Sexual (Re)Production, Social Death, and the Mandingo Genre.” In Orlando Patterson's 1972 plantation slavery novel, *Die the Long Day*, the notion of what he later calls social death ultimately edges out the primacy of economically-driven labor and property ownership as the central motivation for slavery. His novel defines slavery not by the performance of slave labor, as prior novels did, but as a symptom of the perpetrator's wielding of *social death*, a state that the novel's slaveholders perform as violent sexual (re)production. This novel follows in the tradition of Kyle Onstott's popular, hyper-sexual 1957 novel *Mandingo*, a work that inspired a two-film, 14-novel franchise as well as an entire mandingo genre that characterizes plantations first-and-foremost as sexually violent breeding grounds. Bringing the mandingo genre into conversation with his sociological opus *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), this chapter reveals how slavery stopped being causally and practically linked with “the economic” in the 1960s and 70s, exploring how the theory of a sexualized social death came to elide labor as the central structure of slavery. Taking Onstott's and Patterson's works together, this chapter argues that the ascendancy of a neoliberal politics for which greed, by

definition, excluded (rather than defined) the perpetrator, drove narratives in which sex-as-social death replaced the labor plantation.

The last chapter, “Eichmann and Hitler Gone Mad!: Privatizing Evil in Nazi Fiction,” uses Robert Shaw’s *The Man in the Glass Booth* (1967) and Ira Levin’s *The Boys From Brazil* (1976) to show how an explanatory model of pure evil, as an alternative to an explanatory model grounded in self-interest, was conceived and put into place using the Adolph Hitler and Adolph Eichmann archetypes. This chapter explores how Nazis have served as American cultural vehicles for mediating the existence and definition of absolute wrong. My analysis of the novels reflects an increasing individualization, or what could be called privatization, of motive and a denial of the structural causes and contexts of atrocity. This implicit preservation of sociocultural integrity does so in a way that posits American institutional “good” as the antidote to the singularized Nazi purveyor of “evil.” In *The Man in the Glass Booth*, atrocity is located firmly within the boundaries of a psyche so disturbed as to be totally fractured, as we struggle to find out if the main character is a Holocaust survivor or is actually a Nazi escapee. Throughout the narrative, this character (when Nazi and Jew) is understood entirely in terms of his isolation and psychological fracture, removing context from the narrative’s moral line of inquiry. Levin’s narrative uses the discourses of science and psychology to create a horrific thought experiment in which Dr. Josef Mengele clones 94 Hitlers and then proceeds to intervene in their lives in ways that he hopes will elicit a reproduction of the original Hitler’s evil. In this bio-psychologized “experiment,” the premise of “Hitler DNA” turns perpetrator capacity into a randomly assigned mutation, and evil is understood as reproducible but exceptional.

Finally, the concluding review of my project, “When Slaveholders Became Nazis, and Why,” uses two critical reactions to Quentin Tarantino’s 2012 film, *Django*

Unchained, to consider precisely what it means for slavery representations to become more like narratives of the Holocaust. Using director Spike Lee and Adolph Reed to illustrate the competing versions of the explanatory atrocity discourses, those being economics and racism, I consider how this tension continues to emerge in popular culture; this happens in service of considering the critical question at which my project gestures: *How does the fact that authors of Holocaust and slavery fictions are in literary conversation have consequences beyond reading Holocaust and slavery literature?*

In the end, this dissertation argues that in fact 1960s–70s American narratives of the Holocaust and slavery reflect competing accounts of the different logics—especially the financial and racial logics—that underwrote these events, and they did so in symptomatic response to the ascendancy of neoliberal discourse and the prevailing notion that “free market morality” actually guarded against atrocity. In what is now regarded as the emerging dominance of American neoliberalism—with its emphasis not just on the economic value of efficient markets but on their moral value as well—an intensified interest in identifying racism as the source of the world’s greatest evils became linked with an intensifying interest in rehabilitating greed. It is this nexus of relations between the emerging sense of the horror of genocide and the different but, I argue, compatible sense of the value of markets that is at the center of my project.

A critique of what we might call a neoliberal aesthetics, and the obvious problems associated with insisting on the implicit integrity of financial motives, is not to suggest that the exploitation, torture, and murder of European Jews and African slaves logically follows the pursuit of profit. Nor is my point to advocate for racism as the defining causal agent of the Holocaust, or slavery for that matter. Rather, I am simply asking why there is such an

abiding resistance to the suggestion that money might have motivated perpetrator actions after all, and what it means that there is an often uncritical commitment to racism, sexual violence, and insanity as explanatory principles. My analysis of these texts points to the increasingly implicit (and at times overt) hostility to the suggestion that perpetrators were motivated in whole or in part by greed, and forces the question of how changing notions of historical truth, and right and wrong, gesture at the pervasiveness of a normalized economic ideology as it emerges in cultural production, as well as the culture at large. While the answer to this question is outside the scope of my project, this is not to ignore the fact that it is well within the purview of relevant, even urgent, conversation in scholarly as well as general social discourse.

Outside of the universe of the set of texts examined in each chapter, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the literary history of texts that orient themselves around narratives of genocide. Often, these texts are examined with respect to an author's authenticity and historical accuracy. Does a white gentile have the authority to tell Holocaust and slavery stories? Is a reference to sixty million African victims a fair comparison to the better-documented six million of the Holocaust? This project will show that the series of issues having to do with questions of motive, and above all the emergence of racism for some writers—and for others like Styron, the critique of racism—are connected by a shared logic. Because this logic extends beyond the questions raised by literary representation, this project also intervenes into Holocaust and slavery historiographical discourses, advancing the centrality of the relationship between economics and race-hatred. Insofar as these historiographical issues emerge alongside the broader cultural rehabilitation of the market, the questions of people's motives concurrently emerge as crucial not just for what they did—which *is* crucial—but also for

thinking through what at any given moment counts as truly wrong. While the pure version of this is “greed is good,” for most of the artists and scholars I consider, it is not that “greed is good,” but rather that “greed is better than racism.” And this rehabilitation of greed ultimately evolves into the idea that making money can and should be an antidote to race-hatred and even, and especially, genocide.

NOTES

¹ Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2005), 82.

² Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Mariner, 2000), 210.

³ John Newton, *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade* (London: J. Buckland, 1788), 38.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶ Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (New York: Mariner, 2005), 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 560.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Beverly E. Mitchell, *Plantations and Death Camps: Religion, Ideology, and Human Dignity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 94.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

2. THE PLANTATION-AUSCHWITZ TRADITION: REIMAGINING SLAVERY IN *THE CONFESSIONS OF NAT TURNER AND SOPHIE'S CHOICE*

The etiology of Auschwitz—to some a diabolical, perhaps freakish excrescence, which vanished from the face of the earth with the destruction of the crematoria in 1945—is actually embedded deeply in a cultural tradition that stretches back to the Middle Passage from the coast of Africa, and beyond, to the enforced servitude in ancient Greece and Rome.

—William Styron¹

The sea journey of the slave ships was a horror comparable only to the German freight cars.

—Richard L. Rubenstein²

The only mass experience that Western people have had within recorded history comparable in any way with Negro slavery was undergone in the nether world of Nazism. The concentration camp was...a perverted slave system.

—Stanley M. Elkins³

“What the hell, once a racist exploiter always a racist exploiter,” says Stingo, the autobiographical narrator of William Styron’s *Sophie’s Choice*.⁴ The “once” that Stingo has in mind is his inheritance of \$485, “the proceeds of the sale of a 16-year-old negro boy named Artiste,” proceeds that are passed on to him and that he lives on while writing his first novel.⁵ And the “always” refers to the charges of racism made against Styron’s 1967 novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*. He meant *Nat Turner* to be a progressive depiction of slave rebellion, but rather than being celebrated by black scholars—a community that the narrator dismisses just as he expresses lasting disappointment at its collective disapproval—his novel was met instead with “accusations” from “black people” that “as a writer...I had turned to my own profit and advantage the miseries of slavery.”⁶ If, then, not even Styron’s nationally acclaimed masterpiece can mitigate his white guilt—and if in fact what he understands as his best efforts are interpreted as a deceitful and deliberate attempt to professionally and financially profit from slave “miseries”—Stingo’s failure to “tithe a good part of [his inheritance] to the N.A.A.C.P.” could make little moral difference.⁷ This moral

failure is, in Stingo's analysis, simply a harbinger of the inevitable racist exploitation to come.

Criticism of *The Confessions of Nat Turner* was, as Styron suggests, often turned into an attack on the author's ability, or the ability of any white man, to create a just and insightful slave narrative. For example, Lerone Bennett, Jr., senior editor of *Ebony* magazine, objected to Styron's Nat as a "white invention" who is not only a "standard Styron type: a...white intellectual in blackface," but is furthermore a product of Styron's "deliberate attempt to steal the meaning of a man's life."⁸ Bennett's criticism was echoed by several of the other writers in the critical anthology, *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*. For Bennett and the other black writers, this was an egregious case of a white man appropriating and perverting, i.e. exploiting, black history.⁹

Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D., one of Bennett's fellow essayists, suggested that despite his good intentions and attempts at authenticity, Styron's whiteness transformed Nat Turner into "a character [who] seems to be quite white," a fact that was consistent with what Poussaint said were Styron's and the novel's "obvious and...subtle manifestations of white racist attitudes."¹⁰ As evidence of Styron's racist attitudes, Poussaint points to several plot elements: "first, almost all of the important and influential persons in [Nat's] early developmental years were white"; second, the "hero is...portrayed as a 'house nigger'" with stereotypical feelings of "self-hatred, anti-Negro attitudes and a desire to be white"; third, Nat's self-hatred manifests in his yearning for a "white woman with an erotic-religious fervor which implies that salvation itself must lie in her loins"; and finally, the "depiction of [Nat] as a would-be deviant," given his homosexual experiences, "carries the implication that the whole revolt against slavery and racism was somehow illegitimate and 'abnormal.'"¹¹ While Poussaint concedes that he has "no reason to believe that" the "degrad[ation] and

“emasculat[ion of Nat]...was [Styron’s] conscious intention,” he concludes that “given the facts and content of the novel, one wonders if Styron was an unwitting victim of his own unconscious white racism for which he can not be held fully accountable.”¹²

The inclusion of a medical doctor like Poussaint in a critical anthology of this kind is unusual and it is made more curious by the physician’s decision to conclude by shifting responsibility, at least partially, from Styron to his immutable racial identity, framing the problematic elements of the novel as symptoms that are no more avoidable than the symptoms of a patient who fails to rid himself of disease.¹³ Styron’s stain on the narrative extended outside the bounds of print scholarship and into Hollywood; despite much initial enthusiasm for adapting *Nat Turner* for 20th Century Fox, the film was “aborted,” in part out of “fears of a boycott by the numerous black activist organizations that hated the book and were vocally opposed to a film version.”¹⁴

Styron’s problem with racial appropriation was not limited to *Nat Turner* or African American issues. In fact, *Sophie’s Choice*, the very novel in which Styron’s narrator reflects on the black writers’ accusations, was itself criticized for its racial attitudes towards Jews and its inauthentic representation of the Holocaust. But it was criticized less for the fact that Styron is not a Jew than for his choice to use the emblem of the Holocaust, Auschwitz, in the concentration camp-narrative of a non-Jew. While these issues are slightly different—a critique of the author’s identity is obviously not the same thing as a critique of a character’s identity—the question in both cases is principally concerned with race and, more specifically, racial authenticity.¹⁵ Styron acknowledged this when framing his standard defense of *Sophie’s Choice*. When his or Sophie’s right to a Holocaust narrative was called into question, Styron pointed to the multiplicity of Auschwitz’s victims—the presence of Catholics, Romanies, and others alongside Jews—as evidence for the collective right of non-

Jews to create or inhabit their own Holocaust narratives. Although the same answer wouldn't exactly have worked for *The Confessions of Nat Turner*—as opposed to the diversity of Sophie's peers, Nat's fellow plantation slaves are exclusively black—this explanation underscores Styron's lasting impression that the credibility and authenticity of his work was intrinsically linked to identity, be it his or his character's. Styron insists on collective ownership of Auschwitz not just because its methods made it, by nature, “anti-human, anti-life,” but because “at Auschwitz perished not only the Jews but at least one million souls who were not Jews.”¹⁶ Implicit in this defense is the idea that identity counts, and that the diversity of Auschwitz's victims satisfies identity-linked criteria for most people. Shoring up his own authority, Styron shares that his “interest in [Auschwitz] was deep, since...my four children are half-Jewish and I claim perhaps a more personal concern with the idea of genocide than do most gentiles.”¹⁷ Even under the strictest of criteria—that to talk about Auschwitz, one must share a stake in the Jewish future—Styron makes it clear that he has the requisite credentials.

The critique of Sophie's gentile identity also has its roots in the controversial deployment of the term *Holocaust*, which has sometimes been used as an umbrella term describing all victims of Nazi Germany—including Catholic Poles like Sophie—while at other times used to refer solely to the Jewish-specific “Final Solution.” The former definition reflects Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal's argument for a notion of the Holocaust that includes “eleven million civilians dead, including six million Jews,” a definition that Wiesenthal suggested would avoid the political consequences of dismissing fellow survivors; his position was in part a pragmatic one, based on the fact that these survivors, for the most part, returned to nations and communities that had far more international clout than the depleted population of diaspora Jews or their state-seeking counterparts in

Israel.¹⁸ This position directly opposes the limited definition advocated for by Elie Wiesel, who argues that denying the “Jewish essence of the Holocaust...would...falsify it in the name of misguided universalism’... There were indeed ‘other victims’...[but] they were not victims of ‘the Holocaust.’”¹⁹ In setting Sophie’s story in Auschwitz, the emblematic site of Jewish Holocaust suffering—emblematic in part because it is the setting of Wiesel’s renowned autobiography, *Night*—many Jewish critics were anxious that Styron’s narrative would popularize the former “universalized” definition of *Holocaust* over the latter Jewish-specific one. While understanding the Wiesenthal-Wiesel opposition illuminates the critical response to Sophie’s identity, it also raises the challenge for any aesthetic or critical project—and specifically this critical project—to discuss Jewish Holocaust victims and non-Jewish Nazi victims simultaneously, without becoming distracted by semantic politics. In defining my own use of the term *Holocaust*, I will use the “Wiesenthal-[Jimmy] Carter” definition—as Yehuda Bauer derisively calls the inclusion of non-Jews—for ease of reference. Because my interest here is the prevailing identity-linked notions of slavery and the Holocaust, and instances in which authors and historians choose to abandon these identity linkages, it is helpful to retain their base premise: i.e. the language of “Holocaust” and “slavery” remains a constant in spite of the displacement of racial accounts.

But despite these critical and semantic controversies and Styron’s own impressions of them, I will argue, Styron’s race and religion were not the main issues at stake in these conflicts, neither for his critics nor for the writer himself. Rather, the most important, and most contested, element of both novels was Styron’s acceptance and advancement of certain accounts of slavery and Holocaust history that framed these histories as phenomena driven more by economic concerns than by racial ones. These particular representations of slavery and Holocaust history were given their strongest voice by historians Stanley M.

Elkins and Richard L. Rubenstein respectively. Crediting these particular historians, Styron writes in his introduction to Rubenstein's Holocaust history that "when I first read Rubenstein's book I felt very much the same effect of keen illumination that I did when, in the early stages of writing *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, I happened to read Stanley Elkins's *Slavery*.... Like Elkins, Rubenstein is forcing us to reinterpret the meaning of Auschwitz...from the standpoint of its existence as part of a continuum of slavery."²⁰ And this reinterpretation of both Auschwitz and the plantation, one that would emphasize forced labor instead of race-driven murder, was atypical indeed.

The standard account of the Holocaust in particular had always represented it as driven by racism, in the form of antisemitism: Holocaust survivor and international peace activist Elie Wiesel has used his stature to publicly contest any account of the Holocaust that doesn't insist on "the conceptual priority of Jewish victimhood."²¹ Wiesel began advocating publicly for this restricted definition when, as chairman of the founding commission for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, he was charged with President Jimmy Carter's mandate that the museum commemorate the "eleven million innocent victims exterminated—[only] six million Jews."²² Resisting any definition of the Holocaust that directs attention to non-Jewish victim groups, Michael Berenbaum, the deputy director of the commission, argued that "not only were Poles, Gypsies, Ukrainians, and other European ethnics not 'victims of the Holocaust,' but that...he wasn't even sure that they deserved to be called 'victims of Nazism.'"²³ By arguing for the primacy of Jewish victimhood, Wiesel and Berenbaum are not just privileging Jewish suffering to the exclusion of other Nazi victims; more importantly, they are constructing an account of Nazism in which the historical lens of race-hatred—in this case Jew-hatred—provides the only authentic account of events. In Rubenstein's work, however, and in *Sophie's Choice*,

racial exploitation becomes secondary to labor exploitation. For Elkins and Rubenstein, and for Styron who was influenced by both historians, race-oriented narratives obscured a more accurate, and for them more grievous, labor-oriented historiography. By reading Styron next to the distinct histories that so influenced his novels—both Rubenstein’s argument that plantation and “death-camp slave labor merely carried to a logical conclusion [the]...attitudes and procedures...[of] the modern corporate enterprise,”²⁴ and Elkins’s preceding claim that “the products and consequences of slavery...[had] little...to do with race,”²⁵ but were the manifestations of “unimpeded” “capitalism”²⁶—we will see that the principal and lasting debate over his work has little to do with his racial attitudes at all.

In Styron’s novels and the responses to them, two burgeoning discourses emerge: a commitment to the idea that economic motives can explain histories of the Holocaust and slavery, and the different but equally developing commitment to the idea that racial sentiments against blacks and Jews are the defining feature of these histories. My concern in this chapter is precisely with these two competing explanations. I want first to demonstrate what I will characterize as Styron’s commitment to the economic explanation of the Holocaust and American slavery, and second to describe the fate of that economic explanation in the period’s perhaps most controversial history of American slavery, Stanley Engerman’s and William Fogel’s *Time on the Cross*. Both *Time on the Cross* and Styron’s own work were controversial precisely because in the eyes of their critics they failed to take racism seriously, and in failing to take it seriously produced what were regarded as exculpatory accounts of the perpetrators, for both the Holocaust and American slavery. Finally, then, my interest is in the emerging consensus that, because an account based in self-interest is exculpatory, inexplicable and unpardonable crimes like the Holocaust and slavery can only be understood through the lens of race—as genocide. Despite Stingo’s

description of his critical reception—“once a racist, always a racist”—what his critics were essentially worried about is that for Styron it was never about racism.

At the beginning of *Sophie's Choice*, the narrator reflects back thirty years to 1947 when, as a twenty-two year old aspiring writer, he briefly lives in a Brooklyn rooming house and develops a close friendship with two housemates. As Stingo is increasingly drawn into the violent relationship between these two characters—an American Jew named Nathan Landau and a Polish gentile Holocaust survivor named Sophie Zawistowska—he learns about Sophie's past in Poland, where she went from being Zosia, a devoted wife and mother, and the daughter of a prominent antisemitic professor, to being an expendable body laboring to survive in Auschwitz. This narrative is remarkable in two ways: First, as I've already noted and was noted at the time, Styron created a complex Holocaust novel using a non-Jew as the central survivor-figure. Literary critic D. G. Myers, reflecting on twenty years of critical responses to the novel, explained the implications of this choice, writing, “Styron's novel about a Polish Catholic woman who survived Auschwitz only to die tragically in America puts under interrogation the claim that the Holocaust was a uniquely Jewish catastrophe. Styron aims to show that some Christians (in his phrase) ‘suffered as much as any Jew.’”²⁷ Some critics considered the gentile-victim an important contribution to Holocaust narratives: In his review of the novel, Styron's longtime friend and inspiration Richard L. Rubenstein touched on this controversial choice while explaining how essential Sophie's Polish gentile identity is to the larger theme of Styron's oeuvre. While acknowledging the outrage at Styron “for having made his heroine a Polish Catholic rather than a Jewish victim of Auschwitz,” and granting that there were “far more Jewish than Polish victims at Auschwitz,” Rubenstein still lauded the consistency of the novel with

Styron's "lifelong concern with slavery"; as Rubenstein argued, Styron's "choice of Sophie, whose function at Auschwitz was that of a slave, rather than a Jew who was fated for extermination no matter what task he or she might have been assigned at Auschwitz, gives the work a literary integrity and a continuity with [his 1967 novel *The Confessions of Nat Turner* that would have been far more difficult had Styron's protagonist been Jewish."²⁸

However, not all welcomed this insinuation of shared suffering, in Styron's work or anyone else's. The 1950s staging of Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* encapsulates the controversy regarding Holocaust narratives that don't at all, or don't sufficiently, emphasize Jewish-specificity. The gentile husband-and-wife team of Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich created a Broadway adaptation that, much like the diary itself, did not emphasize Anne's Jewishness, and while it was exactly this non-specificity of the Holocaust victim that "captured audiences in the 1950s...[it] was precisely what outraged" contemporary critics of broader "Holocaust victim" categories.²⁹ Cynthia Ozick, who would later criticize Styron's novel as an attempt to "universalize" the Holocaust, writes that "the universalizing of Anne's story had gone so far, and its results had been so pernicious, that it might have been better if her diary had been 'burned, vanished, lost.'"³⁰ Her critique echoes the protest of Jewish novelist Meyer Levin, whose own adaptation of the diary had been rejected in favor of the gentile authors, and who spent the last twenty-plus years of his life expressing his "disgust" and "rage" at their "de-Judaized" portrayal of Anne and, by extension, the popular decentering of Jewish identity in accounts of Nazi atrocity.³¹ Directing a similar lens at Styron, Alvin Rosenfeld, in his 1981 monograph excoriating several Holocaust novels of the period, described Styron's choice as one "to generalize or universalize the victims of the Holocaust [which] is not only to profane their memory but to

exonerate their executioners, who by the same line of thinking pursued above also disappear into the mist of a faceless mankind.”³²

The second distinguishing feature of Styron’s Holocaust narrative, which by contrast went largely unnoticed at the time—but is, I will argue, at least as important as his choice to make Sophie a Polish gentile—was his representation of the concentration camp. In Sophie’s retelling and the narrator’s editorial digressions, the infamous Auschwitz is imagined not only as a death camp but also, and in fact primarily, as a labor camp. Referencing the conditions and context in which Sophie labored, Styron described Auschwitz’s “dual function: as a depot for mass murder but also as a vast enclave dedicated to the practice of slavery.”³³ Indeed, having “evolv[ed] directly from the institution of chattel slavery,” Sophie’s plantation intensifies it, defining slavery by the “absolute expendability of human life.”³⁴ From this standpoint, the use of slave labor in Auschwitz puts the “old-fashioned plantation slavery” of *Nat Turner* in a more “benign light.”³⁵ In place of the relatively more gentle American slavery, Auschwitz produced “a new form of slavery—of human beings continuously replenished and expendable.”³⁶ Although his emphasis on the devastating “expendability of human life” confirms the centrality of death, Styron explained that it is the work of killing and the production of bodies, by which victims “slaved to kill Jews” as part of their “support...[for] a vast corporate enterprise,”³⁷ that makes Auschwitz the “despotic apotheosis”³⁸ of barbarism and the fulfillment of all that was wrong with chattel slavery. The “corporate enterprise” to which the author is referring is the German synthetic rubber producer I. G. Farben. Styron writes, “One of the gaps in knowledge of many people I have talked to is their ignorance of the fact that one of the chief functions of Auschwitz was to support [Farben] in the manufacture of synthetic rubber.... We know now that for various reasons the nearby factories produced very little synthetic rubber to aid

the struggles of the *Wermacht*, yet it was through no lack of effort on the part of either I. G. Farben or the *SS* that the enterprise was fruitless.”³⁹ One of the few critics to remark on this production element of the novel was Rosenfeld, and he did so by objecting to Styron’s suggestion, as he understood it, that the “essential character of Auschwitz was a capitalistic slave society as much as or even more than it was an extermination center.”⁴⁰

But calling Auschwitz the culmination of chattel slavery is only one way that Styron had of linking the two phenomena. He also used the novel’s narrative frame to make the connection between the Holocaust and slavery explicit. Stingo is represented as complicit in the legacy of slavery when we learn that his sole financial support while in Flatbush is the \$485 proceeds of his great-grandfather’s sale of the teenage slave, Artiste. In what his father describes as “one of the truly unpardonable acts of a slave owner—[breaking] up a family,” Stingo’s great-grandfather took Artiste from the safety of his two sisters, Lucinda and Drusilla, and consigned him to “the grinding hell of the Georgia turpentine forests.”⁴¹ Elsewhere, Styron admits how very close to home this anecdote comes, perhaps accounting for the vivid account of Stingo’s inherited guilt: In a separate autobiographical essay in which he reveals the factual context of Artiste’s history, Styron describes his grandmother’s relationship with “two little slave girls she owned” named, like Artiste’s sisters, “Drusilla and Lucinda.”⁴² Perhaps indicating the aesthetic consequences of appropriating these names for the novel, he goes on in the essay to note how their “names [were] right out of one of those heartrending chronicles” that celebrated an “idyllic” plantation history in which “the genteel collision of white people and their black servitors...[was] touching or droll but never menacing.”⁴³ Stingo, preoccupied throughout the novel by a secondhand guilt for his enrichment from this “unpardonable act”—an act which represents the actual outcomes of the seemingly “gentle collision” on slavery’s surface—experiences “the shock

of recognition” at a reincarnation of Artiste’s suffering when Sophie climactically reveals that the core of her own suffering is her separation from her children at Auschwitz.⁴⁴ In *Sophie’s Choice*, just as the plantation is fulfilled at Auschwitz, so is Stingo’s culpability for an American slave’s “grinding hell” fulfilled in the ultimately suicide-inducing experience of a Polish Auschwitz survivor.

But if for Styron these parallels seemed obvious, *Sophie’s Choice* is nonetheless exceptional for its yoking of slavery with the Holocaust; as Styron himself understood, “This duality is often overlooked. ‘Most of the literature...has...stress[ed] the role of the camps as places of execution.... Regrettably, few...thinkers have paid attention to the highly significant political fact that the camps were in reality a new form of human [slave] society.’”⁴⁵ For Styron, then, the economic explanation trumps either the racism explanation or the Nazi-as-deranged aberration. Historian William L. Shirer displayed what is, for Styron, this critical negligence when in 1961 he characterized the Holocaust and its camps as symptoms of Adolf Hitler’s murderous Jew-hatred, a campaign of execution created by an “evil genius, one of the cruelest, most bloodthirsty and barbarous tyrants who ever lived.”⁴⁶ More than thirty years later, historian Daniel Jonah Goldhagen used his book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* to expand the category of “bloodthirsty” perpetrators who, like Shirer’s Hitler, used the camps as landscapes on which to perform their “barbarity,” by historicizing the Holocaust as a product of the German ideology of “exterminationist anti-semitism” defined by the total racial elimination, rather than the mere exploitation or dehumanization, of Jews.⁴⁷ Goldhagen’s, and to some extent Shirer’s, thesis regarding the centrality of antisemitism has been often and vigorously challenged. This debate is perhaps best illustrated by the discourse produced by Goldhagen’s monograph, which was itself a response to historian Christopher Browning’s perpetrators

in *Ordinary Men*, and his interpretation of the records of one German reserve police battalion (the same battalion on which Goldhagen focused) that understood the policemen-perpetrators as middle-aged, middle-class men motivated by any number of nuanced considerations, none being “exterminationist anti-semitism”: careerism, cowardice, ideology, loyalty, etc.⁴⁸

Goldhagen’s decision to reinterpret the historical records of this same police battalion in order to make his case for “exterminationist anti-Semitism,” makes the reception of *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, as opposed to the reception of Browning’s original text, especially interesting. Goldhagen enjoyed much popular success—aside from *New York Times* front page coverage, his book was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and *Time* named it one of the two best nonfiction books of the year—while also becoming the subject of an intense critical backlash from advocates of Browning’s version of history as well as from professional historians who questioned his professional integrity and research methods. In the book-length responses to Goldhagen and the conferences built around the Browning-Goldhagen debate, critical consensus came down at least marginally in favor of Browning. However, for the purposes of my argument here, Goldhagen’s argument is less important than its ability to produce such a popular and critical stir for its alternative causal narrative of the Holocaust, rooted in race-hatred over rationality. Peter Novick rightly notes that most “scholars of the Holocaust have rejected [Goldhagen’s]...argument...that generations of systematic socialization into murderous hatred of Jews was a necessary condition for the Holocaust”; however, he acknowledges equally the lasting nature of the “comforting” argument that “such deep and long-standing hatred is a necessary precondition for mass murder.”⁴⁹

But for Shirer and Goldhagen, it is not the perpetrators' general desire to exterminate that most reveals their barbarity and cruelty; rather, it is their desire to exterminate *an entire race of people* that demonstrates the uniquely monstrous nature of their crimes. While their interest in differentiating between the genocidal perpetrator and the merely murderous one is obviously different from my own interest in distinguishing between histories that insist on the primacy of race-hatred and histories (like Styron and Rubenstein's) that insist on the primacy of capitalist production, the crucial piece that emerges in Shirer and Goldhagen is the narrative of race-hatred. Indeed, what Novick, a Holocaust historian, calls a "traditional" commitment to the historical lens of racism when accounting for Nazi crimes, which bridges the historiography from Shirer to Goldhagen, remains a "powerful" and compelling constant to this day.⁵⁰ But finding this account flawed, Styron subscribed instead to Rubenstein's economic explanation of the Holocaust, despite Rubenstein's comparatively marginal role in Holocaust studies. In one of many places in which Styron appropriated Rubenstein's monograph, *The Cunning of History*, he quoted the historian as saying that "the Nazis...were the first slaveholders to fully abrogate any lingering humane sentiment regarding the presence of life itself."⁵¹ Going on, Styron noted that the Nazis, like plantation slaveholders rather than rabid executioners, operated "through discriminating methods of cost accounting and other advanced formulations of input and output."⁵² Focused as he was on advancing the idea that the Holocaust was an economic event rather than a racial one—principally defining Auschwitz as the Nazi administration of a "labor surplus"—Styron was dissenting from what we've seen was the widely held view of the camps as sites of death rather than labor.⁵³ As opposed to Shirer and Goldhagen's representation of Nazi ideology as exterminationist above all else, Rubenstein and Styron understood death at Auschwitz in the way that they understood

death on the plantation—as a function of market logic. According to this analysis, production mattered for both slavery and the Holocaust; it just happened that in the latter case, Nazis used the same logic to reach a different conclusion: that “it was both more practical and more economical simply to incinerate [the Jews].”⁵⁴ After some cold calculations, in other words, Nazis decided to kill off the Jewish labor force not because of antisemitism, but because Jewish captives in poor health cost more money than they earned.

Thus when *Sophie’s Choice* insists on the analogy between the plantation and the death camp, it does so not to emphasize the ways that the plantation was like the death camp, but to emphasize the ways in which the death camp was like the plantation. In his attempt to illustrate the relationship between, and even temporal simultaneity of, these separate events, Stingo, and thus Styron, doesn’t let us forget that it is slave money that makes this entire narrative possible. Stingo does this in part by repeatedly crediting his family’s slave-victim with his summer of leisure saying how, when considering his “loot...[it] caus[ed] me...to whisper a loving little threnody to my special patron Artiste, moldering to dust these many years in Georgia.”⁵⁵ The structure of the letter in which Stingo’s father announces the forthcoming proceeds of Artiste’s sale is telling: it opens with an anecdote describing his father’s “hatred for the vicious monopoly capitalism that tramples the little man,” moves to discussing “the recent revelation of the horrors of Nazi Germany” and discredits critiques of “jewish [*sic*] financiers who have a stranglehold on the wealth” by explaining that “greed is not a racial but a human predilection,” and finally closes with a guilt-ridden description of Artiste’s victimization.⁵⁶ The financial transaction on which Stingo’s summer is contingent—the gifting of this newly found money—is itself linked to a uniquely egregious incident in the history of forced labor—an incident that is introduced in

a letter that, before anything else, foregrounds Artiste's story by editorializing on the contemporary exploitation of labor and the economic underpinnings of the Nazi project. Uniquely among his contemporaries, Styron thus explicitly uses labor as the grounds for comparing slavery and the Holocaust, arguing that forced labor was the centerpiece, and therefore represented the worst, of both crimes.

By contrast, the more usual view was not that economics figured prominently or even at all, but instead that racism was so central that economic interests were entirely disregarded. Indeed, starting with Nazi Minister of War Production Albert Speer's testimony at Nuremberg, the Nazis' willingness to displace economic interests was underscored by Speer's insistence that the majority of state officials knowingly sacrificed the security and prosperity granted by labor exploitation in favor of costly, hatred-driven policies of racial extermination. Speer claimed not only not to know about the death camps but to have been appalled when he learned about them, as much at the idea of Jewish labor (especially skilled labor) going to waste when it was most needed as because of the horror of the genocide. As he told Nuremberg Prosecutor Jackson in 1946, the effort to "win the war for Germany was made much more difficult [by the] anti-Jewish campaign"; in fact, if Jews "who were evacuated" to camps like Auschwitz "had been allowed to work for me," Speer told the court, "it would have been a considerable advantage for the war effort."⁵⁷ Referencing similar accounts of Nazi behavior, Michel Foucault noted as long ago as 1979 that, for a number of emerging postwar thinkers, the introduction of economic motives was regarded as wholly antithetical to racism; a war run using Speer's economic logic could never accommodate the disregard, even elimination, of a surplus labor force in the service of racial hatred.

This movement in economic logic, the origins of what would come to be known as neoliberalism, consisted in part in the effort of economists like Ludwig Erhard to enforce a strict opposition between Nazis and an interest in the economic as such. Austria's post-Second World War Ordoliberalists—the philosophical forefathers of American neoliberalism—were crucial to this implied division, between those people motivated by the free market (who do good things) and those people (like the Nazis) motivated by things that impede the market (who do bad things, like the Holocaust). Using a term as laden as *neoliberalism*, as when using a term as contested as *Holocaust*, it is worth clarifying exactly what philosophy and which forefathers I mean. Here, *neoliberalism* refers to the American political movement that gained significant ground starting in the 1970s, which is well summed up in the ten points of economist John Williamson's "Washington Consensus," the 1989 policy prescription that he drew up on behalf of several Washington, DC-based financial institutions including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the US Treasury Department. A few representative points are the avoidance of government deficits, the reduction of public spending on social programs such as welfare and health care, the privatization of state enterprises, and the deregulation of financial markets.⁵⁸

Though Ordoliberal thought did form the foundation for the American version of this theory, the very same economic theory that was gaining ground as Styron wrote his novels, Austrian Ordoliberalism and American neoliberalism diverge in a few important ways. The former, economic theorists constructing policy immediately after World War II, were in many ways reacting to Nazism and weren't committed to an unregulated market to the degree that thinkers like Friedrich Hayek were, which is why he called their beliefs a "restrained liberalism."⁵⁹ Foucault contextualizes this distinction saying, "The nature of today's...neo-liberal program...is identified in two main forms.... The German form is

linked to the Weimar Republic, the crisis of 1929, the development of Nazism, the critique of Nazism, and, finally, postwar reconstruction [while]...American...neo-liberalism [is] defined by reference to the New Deal, the criticism of Roosevelt's policies, and which...is developed and organized against federal interventionism and then against the aid and other programs of the mainly Democrat administrations of Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, etcetera.”⁶⁰ However, as he goes on to note, there are a “number of connections between these two forms of neo-liberalism,” principally that they take “Keynes [as] the common enemy,” and “second, they share the same objects of repulsion, namely, the state-controlled economy, planning, and state interventionism.”⁶¹

In advocating for these economic theories, premised on the idea that Nazism and its evils are rooted in an overreaching state, these economists were implicitly defining Auschwitz as nothing but a race murder-driven death camp. In fact, their own commitment to the primacy of the economic—and in particular to the primacy of the market—was understood by them as an antidote to Nazism and fascism both. What they believed was that—precisely because the killing of the Jews was not only economically useless but was, as Speer had insisted, positively counterproductive—a state that founded itself not on any Nazi-style identification of the Volk with the Führer but on the commitment to creating and protecting free markets would be incapable of the racism that was at the core of Hitlerism. Novelist and free market advocate Ayn Rand⁶² summed up this point-of-view when she claimed that “there has never been a dictator or potential dictator who has justified dictatorship on the grounds of selfishness or individual rights. Only the altruist morality allows a dictator to get away with enslaving people.” Rand goes on to argue, “The dictator must offer his victims some kind of goal and tell them to sacrifice their personal interests to it. Take Hitler: if you read *Mein Kampf* or any other Nazi publications, you'll be surprised

to what extent they utter altruistic slogans indistinguishable from communism. They despise individualism and ‘bourgeois’ selfishness.”⁶³ The siren song shared by both Nazism and communism are the call of “service to the state, self-sacrifice, the merging of your interests in the great, national, racial whole, and so on.”⁶⁴ Without this socialist agenda, Nazism could never have emerged and the Holocaust could never taken place, or so Rand’s argument goes.

Germany’s Ordoliberals championed the same sentiments after the war, though in the form of policy. Ludwig Erhard, chairman of West Germany’s 1947 currency reform commission and a key leader in the post-Nazi adoption of free market principles, was tasked with identifying “social objectives that were considered to be politically indispensable in order to avoid the renewal of fascism and Nazism in Europe.”⁶⁵ The fact that his principles of “no price controls and...gradual deregulation”—principles driven by an urgency to reverse economically damaging Nazi policies by “free[ing] the economy from state controls”—led to the dramatic recovery known as the German “economic miracle” only reinforced Erhard’s argument that this “neo-liberal governmentality” was itself an antidote to Nazi fascism.⁶⁶

Styron of course never heard of neoliberalism while he was writing *Sophie’s Choice* but for him these racial accounts, as critiqued by Rubenstein, were reductive because, when Hitlerism was understood exclusively or even principally through the lens of racism, Auschwitz was imagined as “a place where Jews were exterminated by the millions in gas chambers—simply this and nothing more.”⁶⁷ *Sophie’s Choice* became his deliberate attempt to interrupt what Styron called this “misconception,” arguing in effect that Rubenstein was right: “At Auschwitz—the supreme example of the world of ‘total domination’...—there was ultimately systematized not only mass murder on a scale never known before, but also mass

slavery on a level of bestial cruelty.”⁶⁸ Thus, in constructing Sophie and Stingo’s stories in such a way that it was Auschwitz-as-labor-camp rather than as death camp that emerged most crucially, Styron was ignoring the rising consensus that the Holocaust was not only about genocide, but was primarily about genocide as opposed to the kind of monstrous exploitation that Rubenstein and Styron imagined. We can thus see that Styron’s interest in Sophie as a non-Jewish victim not only goes against the narrative that placed genocide (i.e., race-hatred) at the center of the Holocaust but, more importantly, was for him, a way of placing labor and economics at its center instead.

Rubenstein’s idea that the Holocaust was as much about, or perhaps even more about, labor as it was about antisemitism remained pretty much confined to the margins of Holocaust history, but just as he was issuing the historical intervention that Styron invokes in *Sophie’s Choice*, a much more influential and controversial version of his argument was being made by two economic historians in their own challenge to the accepted narratives of American plantation slavery. In Robert William Fogel and Stanley Engerman’s 1974 book, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Slavery*,⁶⁹ the authors presented an account of American plantation slavery that provided what they believed were important correctives to the traditional view of slavery as an unprofitable and inefficient enterprise that caused a stagnating economy and imposed harsh material conditions on the typical slave. Fogel and Engerman argued that slavery was, in truth, an eminently rational cost-benefit system all around: slaves earned far more than they cost, the regional economy built around their labor was robust, and plantation profits enriched both master and slave in a self-sustaining enterprise. As they put it, “Slavery was not a system irrationally kept in existence by plantation owners who failed to perceive or were indifferent to their best

economic interests,” but was instead maintained because it was “a highly profitable investment.”⁷⁰

Among the book’s most controversial claims was that “the material...conditions of the lives of slaves compared favorably with those of free industrial workers”; rather than losing the benefit of their labor, “the typical slave field hand received about 90 percent of the income he produced.”⁷¹ In this telling, the notion of plantation slave was radically transformed from that of oppressed, emotionally and physically humiliated laborer to—especially when measured against their white rural counterparts—moderately enfranchised, comfortably boarded worker who enjoyed stable employment and relative agency in his family life and free time. There is an obvious dissonance between this new notion of the slave and the old trope of the gratuitously violent slaveholder. According to Fogel and Engerman, this is for good reason; their research turned up little evidence for endemic practices of plantation cruelty. After all, “the shrewd capitalist businessmen who ran the slave plantations were not usually psychological perverts” who took special pleasure in inflicting pain, but “generally used force for exactly the same purpose as they used positive incentives—to achieve the largest product at the lowest cost.”⁷² In other words, the “psychologically perverted” slaveholder—an early incarnation of this archetype is Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Simon Legree, the brutal slaveholder of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, who beats, underfeeds, and overworks his slaves—has no place on a profitable plantation, and since they argue that the preponderance of plantations were profitable, that means that the vast majority of slaveholders exercised a certain restraint. In fact, one of the principal barriers between the robust slave economy of Fogel and Engerman’s work and the weak slave economy of their predecessors’ work is the presence of “shrewd capitalist businessmen” operating with exactly this profit-motivated logic. The authors were deliberate in painting

their “more optimistic picture,” urging readers to remember that “planters wanted their slaves alive, healthy and breeding” and would therefore be inclined to “treat...them well,” offering “ample food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention.”⁷³ So when Rubenstein, in his book on the Holocaust published within a year of *Time on the Cross*, claimed that, “slaves were protected by [a] more or less precise calculation of the sort of treatment that was likely to result in the best use of their labor,” he could have been summarizing Fogel and Engerman’s findings.⁷⁴

Indeed, in his fictional account of slavery in *Nat Turner*, Styron linked economic prosperity to benevolent slave practices; when the slaveholder Travis is “restored” to “good fortune,” he is “genial, even generous in his behavior with me, insisting that Hark and I have comfortable accommodations in our bachelor quarters next to the shop, making certain that we ate well from the leavings of the house,” even providing the slaves with vacation at their request.⁷⁵ Although what Sophie gets in Auschwitz is bad treatment, not good, it is nonetheless as explicit an articulation of Nazi economic motives as is the good treatment that Nat receives. The fact that it at the same time frames her experience as a labor relation that sits at the end of a historical trajectory of slavery—emblemized as much by the generous plantation owner as by the sadistic Nazi who forces Sophie to make her defining choice—suggests the thematic continuity of Styron’s interest in the economic incarnations of slavery. And as we will find, this economic notion of slavery, even in its most redemptive forms, is rooted in self-interest rather than genuine kindness; just as Travis’s treatment of Nat is directly attributed to the financial rewards of fostering his lucrative skills as a carpenter, the fact that Sophie is treated with any humanity at all is in direct relationship to the economic logic of doing so. With this notion of market-defined slavery in mind, we can approach *Nat Turner* with a deeper understanding of how his

narrative anticipated this endpoint—specifically, Styron’s representation of Auschwitz as the fulfillment of dehumanization as practiced, earlier, on the plantation landscape that was home to slaves like Nat Turner.⁷⁶ We can also see how the novel anticipated Fogel and Engerman’s widely disputed findings in *Time on the Cross*.

The Confessions of Nat Turner represented Styron’s earliest and most fervent attempt to frame economic incentives as the core of slavery, even though in Styron’s representations these incentives were more likely to result in atrocity than kindness (Travis being the exception to this rule), while for Fogel and Engerman these incentives were the guarantor against atrocity. What Styron and Fogel and Engerman did in fact agree on was that, whether slaves were treated well (as Fogel and Engerman argued) or treated brutally (as Styron argued was equally or more probable), they were treated this way for principally economic reasons. In making his argument in *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, Styron used the historical document of the same name to create a fictional first-person narrative in the voice of Nat Turner, the leader of Virginia’s 1831 slave revolt. The real 1831 *Confessions*, recorded by Nat’s white lawyer, Thomas Gray, was Turner’s prolonged account of his divinely inspired leadership of the slave revolt that commenced with—and despite Nat’s plan, ended with—the slaughter of local whites.⁷⁷ However, in Styron’s sympathetic “meditation,” Nat’s divine inspiration is only a foundation for and possibly a pathological symptom of the multi-causal revolt—according to Styron, “the only effective, sustained revolt in the annals of American Negro slavery”—as led by this complex figure.⁷⁸ Framing the novel with Nat’s prison confession to Gray, Styron’s Nat Turner recounts a pleasant youth when, as the son of a house slave, he is permitted the leisure time and resources that enable his education.⁷⁹ Describing his exceptional childhood, Nat recalls life as “the darling, the little black jewel of Turner’s Mill. Pampered, fondled, nudged, pinched, I was the

household's spoiled child."⁸⁰ What would turn this child, from this "snug, secure dominion...[who] began more and more to regard [his fellow slaves] as creatures beneath contempt," into a radical leader?⁸¹ This transformation begins only when his otherwise humane and affectionate owner, deeply saddened and burdened by debt, must, to stave off financial ruin, reenter the market and claim Nat as a commodity to be sold. The precipitating factor, then, is the slaveholder Samuel's failed enterprise and the reader is left with the sense that a more forgiving economy, one that doesn't financially hobble a hard-on-his-luck planter, would never have created the requisite notions of black inferiority that enabled chattel slavery; in other words, relieving the well-intentioned slaveholder's material suffering would have rendered slavery, and its attending race-linked suffering, unnecessary. But instead Nat is jolted into a less forgiving version of slavery when he is sold to the cruel slaveholder and farmer Thomas Moore; notably, Styron continued to predicate the worst of slavery on market exigencies, producing this cruel-slaveholder trope in the context of Moore's poverty. It is in these circumstances, and their material causes, that Nat develops his hatred of white people and begins planning the revolt.

When Moore dies, Nat changes ownership once more, becoming the property of the more benevolent owner Joseph Travis, the psychological consequences of the former slaveholder's behavior outlast Moore's ownership and make a return to dignity impossible. The cruelty of the poor farmer, Moore, has been too deeply felt and the stage too completely set. And while a more generous explanation for Travis's humane treatment of Nat and his fellow slaves (such as a moral aversion to slavery and oppression) might make the murder of Travis's family during the revolt less forgivable, even here Nat's positive treatment is a function of his earning potential. Not surprisingly, Travis's exceptional kindness is framed by his newfound financial prosperity and, in Nat's case, the slave's

lucrative specialized skills as a carpenter. Thus, during the most gruesome moments of the insurrection, we are reminded that even the best whites acted more out of self-interest than benevolence. The fact that even the most compassionate among them operate from this position makes sense of their slaughter; the slaves are, at the most basic level, revolting against their status as commodities and, Styron suggests, the elimination of this status requires the elimination of commodity-inducing attitudes wherever they may be found.

If the slaughter of benevolent whites is forgivable on the basis of their monetization of black slaves, what of the race-hatred driven slaughter of poor whites whose economic vulnerability makes them into slightly more elevated commodities? In fact, according to Styron and his historical sources, the rebel slaves who went from house to house killing white families pointedly avoided the homes of poor whites, a fact that Styron used as support for his critical account of the events. In "This Quiet Dust," an essay in which he reflected on the life and mythology surrounding the real Nat Turner, Styron said, "That the insurrection was not purely racial but perhaps obscurely pre-Marxist may be seen in the fact that a number of dwellings belonging to poor white people were pointedly passed by."⁸² And if Nat's vision was as proletarian as Styron would have it, his exclusion of them would make sense, particularly when considering the 1865 government report in which poor whites described themselves as little more "than...slaves [for we are] overworked, worn out and enfeebled by toil; with no time left for improvement of mind or soul."⁸³ In comparison, Nat's working conditions, especially at the beginning and end of his life, reflect a degree of dignity that would make an attack on these same poor whites a betrayal of his labor liberation theology. In other words, by framing Nat's ultimate radicalization with this selective racial targeting of white victims, Styron was suggesting that, just as with the novel's

slaveholders, the slaves' collective motives during the climactic revolt can *only* be understood economically.

Styron's Turner expresses racial hatred more energetically than any of the novel's white slaveholders, and his cumulative anger can, in his *Confessions*, be directly correlated to his labor relation with Moore. Just as the racial attitudes that frame the white slaveholders' violence are portrayed, in the above anecdotes, as symptoms of market conditions,⁸⁴ Turner's fury and the religious fervor justifying it were symptoms of—according to Stanley Elkins's history of Nat Turner and repeated by Styron, they were in fact pathological expressions of—his victimhood. Stanley Elkins's pathologized “Sambo” thesis accounts for the totality of plantation society, including the rebel Nat as much as his fellow slaves; Styron captures Elkins's Sambo when he writes that “slavery dehumanized the slave and divested him of honor, moral responsibility and manhood,” creating a community of slaves that was “tranquilized, totally defenseless, ciphers and ants, [they] could only accept their existence and be damned.”⁸⁵ He goes on to assert that slaves “were docile, were childish, were irresponsible and incapable of real resistance.”⁸⁶ Lest we think that Nat's rebellion makes him a heroic exception among this infantilized and malleable community, Elkins describes “the Nat Turner Rebellion [as] characterized by little more than aimless butchery.”⁸⁷ In Elkins's formulation, Nat's rebellion is akin to an inconvenient and grotesque, but “easily suppressed,” temper tantrum and Styron's psychologically disturbed figure substantiates this account.⁸⁸

This dialectical, economically driven reproduction of racial animus was, for Styron and Elkins, the core consequence of the slavery enterprise. As evidence of the collectively understood illogic of racial hatred, Styron included a peripheral story that, during Turner's time with Moore, illustrates the consequences of race motivations. Another area

slaveholder Nathaniel Francis, even more than Moore, encapsulates the trope of the cruel slaveholder and, just as Fogel and Engerman would predict, he is cast as an exception, even a local pariah, for his violent behavior. The farmer's slaves "had endured their owner's thrashings for five or six years.... Francis might have been a moderately prosperous landowner had not his roaring need to inflict misery on his Negroes smothered that logic which must have tried to tell him that halfway decent treatment would keep the [slaves]" from running away.⁸⁹ The gravity of Francis's social crime is underscored when Nat explains how "many if not most of the other farmers in the area were aware of Francis's savage propensities" and, although Francis had to rely on the community for help when his runaway slaves left his plantation unstaffed, "the landowners were understandably reluctant to let out any of their field hands to this ruffian who might send back to them a chattel worth five hundred dollars damaged beyond all repair."⁹⁰ As Styron almost certainly intended, Francis's story substantiates the historical claim that in Eugene D. Genovese's words, "in many communities unduly cruel masters were often ostracized by their peers."⁹¹

From this standpoint, Styron's characterization makes sense when we consider not the moral but the logical distance between this cruel slaveholder and the "shrewd capitalist businessmen" who, in Fogel and Engerman's history, were at the helm of the most profitable plantations. Francis is the slaveholders' cautionary tale: if you act out of violent hatred, your slaves will run away; if your slaves run away, you sacrifice profit; if you sacrifice profit, you are judged to be the area "ruffian"; and if you develop this reputation, you sacrifice your neighbors' willingness to help you. When these are the consequences of "smother[ing]...[capitalist] logic," it makes sense that race-hatred on the part of whites or blacks would be classified as a pathology and understood in the context of market

consequences—in Nat’s case “pre-Marxist” consequences, by which Styron meant the consequences of the poor revolting against and seeking economic justice from the rich.⁹²

Although Styron made efforts to substantiate his “pre-Marxist” account of the rebellion with complementary historical accounts, he also made a point in his “Author’s Note” to give a disclaimer regarding the narrative’s veracity, explaining how he “rarely departed from the known facts about Nat Turner and the revolt of which he was the leader [though]...where there is little knowledge in regard to Nat.... I have allowed myself the utmost freedom of imagination in reconstructing the events.”⁹³ In his 1992 afterword, Styron laid out what is, I would argue, the most crucial of these narrative liberties when he explained how, given the region’s unique geography and economy, the Virginia Tidewater setting of the novel could not have had the “celebrated plantations which gave the South its sheen and legendary glamour.... I felt I had to create a plantation anyway.”⁹⁴ Styron elaborated on the centrality of the plantation to the narrative, describing it as “an integral and characteristic part of Southern life in slave times; *it was the very metaphor for the capitalist exploitation of human labor*” (italics mine).⁹⁵

This reliance on the industrial complex as a historical frame for understanding the essential nature of human atrocity—that being “the capitalist exploitation of human labor”—is familiar, as it figures prominently in Styron’s reliance on Auschwitz as the mediator of historical meaning in *Sophie’s Choice*. If the Holocaust is the apotheosis of American plantation slavery, Nat’s landscape must, and does, anticipate Sophie’s Auschwitz. Making use of his invented plantation, Styron represented it as a “despotic closed system”⁹⁶ that, as the most psychologically oppressive institution ever known,⁹⁷ created “the most wretched desperation”⁹⁸ and was, an “oppression unparalleled in human history.”⁹⁹ And while Styron clearly aimed to satisfy this hyperbole in his representation of plantation slavery, his efforts

were outmatched by his later representation of Sophie's Auschwitz; if Nat's world produces psychologically damaged commodities struggling to kill the sources of their oppression, Sophie's creates a group of "living dead" that "work" to kill themselves and one another. Unlike writers and scholars who may be inclined to test these narratives of suffering against one another, Styron's narrative in and commentary on *Nat Turner* reflects how much he intended these separate, exaggerated histories of "capitalist exploitation" to buttress one another. That according to Styron "the code of regulation from...[a] Nazi concentration camp" mirrors antebellum slave law is, for him, merely rhetorical evidence of an obvious institutional and ideological teleology.¹⁰⁰

Styron's point that slavery and the Holocaust should be defined by this capitalist exploitation of human labor was precisely what made his account so controversial, not only in his work but in Fogel and Engerman's *Time on the Cross*. There is of course an important difference between them: as we've already seen, Fogel and Engerman attempted to downplay the role of economic motives in bad behavior. This attempt to downplay suffering in an effort to highlight its economic character was itself perceived as racist. In this critique, their account was seen, on the one hand, as an apology for slaveholders and, on the other hand and despite their explicit claims, an insult to slaves themselves. Just as Styron intended for his depiction of Nat Turner to complicate unsophisticated notions of slave identity, Fogel and Engerman aimed to match their economic intervention with an assault on infantilized, one-dimensional representations of slaves and slave values, of which they judged Elkins's scholarship to be part-and-parcel. While Elkins, in Styron's summary, agrees with Fogel and Engerman on the economic historiography that is most important for my inquiry, Fogel and Engerman positioned themselves in direct opposition to Elkins,

naming him in the introduction as a critical contributor to the historiography that they intend to revise. In fact, it was principally from Elkins's notion of the infantilized black "Sambo" that Fogel and Engerman hoped to recover a more affirming black American historical narrative and identity, one of the primary stated justifications for their project.

In an attempt to rebut works like Elkins's *Slavery*, which emphasized slavery's unyielding brutality—an emphasis that was not only inconsistent with their own findings, but which they felt infantilized slaves as victims who were robbed of culture and agency—Fogel and Engerman particularly took issue with what they called "the myth of black incompetence," posited by early American slavery historians like Ulrich B. Phillips, another of their openly declared historiographical opponents. In summarizing Phillips's *American Negro Slavery*, Fogel and Engerman excerpt W. E. B. DuBois's review: "Nowhere [in the book] is there any adequate conception of 'darkies,' 'niggers,' and 'negroes' (words used liberally throughout)." DuBois goes on to describe Phillips's "character of the Negroes: they are 'submissive,' 'light-hearted' and 'ingratiating,' very 'fond of display,' with a 'proneness to superstition' and 'acceptance of subordination'...indeed his main picture is of 'inert Negroes...[who] are...less efficient in freedom than their forebears were as slaves."¹⁰¹ It was precisely this myth that, according to Fogel and Engerman, was rooted in reductive accounts of slavery that, by exaggerating the system's brutality, degraded the African-American culture, psychology, and family to which that very system gave birth. However, not only was their work dismissed as a further form of degradation and an implicit justification of slavery rather than a positive revision of history—a criticism familiar from accusations that Styron was a slavery apologist who claimed "slavery wasn't all bad" because his novel's slaveholders provide "food, clothes, and shelter"—but Fogel and Engerman were roundly attacked for their methodology and conclusions, presumed

reflections of their racist agenda.¹⁰² Their attempt to nuance the slave experience, working to humanize slaves by painting a more dynamic portrait of their lives and values, ultimately failed not because it was insincere (whether or not it was) or even inaccurate (whether or not it was), but because the critics were incensed, as we will see, by an analysis that privileged an economic explanation over a racial one.

Much like the critics of *Sophie's Choice*, who feared that the particular “enormity of the Holocaust” would be skewed by Styron’s emphasis on the means (“enslavement”) rather than what they saw as its anti-Jewish essence, critics of *Time on the Cross* were concerned not primarily with whether Fogel and Engerman’s evidence was accurate, but with the conclusions they drew from that evidence: that slavery was at its core an economic relation. And this conclusion had serious consequences for contemporary black politics. As early as 1952, when Paul Robeson¹⁰³ argued that the pending Genocide Convention was a corrective for the “tens of millions [of black slaves] sacrificed in the slave ships and on the plantations,” he did so on the grounds that the slave trade in general, and American plantation slavery in particular, were part and parcel of a campaign of “the destruction of a people.”¹⁰⁴ And literary scholar Eric J. Sundquist notes the lasting power of this claim when he states that Robeson’s observation classifying slavery as genocide developed into a “moral equivalency [that] would gain greater currency...as the century wore on.”¹⁰⁵

The problem with Fogel and Engerman’s argument, then, was their characterization of slavery as, according to Thomas L. Haskell in *The New York Review of Books*, “a rational business enterprise in which the interests of master and slave often converged.”¹⁰⁶ In other words, Fogel and Engerman’s ultimate failure, as judged by their critics,¹⁰⁷ was their choice to disregard the “moral equivalency” that understood slavery as a form of genocide—an equivalency that historicized slavery as “the destruction of a people”—and their aim

instead to “soften the stark image of the concentration camp superimposed over the plantation.”¹⁰⁸ And as these same critics overwhelmingly pointed out, there is little reasonable argument to be made that on the most crucial issue—self-determination—the interests of master and slave could *ever* converge. However, as I will show, the most urgent question is not whether their interests converged, but rather what it meant to frame slavery as “a rational business enterprise.” For critics resistant to this notion, for whom slavery could never be reduced to business, it remained an institution that was motivated by race—and thus an incarnation of genocide—rather than one motivated by profit—and thus an incarnation of capitalism.

Thus, while Fogel and Engerman’s history of slavery was, according to them, an economically dispassionate one, it was precisely their recourse to economics that produced the passionate response to it. For insofar as the slave-slaveholder relation was for them framed by economic considerations rather than racial ones, Fogel and Engerman seemed to threaten the relevance of race and racism not only for the history of slavery but for the subsequent history of black people in the United States. In other words, as different points on the continuum of African American history, slavery’s status as a crime of identity had become intrinsically linked to the Jim Crow-era crimes of identity, and a historiography that compromised the former risked delegitimizing the collective movement against the latter. In undermining a race-defined understanding of slavery, Fogel and Engerman were implicitly challenging those attempts to express the gravity of 1960s–70s African-American suffering that framed blacks as under threat of a “Final Solution”-like extermination. In fact, according to scholars like Chester Himes and Orlando Patterson, a crucial element in ensuring the success of the Civil Rights Movement and the safety of the “Afro-American underclass” was the exorbitantly high cost to “get rid of the million...despised” blacks.¹⁰⁹

In this political landscape, the commitment to thinking of plantation slavery as (like the Jewish Holocaust) an essentially genocidal phenomenon was, more than anything else, an attempt to advance and preserve its racialized enormity. Thus while there may have been an element of competition when Toni Morrison, at the beginning of her slavery novel *Beloved* (1987), dedicated it to the “sixty million and more,” this should not be taken as mere point-scoring. The crucial thing for writers like Morrison was not that even more Africans were killed than Jews but that, however many were killed, they were killed for the same reasons. The parallel was, above all else, Morrison’s attempt to join the Jews rather than displace them. So what Morrison was drawing on is the increasingly popular view of the Holocaust as a crime of identity—it was precisely that view to which Styron and Rubenstein objected—and she insisted on the relevance of this view for an understanding not only of slavery, but of African-American history more generally. Indeed, this collective appeal to the Holocaust as a framework for understanding slavery was so successful that by the 1990s, when Marxist historian Barbara Fields argued that “the chief business of slavery...[was] the production of cotton, sugar, rice and tobacco...[not] white supremacy,” she was in a very small minority. While Fields’s article stood out in the way that Fogel and Engerman’s book had twenty years before, her position was in a way fundamentally the opposite of Fogel and Engerman’s. Although she describes slavery as a labor relation, she does not share their commitment to the market as a kind of ethical purifier (which was exactly the commitment that most riled their critics).¹¹⁰ However much this distinction saved her from the accusations leveled against Fogel and Engerman, her emphasis on production didn’t accord with the zeitgeist of the period. By contrast, Morrison’s sixty million was simply one of many late-1980s through early-1990s critical attempts to bring the Holocaust

and slavery together, framing them as horrific manifestations of racism rather than as a calculated means to an economic—and specifically, a capitalist—end.

Furthermore, the fact that Fields’s interest in slavery as a way of making a profit was now coming from the anti-capitalist left, rather than (as with Fogel and Engerman) from the pro-capitalist right, suggests the fundamental compatibility between the market triumphalism that followed the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, and the diagnosis of racism—rather than capitalism—as the source of slavery’s evil. As we’ve already seen, the argument of early neoliberal economists was not only that it wasn’t capitalism that led to the horrors of slavery, but in fact that *only* capitalism (in the form of neoliberalism) could prevent these outcomes. In fact, arguing for a reverse historical causal relationship, these same economists claimed that Nazi totalitarianism and racism were reciprocally supportive, and that the free market and racism are irreconcilable and not only in the case of Germany. Rather than attempting to answer the obvious question—how could the market possibly accommodate race-hatred when it was, in Foucault’s retelling, an ideological barrier to Nazism’s ugliest policies—what these economists asserted was that it was in fact impossible for markets to do so. Indeed, not only were markets and racism increasingly regarded as irreconcilable, but markets themselves were becoming the technologies of virtuous behavior. Take for instance Alan Greenspan¹¹¹ who, in 1963 during his 33-year tenure as the chairman and president of his economic consulting firm, proclaimed the virtue of markets when he wrote that, “[Free market] capitalism is based on self-interest and self-esteem; it holds integrity and trustworthiness as cardinal virtues and makes them pay off in the marketplace, thus demanding that men survive by means of virtue, not vices.”¹¹²

Greenspan was in equally passionate company; his publisher, Ayn Rand, testified at length to her own enthusiasm for virtuous markets in 1967’s *Capitalism*, ascribing

economic “abundance not [to]...public sacrifices to the common good, but [to]...free men who pursued their own personal interests and the making of their own private fortunes.”¹¹³ She even directed her analysis to the economic example of the American South, arguing that “the South is the one part of America that has never been capitalist,” given that it’s agrarian nature made it more like “medieval feudalism than...industrial capitalism”; she goes on to say that, “in fact, capitalism wiped out slavery in the nineteenth century” because “capitalism cannot function with slave labor, and the moral principles implicit in capitalism do not permit slavery.” So for Greenspan and Rand too, free market ideology both advances and preserves social values, and is thus incompatible with and actively working against the sort of values—namely the disregard for universal dignity, irrespective of racial identity—that made slavery and the Holocaust possible.¹¹⁴ For Friedrich Hayek too, the “individualist society,” defined as it is by the operation of a free market, is essential to preserve “virtues”—especially those key to the American social contract—like “independence, self-reliance...the readiness to back one’s own conviction against a majority, and the willingness to voluntary cooperation with one’s neighbors.”¹¹⁵ When markets become the emblem of virtuous society, as Hayek, Rand, and Greenspan would have it, the social good makes natural the move to filter everything through them. Where once it was the love of money that counted as the root of all evil, now it was not loving money, or at least not loving it enough, that performed the same function.

This application of economics to everything, including the two historiographies with which Styron was principally concerned, creates an apparent paradox: On the one hand, Styron’s novels were produced just when the goal was to fundamentally explain everything through the market while, on the other hand, when the notion of market virtue was (and is) seen by free market adherents as irreconcilable with the horrors of slavery and the

Holocaust. How, then, do we deal with these exceptions to market logic? There is, in fact, one notion that makes sense of these anomalies: The idea of evil, the default explanation to which Styron's contemporaries subscribe,¹¹⁶ plausibly accounts for perpetrator motives when economic interests are unable to do so. And when it falls on historians and writers to characterize evil, trading an economic explanation for an identity-based one makes sense, especially given the proximate race-driven crimes of the Jim Crow south. Race, from this point of view, actually works to purify the market and exists as an alternative location for evil.

This purification of the market is dissonant, then, with the kind of claims that defined Styron's novels; the author's adherence to an account for which "the products and consequences of slavery" as practiced on the Southern plantation and at Auschwitz "had [little] to do with race" is, in its deprivileging of racism, challenging the moral primacy of the market and the suggestion that it is the guarantor of virtuous decision-making and the guarantor against savage behavior.¹¹⁷ This idea positions the implied, complementary historiography of the Holocaust as one more challenge to the narrative of markets that lean on racism as the explanation for criminality when economics might otherwise be implicated.¹¹⁸ More specifically, if we take seriously claims like David Harvey's that neoliberalism is "in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade,"¹¹⁹ it's not hard to see that racism, increasingly regarded as a kind of involuntary and omnipresent tendency in human nature, would take its place as a force so powerful that it could overcome the otherwise equally omnipresent but redeeming desire to buy and sell. The increasingly mainstream maxim that everybody

is, to some degree, racist—a notion promoted and reproduced in popular media outlets, such as a recent cover story from *Newsweek*, which warned that “kids as young as six months judge others based on skin color”—has been supported and legitimized by scholars as diverse as political scientists Ross Hammond and Robert Axelrod, both of whom identified a behavioral impulse to ethnically cluster and eliminate other ethnic groups.¹²⁰

And from the standpoint of *capitalism-as-virtue* and *racism-as-vice*, the problem with Styron was, first, that he didn't accept racism as a motive for slavery or the Holocaust and second, that in refusing it, he refused also the new understanding of markets as guarantors of virtue. Thus, however dubious the merits of his insistence that “the products and consequences of slavery” as practiced on the Southern plantation and at Auschwitz “had [little] to do with race” (plausible perhaps with respect to slavery, not so plausible with respect to the Holocaust), what made that insistence so controversial was not just the possibility that he might be wrong, but the sense that the very claim itself jeopardized the purification of the market that was so central to the moral project of the then-new neoliberalism.

Taken to its logical ends, this moral project disrupts the notion that bad behavior is defined as happening in spite of market considerations. In Styron's novels, the logic of the market no longer saves you from bad behavior (like the en masse enslavement and murder of blacks and Jews), but in fact incentivizes it. It is his suggestion—that the market is the ultimate corrupting influence, and that acknowledging this corruption in the context of slavery implies the “costly” “redress” of “wrongs”—that begins to become problematic in the context of a world in which economic motives are increasingly defined as implicitly virtuous and thus implicitly exculpatory. It is in this context, then, that race and racism helped save greed and capitalism from the kind of indictment that a more contemporary

version of Styron’s “pre-Marxism” might have seemed to call for. But it may well be that the economic crisis of the last four or five years—whether or not it makes Styron’s accounts of slavery and the Holocaust more plausible—will at least create a sympathy for the view that it is not just racism but is, after all, capitalism that ultimately produces and sustains collective suffering. The point here is not, of course, that racism (especially genocidal racism) isn’t evil, but rather that the evil of racism needn’t be deployed to mitigate capitalism.

NOTES

¹ William Styron, introduction to *The Cunning of History: The Holocaust and the American Future*, by Richard L. Rubenstein (1978; repr., New York: Perennial, 2001), ix-x.

² Richard L. Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History: The Holocaust and the American Future*, by Richard L. Rubenstein (1978; repr., New York: Perennial, 2001), 38.

³ Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional & Intellectual Life* (1959; repr. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1963), 104.

⁴ William Styron, *Sophie’s Choice* (1979; repr., New York: Vintage, 1992), 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Lerone Bennett, Jr., “Nat’s Last White Man,” in *William Styron’s Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*, ed. John Henrik Clarke (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 5.

⁹ For a discussion of the ten critics’ invocation of Styron’s race as relevant to their critique, see Harvard Stikoff and Michael Wreszin, “Whose Nat Turner? William Styron vs. the Black Intellectuals,” *Midstream* (November 1968): 10-20. For Styron’s response to *Ten Black Writers*, see William Styron, “Nat Turner Revisited,” *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 431-455.

¹⁰ Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D., “*The Confessions of Nat Turner* and the Dilemma of William Styron,” in *William Styron’s Nat Turner*, 18-19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18-22.

¹⁴ Paul Talbot, *Mondo Mandingo: The Falconhurst Books and Films* (New York: iUniverse, 2009), 261.

¹⁵ Although my project presumes a certain consensus regarding the characterization of Jews as a race, this idea is still met with wide scholarly and popular resistance. Rather than engage a complex interdisciplinary debate, invoking evidence ranging from the ethnobiological to the spiritual, I offer the following caveat: In *Sophie's Choice*, as in the majority of the Holocaust narratives that I discuss, what marks characters as Jewish has nothing to do with their religious commitments. Given my interest in representations of *American Holocaust culture* (as opposed to and distinct from representations of *American Jewish culture*), my application of the term "race" in reference to Jews is predicated on the markers of Judaism that mattered to Hitler: ethnicity, biology, and lineage (i.e., race), and *not* the religious or communal practices of Jewish identity (i.e., culture). For an intellectual history that more directly engages these competing and evolving notions of Judaism in an American context, see Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks: And What That Says About Race in America* (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); and Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹⁶ William Styron, "Auschwitz," *This Quiet Dust and Other Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 337–338.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 337.

¹⁸ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Mariner, 2000), 215.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

²⁰ Styron, introduction to *Cunning of History*, vii, ix.

²¹ Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, 218.

²² President's Commission on the Holocaust, *Report to the President* (Washington, D.C., 1979), app. C and D, 26, 28, quoted in Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, 218.

²³ Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, 335 n43.

²⁴ Rubenstein, *Cunning of History*, 67.

²⁵ Elkins, *Slavery*, 104.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 61. Marxist historian Barbara Fields is like Elkins in that she too claims that slavery had little to do with race. However, she is completely unlike Elkins in that she rejects the psychoanalytic account of infantilized black "Sambos" that made his book especially controversial. For a further explication of Fields's argument, see the discussion of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* on page 22, as well as footnote 84.

²⁷ D. G. Myers, "Jews Without Memory: *Sophie's Choice* and the Ideology of Liberal Anti-Judaism," *American Literary History* 13 no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 499–500.

²⁸ Richard L. Rubenstein, "The South Encounters the Holocaust: William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 20 no. 4 (Fall 1981): 427.

²⁹ Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, 117.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 117–118

³¹ Ibid., 118. For Ozick's objection to Styron's "universalization" of the Holocaust see, Cynthia Ozick, "Primo Levi's Suicide Note," *Metaphor and Memory: Essays* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1989).

³² Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 160. See also Alvin H. Rosenfeld, "The Holocaust According to William Styron," *Midstream* (December 1979), 43-49.

³³ Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 254-255.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ William Styron, "Hell Reconsidered," *New York Review of Books*, June 29, 1978.

³⁸ Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 255.

³⁹ Styron, "Hell Reconsidered."

⁴⁰ Rosenfeld, "Holocaust According to William Styron," 44.

⁴¹ Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 33.

⁴² William Styron, "A Voice from the South," *This Quiet Dust and Other Writings* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 53.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ The narrator spends a few pages discussing George Steiner's concept of "time relation"—the notion that different people have vastly different experiences at the same real or temporal moment—as it applies to his own trivial life experiences while Sophie experienced the worst of Auschwitz. This revelation, of how things co-occur, and the way that isolated trivialities in one place make Auschwitz possible in another, leads to Stingo's "shock of recognition" at his own culpability. George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1998) quoted in Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 234.

⁴⁵ Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 254, quoting Rubenstein, *Cunning of History*.

⁴⁶ William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of Adolph Hitler* (New York: Random House, 1961), 4.

⁴⁷ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage, 1997).

⁴⁸ Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper, 1993).

⁴⁹ Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, 137.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 256.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Rubenstein, *Cunning of History*, 46.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁵ Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, 62.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 31–32.

⁵⁷ Albert Speer, *Nuremberg Trial Proceedings*, vol. 16, June 21, 1946, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/06-21-46.asp>.

⁵⁸ John Williamson, “What Washington Means by Policy Reform,” in *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?*, ed. John Williamson (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 1990).

⁵⁹ Manfred E. Streit and Michael Wohlgemuth, “The Market Economy and the State: Hayekian and Ordoliberal Conceptions,” in *The Theory of Capitalism in the German Economic Tradition*, ed. Peter Koslowski (Berlin: Springer, 2000), 227.

⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008), 78.

⁶¹ Ibid., 79.

⁶² Literary scholar Michael Szalay challenges the lasting influence and scholarly seriousness of Rand’s literature—in particular, her opuses *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957)—as well as her philosophical movement, Objectivism. While these are fair critiques, Rand’s rhetorical and ideological contributions to the then-nascent neoliberalism shouldn’t be overlooked. Michael Szalay, *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁶³ Robert Mayhew, ed. *Ayn Rand Answers: The Best of Her Q & A* (New York: New American Library, 2005), 116.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 80. Under the Third Reich, Erhard worked as an assistant at, and eventually the director of, the Nuremberg College of Commerce’s Institute of Economic Observation. His work drew the attention of the Anglo-American authorities who appointed him chairman of West Germany’s currency reform commission in 1947; it was his policies in this role that contributed to the dramatic post-war economic recovery, or German “economic miracle,” for which he is most famous. His political stature coming out of this success led Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to appoint Erhard Minister of Economics in 1951, a role that he remained in for all fourteen years of Adenauer’s tenure. His popularity coming out of this state service, as well as the earlier *Wirtschaftswunder* or “economic miracle,” led him all the way to the Chancellorship in 1963. For a history of Erhard’s ascension and his theories of deregulation, what he calls a “social market economy,” see Alfred C. Mierzejewski, *Ludwig Erhard: A Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Guido Thieme, “Social Market Economy’ and Its Impact on German

European Policy in the Adenauer Era, 1949-1963,” *German Politics and Society* 25 no. 2 (Summer 2007): 68-85.

⁶⁶ Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 80-81, 91. Erhard claimed that only by liberating the economy from state control, and consequently restoring economic freedom to state citizens, could the government be able to “legitimately speak in the name of the people.” Foucault argues that by framing free market policies as a key legitimizing state feature, Erhard was effectively “saying that the National Socialist state, which violated all these rights, was not, could not be seen retrospectively as having exercised its sovereignty legitimately”; in this formulation, the Third Reich “was and is retrospectively stripped of its rights of representativity. That is to say, what it did cannot be considered as having been done in the name of the German people.” *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶⁷ Styron, introduction to *Cunning of History*, x.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Robert William Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, vol. 1 (1974; repr. New York: Norton, 1995).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 232.

⁷³ Frank B. Tipton, Jr. and Clarence E Walker, Review of *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Slavery*, vol. 1, by Robert William Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *History and Theory* 14 no. 1 (Feb. 1975), 91-92.

⁷⁴ Rubenstein, *Cunning of History*, 43. It is unlikely that Fogel and Engerman were familiar with Rubenstein’s scholarship and were thus deliberately responding to his work, just as it is unlikely that Rubenstein, writing at the same time but in an entirely different field, was aligning himself with these economic historians. However, they all three drew upon the same set of slavery historians in the service of their work and reached complementary conclusions against similar critical protests.

⁷⁵ Styron, *Nat Turner*, 343.

⁷⁶ Styron, introduction to *Cunning of History*, x.

⁷⁷ Expectedly, the authenticity of the historical document is contested, and some historians allege that Nat Turner’s *Confessions* was a fabrication by his lawyer, Thomas Gray. For one example see Sharon Ewell Foster, “The Truth About Nat Turner,” *The Root*, August 23, 2011, http://www.theroot.com/views/truth-about-nat-turner?page=0,0&wpisrc=root_lightbox.

⁷⁸ In his “author’s note,” Styron introduces an excerpt from the twenty page pamphlet that forms the real *Confessions*, calling it “the single significant” primary historical document that describes this singular “effective...insurrection.” Preempting critics who might contest his deviations from this important historical record, Styron provides the disclaimer that it has been his “own intention...to produce a work that is less an ‘historical novel’ in conventional terms than a meditation on history.” Styron, “Author’s Note,” *Nat Turner*, ii.

⁷⁹ Styron admittedly borrows his narrative structure from Albert Camus’s *The Stranger* (1942).

⁸⁰ Styron, *Nat Turner*, 169.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² William Styron, "This Quiet Dust," *This Quiet Dust: and Other Writings* (1953; repr. New York: Vintage, 1993), 19-20.

⁸³ Jurgen Kuczynski, *The Rise of the Working Class*, trans. C. T. A. Roy (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 181.

⁸⁴ Eugene D. Genovese, in the pages of his well-known history of slavery, characterizes slaveholders' racism as a rationalization of, rather than the cause of, slavery policies. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), 58.

⁸⁵ William Styron quoted in Herbert Shapiro, "The Confessions of Nat Turner: William Styron and His Critics," *Negro American Literature Forum* 9 no. 4 (1975): 100.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Elkins, *Slavery*, 136.

⁸⁹ Styron, *Nat Turner*, 300-301.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 41.

⁹² In an interview with James L. West, Styron explains what he thinks might be distress over his pathological reading of Turner's Marxism, saying that black critics may not like *Nat Turner* because his narrative points to the leader's reliance on "the white man's religion...Surely Marx was right when he talked about religion as the 'opiate of the people,' because for the Southern Negro it became a real opiate. It had to be; it was the only way of life for Negroes which made the other way of life, the intolerable burden of working the fields, bearable." James L. West III, *Conversations with William Styron* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1985), 100.

⁹³ Styron, "Author's Note," *Nat Turner*.

⁹⁴ William Styron, "Nat Turner Revisited," *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, 442-443; emphasis mine.

⁹⁵ Ibid; emphasis mine.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 449; emphasis mine.

⁹⁷ Styron, "This Quiet Dust," 14.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁹⁹ William Styron, "Slave and Citizen," *This Quiet Dust*, 37.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰¹ W. E. B. DuBois, Review of *American Negro Slavery* by Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Political Science Review* 12 (1918): 922-926, quoting Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment, and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1918).

¹⁰² John A. Williams, "The Manipulation of History and of Fact: An Ex-Southerner's Apologist Tract for Slavery and the Life of Nat Turner; or William Styron's Faked Confessions," in *William Styron's Nat Turner*, 48.

¹⁰³ Paul Robeson (1898-1976) was an American actor, singer, and civil rights activist who, following the Spanish Civil War, embraced communism and anti-imperialist movements despite McCarthyism and a shift in public support.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Robeson, "Genocide Stalks the U.S.A.," quoted in Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2005), 218-219; see this text for a comprehensive discussion of the black-Jewish politics that underscored broader American literary and social discourse, from the 1950s through the present.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 218.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas L. Haskell, "The True and Tragical History of *Time on the Cross*," *The New York Review of Books*, October 2, 1975, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/9075>. Haskell's use of the word "rational" recalls the Ordoliberal assessment of capitalism (i.e. Nazism's) "irrational rationality." In this way, rational and irrational become stand-ins for more pronounced value judgments, like good and evil, which more traditionally animate discussions of genocide and slavery perpetrators. Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 105.

¹⁰⁷ Haskell reviews the three principal critiques published in response to *Time on the Cross*: Herbert G. Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of Time on the Cross* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Gary M. Walton, Ed. "A Symposium on *Time on the Cross*," *Explorations in Economic History* 12 (1975); and Paul A. David, Herbert G. Gutman, Richard Sutch, Peter Termin, Gavin Wright, *Reckoning with Slavery: Critical Essays in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

¹⁰⁸ Haskell, "True and Tragical History."

¹⁰⁹ Orlando Patterson quoted in Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land*, 311.

¹¹⁰ Barbara Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review* 181 (1990), 99.

¹¹¹ Alan Greenspan was appointed chairman of the Federal Reserve by President Ronald Reagan in 1987, a position that he held for an unprecedented five terms, until 2006.

¹¹² Alan Greenspan, "The Assault on Integrity," *The Objectivist Newsletter*, August 1963.

¹¹³ Ayn Rand, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (New York: Signet, 1967), 22.

¹¹⁴ Mayhew, *Ayn Rand Answers*, 36.

¹¹⁵ Friedrich A. Von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom: Text and Documents* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 217.

¹¹⁶ Texts discussed in the following chapters default to this “identity-defined evil” explanation in nuanced ways, including Orlando Patterson’s *Die the Long Day* (1972) and Ira Levin’s *The Boys From Brazil* (1976).

¹¹⁷ Elkins, *Slavery*, 104.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Upon publication, there was a critical backlash against Elkins’s “analogy between the Nazi death camps and the southern slave plantations,” from (principally African American) intellectuals, such as Ralph Ellison, who considered this history to be a “Jewishly accented perception of blacks.” See Emily Miller Budick, “Plantations and Pogroms, Slavery and the Holocaust: Disentangling Black and Jewish History (Stanley Elkins, Ralph Waldo Ellison, and Hannah Arendt),” *Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 65; and Kirsten Fermaglich, “‘One of the Lucky Ones’: Stanley Elkins and the Concentration Camp Analogy in *Slavery*,” *American Dreams and Nazi Nightmares: Early Holocaust Consciousness and Liberal America, 195–1965* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 24–57.

¹¹⁹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

¹²⁰ Po Bronson, “See Baby Discriminate,” *Newsweek*, September 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2009/09/04/see-baby-discriminate.print.html>. Mark Buchanan, “Born Prejudiced,” *The New Scientist* 193 no. 2595 (2007): 40–43.

3. “PLEASURE ME, YOU EBONY WENCH!”:

SEXUAL (RE)PRODUCTION, SOCIAL DEATH, AND THE MANDINGO GENRE

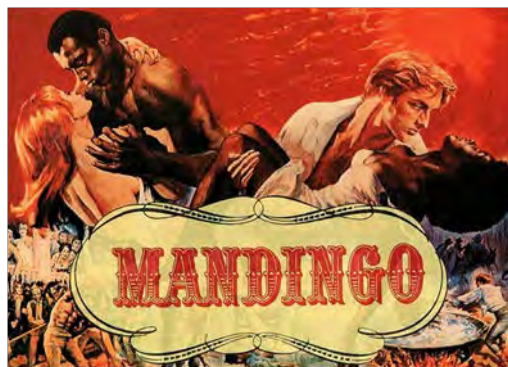
There is nothing in the nature of slavery which requires that the slave be a worker. Worker qua worker has no intrinsic relationship to slave qua slave.

—Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*¹

On February 25, 1978, *Saturday Night Live* showcased *Mandingo II*, the trailer for an imagined sequel to the popular 1975 film of the same name. The sequel, according to *SNL*, would, “bring to the screen the sounds, the smells, the flaming passions of the slave breeding plantations where men and women mated and bred like cattle.”² Summing up this “world of violence, cruelty, greed and lust” in a multi-voice litany—“take me, mandingo,” “pleasure me, you ebony wench,” “masta goin’ give it to me, but first I’m goin’ give it to you”—the trailer ludicrously but not inaccurately concludes, “You may hate it, you may be disgusted by it...but you’ll never forget it! *Mandingo II*!... The sensual, the shocking, the powerful, the shameful, the hilarious, *Mandingo II*!”³

While *SNL*’s cultural reference testifies to an assumed familiarity with the original film—after all, the strength of the parody relies on a base knowledge of the story being parodied—it also raises the question of the narrative’s location in popular culture: as an over-sexed, hyper-violent slavery narrative that gained such broad appeal that, not only was the average 1970s American TV viewer likely to know about it, but she would find its amplified recasting a laughing matter.

What makes the trailer ludicrous, of course, is its implication that the only thing that ever happened on slave plantations was the kind of sex suggested by *SNL* comedienne Laraine Newman’s “take me mandingo” instructions to that episode’s guest host, the not-yet-infamous O. J. Simpson.⁴ The word “slave” is mentioned just once in the skit, used to



SNL's version of Mandingo requires little more than a wig to restage the story for purposes of parody. (SNL screenshot on left; film poster, also used for tie-in novel editions on right.)

define the *kind* of breeding that was happening on the plantation. In a second and final gesture to the more familiar notion of plantation labor, the slave also makes mention of his formal labor obligations saying, “I gotta go toil in the cotton fields now.” He is, however, immediately reminded of his primary role on the plantation when he is called upon once more to “take me!”

Whatever the accuracy of its representation of actual slave plantations, the skit was right on target in its representation of the actual film, *Mandingo*, as well as its sequel, *Drum* (1976); so too were the fourteen novels—published between 1957 and 1988, and selling millions of copies—that were at the foundation of what became the *Mandingo* franchise. Begun in 1957 by Kyle Onstott, *Mandingo* and Falconhurst, the Alabama plantation on which the novels were set, had become a veritable industry, eventually including not only two successful movies and a very unsuccessful Broadway production (with Dennis Hopper), but other authors, Lance Horner and Ashley Carter.⁵ However ridiculous *SNL's* skit may initially seem, it becomes less so (or at least less clever) when we discover that it is practically plagiarized from the back cover copy of *Mandingo's* paperback edition: “HUMAN BREEDING FARM! Behind the hoop skirts and hospitality, the mint

juleps and magnolia blossoms of the Old South was a world few people knew existed—a world of violence, cruelty, greed, and lust. *Mandingo* brings to vivid reality the smell and hassle of the slave-breeding farms and plantations, where men and women were mated and bred like cattle. You may rave about *Mandingo* or you may hate it, but you won't be able to lay it down, *because it is a terrible and wonderful novel!*"

Taking this back cover enticement as representative of Falconhurst's southern landscape, this caricatured narrative of the plantation had gone beyond the actual *Mandingo* franchise to become what *Kirkus Reviews* called its own unique "genre," one characterized by a plantation atmosphere in which "sex and violence [were] the big things, replacing the myth of moonlight and magnolia with the myth of sex and sadism."⁷ And this body of "slavesploitation" literature has grown large indeed; some of the best known include Eric Corder's *Slave* (1968), Lonnie Coleman's *Beulah Land* (1973), George McNeill's *Plantation* (1975), and William Lavender's *Chinaberry* (1976). Thus, describing how a new novel of 1972 "open[s]" "slave society" up "like a rotten anthill, swarming with lust,"⁸ *Kirkus's* reviewer could say of *Die the Long Day* that, although not set in Alabama but in Jamaica and written not by a member of the *Mandingo* team but by a young West Indian author, Orlando Patterson, it nevertheless belonged to a distinctive category: "the mandingo genre."⁹

Though he didn't acknowledge the narrative roots of the breeding plantation in *Mandingo*, Patterson did adopt the genre conventions that were so familiar to fans of the Falconhurst series as well as to the *SNL* viewing audience. The *Kirkus* reviewer, who was undoubtedly familiar with the more recent Falconhurst novels—such as *Heir to Falconhurst* (1968) and *Flight to Falconhurst* (1971)—couldn't have drawn a clearer line between *Mandingo's* sensational, pulp-fiction storytelling and Patterson's more nuanced depiction.

From our standpoint—that is, the standpoint from which we can see the young unknown novelist as one of the most eminent and influential sociologists of the last half century—this description of Patterson’s novel, *Die the Long Day*, is bound to seem a little unfair. And, in fact, the nuance of Patterson’s plot and elegance of his prose style make it the literary superior to *Mandingo*, as Kyle Onstott—who admitted he “didn’t care for [his own novel] much” and only wrote it to “make some money”¹⁰—would almost certainly concede. However, with the graphic depiction of Falconhurst’s hyper-sexualized breeding plantations in mind, Patterson’s work is exactly what *Kirkus* defines it to be: a comparatively tasteful intervention into an emerging, and some would argue ahistorical, genre.

True to form, in *Die the Long Day*, Patterson’s plantation world writ-large is rife with sex and violence: The plot is built around Quasheba,¹¹ a hard-working slave fighting to protect her daughter, Polly, from the syphilitic and lecherous planter, Busha Pickersgill, who is determined to rape her. When Quasheba confronts the planter with a knife, he responds to Quasheba’s pleas for her daughter by reminding her that she has no rights over her daughter nor herself, saying that “you don’t own anything, you insolent black bitch.... You don’t even own your own body.”¹² From the start, then, Patterson’s plantation, much like Falconhurst’s breeding plantation, is framed by sexual violence, and its slaves are subject to a world in which they have no rights over their bodies’ most basic functions, neither their physically productive nor their reproductive capacities.

It’s especially easy to see why the anonymous reviewer for *Kirkus* thought right away of *Mandingo* when reviewing *Die the Long Day*, especially given a central scene in Patterson’s novel. The relationship between the novels is most explicit in the story of a young slave named Benjamin. When Benjamin visits his cousin, a free man of color named Jason, to celebrate that he has earned enough money to purchase his own freedom,

Jason's statement that he will "mourn [Benjamin's] freedom" takes the ecstatic slave by surprise.¹³ But Jason is persuasive in arguing that, in fact, the abjection Benjamin hopes to avert by leaving slavery is inescapable for all brown-skinned Jamaicans, and that freedom intensifies this suffering rather than relieving it. To illustrate how "a freed black is a hundred times more wretched than an enslaved one," Jason describes the crippling nature of life without either a protective master—whose property interests ensures a minimum quality of life for hardworking slaves—or the meaningful (and in Benjamin's case, skilled) labor with which a busy slave is able to fill his days.¹⁴ At this point in their exchange, then, Jason's—and in this case, perhaps Patterson's— notion of slavery seems very much staked in a plantation life having very little to do with sex. But just as quickly as Jason gives this impression, he shifts back to an account of slavery that brings us back not only to the centrality of violent and alienating sex, but ultimately to its displacement of the aforementioned forms of positive and productive slave labor.

For our purposes, the most interesting part of their exchange, then, emerges as Jason is forced to offer personal examples illustrating the consequences of having neither a master nor work to occupy his time. Notably, his go-to example is that free black women are forced into what is effectively prostitution because their men cannot provide for them. Worse, "should a...white sailor rape your woman before your very eyes" the free man of color has no recourse, unlike "the slave who has the protection of his master who has a vested interest in him."¹⁵ Jason closes his anecdotes of freedom's sexual degradation by asking Benjamin, "What kind of freedom is that? What kind of heaven have you bought yourself into?... What are you free from?"¹⁶ The irony, as Jason reveals it, is that Benjamin is attempting to free himself from a space in which the rape of black women is normalized, only to earn his way into more of the same.

Having catalogued the transportability of sexual degradation, Jason explains that the displacement of the self, which gets termed “natal alienation” in his later work, is itself inescapable. As Jason explains, “even if you were free from the abuse of every malicious white in the country,” as a free man “there is still the little matter of the white man inside of you.”¹⁷ When Benjamin responds with confusion, Jason loses his patience: “You damn well know what I mean. I’m talking about that perverse yearning to be one of them, that endless sense of failure and of loss, of suffering from some deep, incurable disease of the soul because you are not one of them.”¹⁸ And lest Benjamin suggest that, if it’s all the same, he might prefer this soul suffering from outside of the plantation rather than inside of it, Jason explains that “it’s when you are supposed to be free that” the inner death wrought by slavery “hurts you most.”¹⁹ It is this death, which Patterson later comes to define as “social death,” rather than the physical or psychological brutality of slavery—or even the absence or presence of a brown man’s productive labor value, earlier mourned by Jason—that so defines the existential consequences of a slave society. Patterson’s point, as articulated by Jason, that it was not necessarily qualitatively better to be free than to be a slave, has not gone out of academic vogue. Laurence Mordekai Thomas makes a similar claim in his philosophical comparison of American slavery and the Holocaust, arguing that given a freed slave’s inability to “fend for himself economically and culturally,” there is little reason to assume, as Benjamin does, that “it is better to be free, period, than to be a slave.”²⁰

After Jason’s condescending instructions to “go back to your cozy cabin and your work-shed” because “there’s no point being responsible if there’s nothing to be responsible for,” the shaken and suddenly uncertain Benjamin comes across a scene that pushes him over the edge. Disheartened and distressed, Benjamin is attempting to exit Jason’s boarding house when, as if out of a Falconhurst novel, he comes upon a grotesque scene in one of

the rooms. An orgy is on public display, presided over by Captain Lockheart, a Jamaican planter “who had attained notoriety for...his brutality to his slaves.”²¹ A black man, who we learn is one of Lockheart’s slaves, is “almost buried by two women,” his “penis buried inside” one of the women, and the other “forcing her breast, like a harassed nursemaid, into his mouth.”²² Lockheart “peer[s] closely at the [slave’s] activated genitals,” and it becomes clear that the free women have been offered a prize should they be able to make the enslaved man ejaculate. Giddy with delight, the slaveholder taunts the women, telling them “you can’t beat my boy; you won’t win; I say, you can’t beat my boy.”²³ Benjamin notices that not only does one of the women happen to be Melinda, Jason’s “wife,” but that the scene is exciting Captain Lockheart to the point that “he was fingering his little gray penis.”²⁴ Not only is this image visually repugnant, but the Captain’s arousal is a sexualized illustration of what Patterson finds to be Hegel’s convincing notion of “ironic bondage”: the “master’s dependence on his slave...as a kind of perverted parasitism.”²⁵

This scene which shows Benjamin how free women and an enslaved man are reduced to equal parts of the same act—how although the women might win “two doubloons” should they succeed, they have neither the assurance of food or shelter that this slave has over the long term—prompts Benjamin to “lose all sense of relation to either time or space,” realizing that he had “no future to look forward to”²⁶ whether or not he remains a slave. The final encounter that Benjamin has before reaching the slave reality that he worked so hard to escape ends up proving Jason’s ultimate point: where a difference exists between slavery and freedom, it is far more semantic than it is qualitative. When he reaches home and, first thing, says, “Massah, I don’t want to buy my freedom no more,” Patterson has ensured that this seems merely an exercise in good common sense.²⁷

In this account of eighteenth-century Jamaica, then, the reach of sexual labor effectively turns every nook of the island into the plantation.

Literary scholar Lawrence L. Langer coined the term “choiceless choices”—a term that is especially relevant to so many slaves of the fictionalized Mandingo plantation—in an effort to describe the situation of conflict in which many Jews, faced with only catastrophically bad options, found themselves during the Holocaust. While the stakes for Benjamin may seem less urgent than, say, the protagonist of *Sophie’s Choice* who must decide which of her two children should be sent immediately to the gas chambers (lest all three be killed), Benjamin’s problem is essentially the same: all of his options leave him in a liminal state of spiritual and social elimination. The quandary, as Jason has argued and Captain Lockheart has proved, is that all of Benjamin’s options are different versions of the same marginal existence.²⁸ And yet Patterson’s depiction of Benjamin’s “choiceless choice,” between remaining on what we might call a breeding plantation, or buying his way off of it to look for non-existent alternatives, doesn’t—from the author’s point of view—take away from the slave-rehumanizing project for which the novel was crafted. He further signals the intended prominence of this theme when in his author’s note he stages his main point: Plantation life led to “debasement. But whenever this takes place the human spirit rebels. There are limits...beyond which one refuses to be dehumanized or debased.”²⁹ *Die the Long Day*’s main character, Quasheba, does on the surface stage the narrative for this edifying purpose, with her subversive and enfranchising statement to the slaveholder who threatens her daughter, Polly: despite his abuse, “me is human.”³⁰ It is in this same spirit that Patterson ends with another slave’s soliloquy that “our body may be enslaved, but it is the freedom of the spirit that counts.”³¹ But just as Quasheba’s graphic murder at the end

of the prologue outlasts her self-asserted humanity, so is this monologue offset by the psychosexual trauma of the Mandingo plantation.

The soliloquy distinguishing the slave's body from his inviolate spirit—spoken by Quasheba's fellow slave, Africanus, to her lover-in-mourning, Cicero—is too little to balance the broken soul that matches Cicero's breaking body, nor can it stand up to the preceding prose. The several pages preceding Africanus's speech describe vivid and graphic dreams in which Cicero watches his disembowled mother being eaten alive by crabs; after attempting to escape the crabs himself, he is caught so that “one of the crabs...crawled up...his legs and with a single snap...bit off his genitals.”³² Despite the fact that Cicero has awakened from this nightmare to the ostensibly comforting and affirming words of a friend, we can only assume, given his skepticism at Africanus's hopeful account, that his dreams will return him to this grotesque place, and his life on the plantation will be a series of relived sexual and spiritual castrations. Reminding us that the most insidious work of slavery is its psychic alienation, Patterson closes the novel with an account of perpetual violence, however surreal, that works in the victim's sleep and haunts him from the inside out.

With this less-than-hopeful closing, Patterson has offered up a version of slavery defined by sexual sadism and spiritual violation to the exclusion of everything else including the cane sugar and the cotton that were, until the mandingo genre, the presumed concerns of slaves and masters. From Cicero's dreamscape to Lockheart's orgy, Patterson's plantation economy is not one of material production, but rather a sexual brokering of existentially extinguished black bodies that, at the pinnacle of their value, sexually reproduce more black bodies, in the black and brown shades of master-and-slave. In a word, his plantation is the breeding kind. Here we can begin to see the force of inscribing

this account of the plantation within this particular genre, a genre based on a series of texts and films that are regularly described by critics as racist. Thus, when Tim Ryan, in his history of the American slavery novel since *Gone with the Wind*, lauds Onstott for the novel's masterful intersection of brutality and sex in *Mandingo*, his analysis isn't entirely convincing; according to Ryan, these two central elements that are too often elided in the majority of slavery fictions, are crucial to fully understanding how slavery worked to "turn human beings into beasts of burden,"³³ a brutal transformation that gets glossed over without *Mandingo's* rough edges. His defense continues to stretch plausibility as he reflects on how *Mandingo* "exposes and crudely revels in the interracial sexuality and casual brutality that *Gone with the Wind* denies,"³⁴ suspect no doubt because the novel "crudely reveals" more than "exposes."

Instead, more resonant are those reviews that gesture to the hyperbolic tone of *Mandingo's* promotional materials, summing (in this case the film) up as a "trashy potboiler [that] will appeal only to the s & m crowd...stinko!"³⁵ and a "celluloid bag of clichés and pat situations about a plantation in the South that bears little resemblance to what *Scarlet O'Hara* left behind."³⁶ And yet in film critics' circles, there are still those who, going beyond Ryan's restrained defense of the story, would describe *Mandingo* as an "epic potboiler...[that] probably sheds more light on the roots of racial hatred in this country than any dozen more politically correct films on the subject."³⁷ With even greater enthusiasm, in his essay, "*Mandingo: The Vindication of an Abused Masterpiece*," film scholar Robin Wood called *Mandingo* "the greatest film about race ever made in Hollywood." His claim was anecdotally supported by Wood's favorable experience of realizing the "enthusiasm of black students, who find at last a pre-[Spike] Lee Hollywood film about race to which they can relate unconditionally."³⁸ (One can't help but wonder at the suggested critical impact of

a narrative that admittedly originated out of what Onstott described as his singular motivation to write *Mandingo*: a desire to “write a book that would make him rich.”³⁹)

Preoccupied as all of these critics are (depending on their point-of-view) by the novel and film’s lurid and gratuitous, or graphically accurate, depictions of a sex-defined plantation, what matters about *Mandingo*’s focus on sex is not so much Onstott’s affective relation to it as the fact of its prominence and especially the consequences of that prominence. For in the *Mandingo* series, sex is so central that it makes everything else about slavery—above all, the slaves’ labor, their work in producing the commodities (cotton, cane sugar, etc.) for which the slave plantation existed—fundamentally irrelevant. According to historian Catherine Clinton, this “‘Mandingoization’ of plantation history” is contagious, leading to the historiographical replacement of any version of the plantation not focused on sex “with an equally distorted notion of the Old South as a swamp of sin”⁴⁰—an evocative alliterative description somewhat reminiscent of the aforementioned likening of Patterson’s novel to a “rotten anthill swarming with lust.” And in *Die the Long Day*, which is emphatically not racist and in which there is no reveling (crude or otherwise) in its nonetheless graphic depictions of sex, we see that this displacement of labor is actually the point of the sex. Indeed, the only plantation that matters in Patterson’s novel is one in which labor is sex: a breeding plantation. The commodity produced here is the slaves themselves and the power of the novel is in its transformation of sex as racist titillation into sex as a mode of production.

The very existence of the “Mandingo-ized” breeding plantation is historically controversial, as Falconhurst-series creator Onstott, in a 1959 interview, acknowledges in his vigorous insistence on their historicity: “The deliberate breeding of slaves to satisfy the demands of the market is frequently disputed and even denied. But it happened.”⁴¹ Onstott

furthermore claims that “many planters expected and demanded that each of their slave women produce for them one child every year.... Some planters hired their overseers partly on the basis of their vigor and good looks, trusting that the overseer would lighten and improve the slave population by blending his blood into it.”⁴² (While Onstott’s failure to substantiate his larger argument weakens his claims, he is altogether undermined when he goes on to explain—again without offering evidence—that “a slave girl took pride in the sexual attention of a white male; if she were made pregnant by a white man, she would boast of that pregnancy and the resultant child.”⁴³)

As problematic as Onstott’s defense may be, even contemporary historiographies offer some evidence for the breeding plantation (though not in its “Mandingoized” form). According to literary scholar Venetria K. Patton, “female slaves were valued at least in part for their breeding capacity”; quoting nineteenth-century journalist Frederick Law Olmsted, Patton notes that “‘a slave woman is commonly esteemed least for her laboring qualities, most for those qualities which give value to a broodmare.’ The value placed on slaves’ breeding capacity was in direct proportion to the value of potential offspring.”⁴⁴ Testimony from former slaves corroborates this; as Hattie Rogers, an emancipated slave living in North Carolina, told WPA interviewers in 1937, “If a woman was a good breeder she brought a good price on the auction block.... The slave buyers would come around and jab them in the stomach and look them over and if they thought they would have children fast they brought a good price.”⁴⁵ Given the disparity between these historical breeding plantations and their mandingo-genre incarnations, Clinton seems on point to suggest that “vivid modern ‘portraits’ of the sordid [Falconhurst-inspired] subculture coexisting with the splendor and pageantry of the chivalric South reveal more about today’s sexual attitudes than they do about sexual activity in the ante-bellum era.”⁴⁶ Even more to the point is her

insistence that we resist the urge to “dismiss the invented image” of the mandingo plantation “as pure fantasy,” instead exploring “what [this image] suggests about the way we today *prefer* to ‘remember’ the past.”⁴⁷ How, then, do we prefer to remember the plantation? As having everything to do with sex and absolutely nothing to do with labor. So when a slaveholder reminds Quasheba only hours before her death that she is as Olmsted, a contemporary of slavery, describes—a broodmare and not a mother—“just the bitch we used to breed”⁴⁸ more slaves—the point is that the only kind of slave labor that matters is not the production of sugar cane but the reproduction of slaves.

The economic cross-section of slaveholders, or Bushas, featured in the novel show that, in fact, material prosperity neither guarantees against brutality—as it does for William Styron—nor does it change the sexual contours of this brutality. On Patterson’s plantation, the relationships between, slavery, sexual violence, and money are interesting to consider but, as it turns out, ultimately incidental. The economic is protected in Patterson not because the savvy Busha is necessarily inclined toward leniency, but because greed and money are extracted as a factor in the institution of slavery altogether.

It is notable that Patterson is deeply familiar with questions of class, so his choice to abandon economics as a causal factor of slavery in this narrative is not symptomatic of a larger unwillingness to view economics as a lens through which to understand the world. Aside from the circumstantial evidence of his doctorate from the London School of Economics, his first novel, *The Children of Sisyphus*, is an unrestrained Marxist critique of class-driven, slum-ridden Kingston life. In *Die the Long Day*, too, Patterson acknowledges the (ultimately non-determinative) presence of market logic in slaveholder-slave relations. When Quasheba is described as a woman whom “nobody could control”—a quality with which any slave manager, including her own Busha, Gregory, and driver, Bongo, would

take issue—we are told that “she was the only field slave [they] thought twice about lashing.... In the field she worked as hard as any man so although Bongo...had been trying to find fault with her....he had failed to lay the cod on her.”⁴⁹ In other words, Quasheba is in certain instances protected by her own productivity, and her Busha and driver are restrained by their own interest in sustaining this productivity, even at the cost of their authority and pride.

It is to these very assets that Quasheba appeals when she asks Busha Gregory to reconsider his agreement to lend Polly to Busha Pickersgill, a deal that he admits having been driven to because he “need[s] the cash.”⁵⁰ She attempts labor bargaining, insisting that she and her partner Cicero “from now on going work twice as ‘ard for Massah. So Massah ‘ave two extra slaves. So ‘im don’t need to hire out Polly.”⁵¹ When this logic leaves him unconvinced, Quasheba tries a different persuasive strategy: she argues that, considering “how you spend a lot o’ money to keep your slave good an healt’y...get[ting] nice white doctor to come an’ look after slaves,” perhaps he wouldn’t want to sacrifice this investment to his neighbor’s sexual proclivities.⁵² As Quasheba puts it, “seeing as how Massah want to keep...we slave healt’y...so we can work an’ make lots o’ sugar for him...well...him wouldn’t want ‘im poor slave, Polly, to get so sick she no good no more to him.”⁵³ But even these relatively sophisticated economic arguments, made by the plantation’s most productive slave, are insufficient to change Gregory’s mind.

While Patterson is not resistant to the ways in which otherwise redeemable people may be motivated by money—Busha Gregory, for example, feels contrite about his financially driven decision to rent out Polly and his “outrage” at Quasheba’s insolent appeals to protect Polly was an insincere performance meant to fulfill “what [he] felt his slave expected from him”⁵⁴—he still resorts to causing Quasheba’s distress because it is in

his financial interest to do so. Just as Patterson acknowledges the presence of financial considerations in Quasheba's strategy, he reinforces its ultimate irrelevance in Polly's fate. Quasheba is, after all, right: Pickersgill's rent money in the short term is unlikely to offset the opportunity cost of this arrangement in the long term. Should Polly contract syphilis, her lost labor and medical care, to say nothing of the probable reduction in Quasheba's morale-driven productivity—likely, if unintentional, should her daughter become sick—actually make this transaction, using this particular slave, more net cost than net benefit. But despite Gregory's implied acknowledgement of the financial and moral compromises that are intrinsic to his rental arrangement with Pickersgill, he opts to move forward with the plan. Whereas financial savviness may have inspired his restraint with Quasheba in the past, that same savvy mind and its financial calculations are set aside at the exact moment when—at least for Quasheba—the stakes are highest. As it turns out, Gregory's decision not only risks a long-term cost, but also has the unexpected immediate consequence of losing his most productive laborer.

In his imagined plantation world, the crucial piece for Patterson is not whether slaveholders do or don't act in their own interest. Rather, as we will discover in Patterson's larger oeuvre, the presence or absence of labor logic has no bearing on whether something gets called slavery, nor does the presence or absence of economic interest mediate the qualitative experiences of slaves over the long term. Even though, as we learn during Quasheba's quest to protect Polly, her work ethic spares her the whip, the constitutive state of slave "being"—imposed by the very essence of her subjectivity—is the essential factor. In Patterson, the economic doesn't get indicted as it does in Styron because, mediated through sexual violence, it becomes incidental to the brutal features of the institution of plantation slavery in particular and, according to Patterson, universal practices of slavery

over time. And here we see the continuity not only between *Die the Long Day* and *Mandingo* but also between *Die the Long Day* and Patterson's major scholarly achievement, *Slavery and Social Death*.

Whereas Patterson's novel is a symbolic treatment of slavery in order to get at his conclusion that slavery wasn't about work, *Slavery and Social Death* is more explicit about what *else* slavery wasn't about and, most importantly, what—outside of sex—slavery actually *was*. Unlike *Die the Long Day*, in this book, we get a theory of slavery that is materially, rather than narratively and symbolically, articulated. In his scholarship as in the novel, Patterson defines slavery by individual experiences and psychological states of being; slavery is such because it creates a certain interpersonal dynamic, principally manifested in the novel as a sexual dynamic. This means that its institutional incarnations—in this case, sexual abuse on the American plantation—is not a defining practice of the slaveholder so much as it is an expedient means by which we can understand the essential subjectivity of “slave,” a temporal status which *is*, for Patterson, the defining category of slavery. Given the omniscient narrator's ability to convey the operations of the mind in *Die the Long Day*, Patterson's novel can be read as a performance of the narrative of slavery that he explicates at length in his seminal, comprehensive philosophical history, *Slavery and Social Death* (1982). In this major project, Patterson, like Rubenstein in *The Cunning of History*, argues that slavery was not a “peculiar institution,” but was in fact part of a continuum extending all the way back to Ancient Greece and Rome. For this reason, his framework was meant to span time and space to encompass the historical trajectory of global slavery in all its incarnations. Patterson's earlier book, *The Sociology of Slavery: An Analysis of the*

Origins, Development, and Structure of Negro Slavery in Jamaica (1967) was the scaffolding on which he built his analysis in this more comprehensive project. It also provided much of the historical reference material that he used a few years later to write 1972's *Die the Long Day*.

Contrary to what *Die the Long Day*'s genre and narrative might suggest, *Slavery and Social Death* makes clear that Patterson isn't simply dropping in sex-based violence where the narrative of race-based slavery used to be. Instead, in his scholarly text we see that the crucial element of slavery was never the sex, but rather the state of social death that the novel's sexual violence allegorized. Patterson's claim that "natal alienation made possible [the slave's] exploitation as a laborer," reflects his commitment to slavery as a socio-psychological process, made possible by the oppression of the individual, rather than as a pragmatic institution that was driven by its efficiency—however much the plantation owner did or didn't succeed—and the acquisition of wealth. Given everything that slavery *is not*—a system of labor production, property management, or wealth acquisition—what is left as the central constitutive element of slavery is the internalized experience of social death, a substitute for physical death that deprived the slave of any "socially recognized existence outside of his master [who became] a social nonperson," leading him to the ultimate victim state of liminal personhood.

It is easy to see Patterson's theory at work just using the novel's framing narrative: Quasheba's quest to save her daughter, Polly. Aside from the obvious psychic trauma, which Quasheba dismisses as an intrinsic element of slavery, what are the stakes for preventing Polly's rape, as Quasheba sees them? According to her warning, to suffer from syphilis is like "you' inside rotten out and you just pass pus all day, all day.... It kill you slow an' painful.... You smell the dead part o' your inside before the rest o' you go."⁵⁵ Described

this way, the physical symptoms of the Busha's sexual violence—symptoms that, from the novel's opening, are situated as the material consequences of slavery at its most brutal—become the metaphor for the vulnerable slave's inside-out process of living death—a subjectivity (slavery-cum-rape) normalized in the novel as the “custom of the country,”⁵⁶ the “corrupt sexual bond that binds master to slave.”⁵⁷

When Patterson argues—first in *Slavery and Social Death*, more recently in *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*⁵⁸—that “freedom was generated from the experience of slavery,”⁵⁹ he frames the slave's bondage as the precondition for and guarantor of the master's liberty. In saying that a principal consequence of slavery is the affirmation of (slaveholders') freedom, he is defining their interest in the institution as primarily and ultimately self-affirming. And his novel bears this out: while Busha Pickersgill's rape of Polly carries no material benefit, and while Captain Lockheart's choice to use one of his strongest slaves for a sexual performance rather than field work places entertainment before production, both men's choices lead to the priceless affirmation of their role as self-determining slaveholder, which is contrasted with their slaves' non-determination of even their most basic, intimate physical acts. In this way, the slaves in fact provide an invaluable service: their sexual violation, a demonstration of their non-personhood, validates the masculinized, hyper-determining status of the slave-managing “busha.” It makes sense, then, that Patterson defines the “social death” of the book's title, and the novel's narrative, as a state in which “the slave had no socially recognized existence outside of his master, [and] he became a social nonperson.”⁶⁰ As his novel suggests, the “human parasitism” through which Patterson's master takes the slave's personhood—her freedom, honor, and relational existence—is nowhere more aptly demonstrated than in the

non-consensual sexual act figuratively and literally joining master and slave, during which the master's body consumes the slave's reproductive resources.

Looking back at the context of the sexual performance orchestrated by Captain Lockheart—the evening in which the almost-free Benjamin decides to remain a slave, after all—this scene underlines Patterson's argument for the primacy of “slaveholder-enfranchisement” in accounting for slavery; this ultimately confirms that the driving plot element in this scene—and the entire novel—was never simply sex. After Benjamin sees how the free women-of-color are just as subject to Captain Lockheart's whims as is the slave whom they are straddling, he realizes that he has “no future to look forward to”⁶¹ whether or not he remains a slave. This very bleakness is the core feature of social death, as is the affirmation of a certain Hegelian notion of the master's—in this case, Captain Lockheart's—dignity as emerging out of the manipulation of his own bondsmen. As the one “who first explored in depth the dialectics of this political psychology,”⁶² Hegel discusses the trope of the master-slave, or lord-bondsman, dialectic in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*; given the deeply theoretical underpinnings of his discussion—framed as a parable in which man encounters and defeats the bondage of God and superstition—different accounts of its meaning have emerged and been deployed in works ranging from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967).⁶³ Its deployment as a means of understanding Captain Lockheart's perversion is just one such incarnation. But just as he invokes Hegel, Patterson makes it clear that he importantly diverges with Hegel on the philosopher's emphasis on the economic. In Patterson's words, he disagrees with “Hegel on his stance that the slave stood interposed between his master and the object his master desired (that which was produced).”⁶⁴ Just as he acknowledges that “this may have been partly true of the capitalistic antebellum U.S. South,” Patterson

counters that “in a great many slave-holding societies masters were not interested in what their slaves produced.”⁶⁵

By closing the scene with Benjamin’s decision to remain a slave, Patterson demonstrates that the climax of this whole account, then, has nothing to do with sex; rather, as reflected in Benjamin’s decision, the master’s actions—forcing three black people (slave and free) to participate in a sexual act—demonstrates that the slave can never cast off his identity, that the roles of lord and bondsman are reified beyond the bureaucratic designation of *slave* and *free*. Even with the money to buy his freedom papers—or born free, as is Benjamin’s cousin Jason—this scenario has taught us that the master will always be master, and the slave, slave. And moreover that, for this incarnation of the mandingo genre, sexual (re)production matters first and foremost as evidence for what Patterson has called the master’s parasitic reliance on the bondsman for his own sovereignty.

Patterson, gesturing again here at an interpretation of Hegel, writes of this dialectic of slavery-sovereignty: “What was universal in the master-slave relationship was the strong sense of honor the experience of mastership generated, and conversely, the dishonoring of the slave condition.”⁶⁶ Expanding the utility of slaves (to confer sovereignty) beyond just the planter class, he writes that because “the poorest free person took pride in the fact that he was not a slave,” he was able to “shar[e] in the collective honor of the master class, all free persons legitimized [by] the principle of honor.”⁶⁷ It is this larger investment in honor which makes it so that, in Patterson’s world, slaveholders are driven less by money than they are by an interest in affirming their own freedom and personhood through the denial of this status to another group (whether or not that group is defined by race or some other marker of difference outside of the plantation context). According to Susan V. Donaldson, there is a “kind of degradation that Orlando Patterson sees as crucial...in the acquisition of

white honor,” in the American case; to achieve honor, Patterson maintains, the master must reduce the slave to the level of the stereotypical ‘Sambo.’”⁶⁸ This refers back, of course, to Stanley Elkins’s “Sambo” thesis, as advanced in *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959). However, Patterson objected to the historical specificity of Elkins’s American “Sambos,” arguing that, in fact, the “‘Sambo’ was a trait found in all slaves at all times, not an artifact of American conditions, let alone African personality.”⁶⁹ In denying the racial specificity of the reduction to “Sambo,” Patterson is underscoring the place of this archetype in far-reaching applications of Hegel’s theory, just as *Slavery and Social Death* aims to theorize all of human slavery rather than just its “New World” examples.

In Benjamin’s story, the perceived role of money in slave relations is an illusion, a rhetorical tool in a rigged and ultimately soul-extinguishing enterprise. The bank notes he has in his pockets are simply a means to change setting, because money—as we’ve learned—cannot forestall the process of self-alienation that a slave bureaucracy has wrought. The coerced, sexualized, disembodied act being directed by Lockheart and viewed by Benjamin through the window signifies plantation-society reality—at least, as it exists for Afro-Jamaicans—far more than does the economic transaction that Benjamin—who Patterson has revealed as the pinnacle of naivety—had imagined as his ticket out. With this reading in mind, we see that what is not just left out of, but is in fact crucially eliminated from *Die the Long Day*’s notion of slavery is the economic, understood in Benjamin’s case as the inability of his own money to make a difference in his quality of life, and more broadly as the peripheral role of materially productive labor. And labor, in all these texts, is rendered fundamentally irrelevant to, reduced almost to an epiphenomenon of, slavery.

According to Patterson's theoretical account in *Slavery and Social Death*, the essential nature of slavery is not intrinsically economic, because slaves needn't labor to produce anything. As he explains, "There is nothing in the nature of slavery which requires that the slave be a worker. Worker qua worker has no intrinsic relationship to slave qua slave."⁷⁰ For those who might imagine slavery as a labor-based institution, he grants that "this does not mean that the slave cannot be used as a worker."⁷¹ However, this labor is an incidental symptom of the master-slave relation rather than an essential facet of its true nature. In other words, labor cannot be a defining element of slavery given its variable, non-economic, unproductive incarnations over the centuries. If, as Patterson argues, historical slave societies share enough in common with plantation slavery to be called the same thing—societies for which slave relations are premised on factors outside of material production as in, for example, "the Islamic world"⁷² in which slaves were economically dependent and unproductive—then the market is necessarily an incidental feature of slavery rather than a defining one. Instead, in Patterson's account, slavery is an operation of natal alienation and social death. Its sometimes subliminal, sometimes deliberate, motivating force, and the unchanging consequence of slavery, is the "human parasitism" that transforms the dishonor of the slave into the honor of the master-nonslave. Ultimately, while the slave's "slaveness, especially his natal alienation, made possible his effective exploitation as a laborer,"⁷³ for masters as diverse as "Toradja tribesemen in the central Celebes, ancient Greek intellectuals...Islamic sultans"⁷⁴ or Jamaican planters, "this does not in any way mean that slave necessarily implies worker."⁷⁵

What instead defines slavery for Patterson, as for philosopher Laurence Mordekhai Thomas, is the concept of natal alienation. Explaining it as a means of linking slavery and Holocaust victimhood, Thomas writes, "There is natal alienation in the lives of an ethnic

group when the social practices of the society into which they are born forcibly prevent most of them from fully participating in, and thus having secure knowledge of, their historical-cultural traditions.”⁷⁶ In other words, natal alienation—which is, along with social death, a constitutive element of slavery—is all about alienation from culture, and not (as Marx might have it) about alienation from capital. As it happens, this likening of slave to Nazi prisoner doesn’t end with Thomas. Patterson, during his discussion of alienation and liminality, catalogues the progressive modes of slave dehumanization: slaves were “obliged” to wear distinguishing clothing and “forbidden to wear” the clothing of their native culture⁷⁷; “the shaving of the slave’s head” “was one aspect of a stark symbolic” indicator of the slave’s “permanent condition of liminality”⁷⁸; and “in every slave society one of the first acts of the master has been to change the name of his new slave” which is a “universally symbolic act of stripping a person of their former identity (note for example the tendency among modern peoples to assign a new formal identification, usually a number.”⁷⁹ In a startling if unintentional parallel, Primo Levi describes the means by which he and his fellow Auschwitz prisoners, upon arriving at the camp, “had reached the bottom,” a “miserable” “human condition” from which it is impossible to “sink lower”: “Nothing belongs to us any more; they have taken away our clothes, our shoes, even our hair.... They will even take away our name” and we will be “baptized” instead with a tattooed “number.”⁸⁰

This convergence with other scholars and writers doesn’t end here. Going on to further historicize his arguments, Patterson claims “that most slaves in most precapitalist societies were not enslaved in order to be made over into workers; they may even have been economic burdens on their masters.”⁸¹ This is broadly accurate, as we can hardly argue that the slaveholders of ancient Greece or Rome owned slaves based primary on the

cost-benefit rationale of doing so. In the more Marxist-oriented period of his scholarship, slavery historian Eugene D. Genovese provides a particularly interesting definition of so-called “precapitalist societies,” depicting them as anti-modern and pre-bourgeois.⁸² And while Patterson grants this for societies of the ancient world, he is (perhaps surprisingly) insistent that, despite Genovese’s claims that the “South was precapitalistic,” it was in fact “thoroughly capitalistic,”⁸³ a claim that he buttresses by citing Fogel and Engerman. (Although Patterson deems *Time on the Cross* of sufficient integrity to cite their hotly contested data, Patterson did see his book as a direct response to the cachet of plantation econometrics defined by Fogel and Engerman and their narrow, numbers-oriented, and non-psychologized point-of-view.) But lest we think Patterson is implying that economics was a defining feature of slavery, he takes the rather equivocal position that while Southern slaves “*could* be used as the perfect capitalistic work force,” it was their performance in the roles of “perfect noncapitalistic retainer, concubine, or soldier” that equally illustrated their subjectivity as slaves (arguably ignoring the way in the slave’s labor as retainer, concubine, or soldier might be understood as elements of a different but equally important economy).⁸⁴ For Patterson, “the problem that slavery created for the U.S. South and other capitalistic slave systems...was not economic but, as in primitive societies, ideological.”⁸⁵ In other words, forced labor has the benefit of creating wealth but is, in the main, an ideological practice rather than an economic calculation. Thus, when he points out that “in many...societies...slaves produced nothing and were economically dependent on their masters,”⁸⁶ Patterson is including plantation slavery in a historical trajectory for which economic productivity was, by definition, incidental. Rather, in the most elementary sense, slavery is a mechanism of natal alienation and social death, by whatever means these states are achieved. The preliminary definition of slavery that stages *Slavery and Social Death*,

and that describes the ideology that he claims displaces the economic, is simply: “slavery is the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons.”

As interesting as this account is in itself, what is even more important for my purposes here is the way in which Patterson’s relegation of labor to the periphery of slavery historiographies turns out to be symptomatic of larger developments in the field. In slavery historiographies as early as the 1920s scholarship of antebellum historian Ulrich B. Phillips (one of Fogel and Engerman’s named opponents), the idea emerged that the institution of plantation slavery actually had a “calamitous” impact on the long-term prosperity and “productive efficiency” of the southern economy.⁸⁷ So while Patterson’s account of slavery as social death *was* unique to him, the idea that slaves weren’t necessarily assets to market calculations, and shouldn’t be primarily understood in their role as laborers, *was not*. As I explore in greater depth in the last chapter, the strong reaction against writers like Styron, who situated economics as central to slavery—equally strong against even those narratives, like Phillips’s, that prioritized plantation economics only to dismiss their efficiency—was not necessarily from scholars committed to the plantation as a mandingo breeding ground on which slavery is “all about sex.”

What, then, was the basis of slaveholders’ behavior, if not capitalism or sex? From the very beginning, a number of influential historians have described slaveholders’ interests as, above all, racial. John Anthony Scott, for example, writes in 1984 of the urgent need to “recogni[ze] that racial segregation, racial discrimination, and racially motivated violence were an integral” and, as he describes it, primary “part of slavery.”⁸⁸ Going on to explain how “segregation...dominated the lives of...slaves just as much as forced labor itself,”⁸⁹ Scott finally defines slavery as he sees it: a “system” driven by a “single criterion—*the color of the skin*” that was “from top to bottom racist.”⁹⁰ Commenting on Scott’s account of slavery, that

defines it as foremost a method of racial segregation, Barbara Fields fairly points out Scott's failure to deal with the basic question: "why Europeans seeking the 'ultimate' method of segregating Africans would go to the trouble and expense of transporting them across the ocean for [the] purpose [of segregation], when they could have achieved the same end so much more simply by leaving the Africans in Africa."⁹¹ Although Patterson is not committed to racism in the same way as Scott and like-minded historians, we see in his work another way of denying the centrality of labor to slavery and another way, in fact, of legitimizing and supporting markets.

In response to those insisting that slavery was, in fact, all about race, Patterson insists on the relative unimportance of race in understanding slavery writ-large, pointing out that over the course of human history, a preponderance of slave societies "had populations in which masters and slaves were of the same mutually perceived racial group."⁹² He supports his dismissal of race as intrinsic to the institution of institution with data on "fifty-five societies in [a] world sample. Of these, 75 percent had populations in which both slaves and masters were of the same mutually perceived racial group, 21 percent had populations in which masters and slaves were of different racial groups, and 4 percent had populations in which some slaves were of the same racial group as their masters while others were not."⁹³ More specifically, appealing to the Caribbean example, Patterson claims that "color, despite its initially dramatic impact, is in fact a rather weak basis of ranked differences in interracial societies"; the fact that "the suntan acquired by most whites working in the tropics" rivals the shade of many brown-skinned slaves is further "blurred by miscegenation, which diminishes the significance of color much faster than is usually imagined."⁹⁴

This notable disinterest in race as the seat of analysis appears from the first in his novel as well. The opening chapter of *Die the Long Day* accesses a uniquely deracializing element of West Indian plantation society; the first villains of the novel, before we encounter any slave masters in the flesh, are the ravenous group of Maroon men—free blacks who, in an effort to protect their status, collaborated with local planters to pursue runaway slaves—who pursue Quasheba through the woods and graphically chop her to death, “her blood flowing from the blades like the dust-stained streams of sweat down the arms of hoeing slaves.”⁹⁵ Displacing early any impulse on the part of the reader to understand how production mediates the narrative, Patterson doesn’t save even this interaction from sexual overtones, describing how Quasheba’s sole bargaining chip when she is finally cornered by one of the Maroons is to instruct him to (in the marked language of the mandingo genre) “take me instead,” and to “pull...her smock above her legs.”⁹⁶ And lest we attribute the Maroons’ brutality to strictly manifestations of their role as paid bounty hunters, we encounter another perpetrator’s privileging of his own sexual impulses: “the grip on his machete slackened. The bulge at the front of his breeches increased.”⁹⁷ Aside from this bargaining chip, Quasheba’s only other hope is to reach her home plantation before she is caught by the Maroons, because in this world we are told that “Massah himself would come to her rescue since every master felt that he alone had the right to kill his slave.”⁹⁸ The grounds of her protection aren’t that he would want to preserve his right to wage-earning property—because mentions of work and labor are negligible topics on Patterson’s plantation—but that he would preserve his right to administer death under circumstances of his own choosing. In a world in which the slave’s greatest hope of safety is her knowledge that someone else exercises ownership over even her death, how could she said to be anything but the living dead? In short, we see from the very beginning the link

between social and physical death and, more importantly, how an instrument of this death can just as easily share the same shade of skin as the slave-victim in question.

In considering the relationship between race and slavery, Patterson particularized the American case by acknowledging that “slavery in the Americas is unique in the primary role of race as a factor in determining the *condition* and *treatment* of slaves.”⁹⁹ However, he stipulates that this simply signals the *presence* and *practice* of racism, rather than ascribing any more than an incidental role in the slave-defining experiences of alienation and temporal death. In Patterson’s view, it can hardly be more than incidental when the mutability of race is taken into account, remembering that “the mulatto slave offspring of an African mother and a very blond” European father “was lighter than the average dark Welsh overseer.”¹⁰⁰ Otherwise, to maintain “the symbolic role of color as a distinctive badge of slavery” would have dissolved the “peculiar institution” just as quickly as the slaves’ skin was lightened by generations of interracial sex and the masters’ darkened by the southern sun.¹⁰¹ But ultimately, while Patterson and the chorus of race-committed slavery historians disagree on the relevance of skin color to slavery, Patterson does with his theory of social death what historians increasingly did with race, that being, to make labor secondary. There is thus a kind of agreement between Patterson and those writers who understood racism to be at the center of American slavery, not, obviously, on the significance of race but on the irrelevance of class, or, rather, of labor.

Returning to Patterson’s fictional deployment of his theories, in which social death and natal alienation displace class and labor, reveals the height of these concepts in practice: the self-body dissociation that defines social death and is produced by repeated, aggravated sexual degradation; the breeding of *literally* natively alienated slave “nonpersons”¹⁰² through these sexual acts (for Polly as well as the performers in Jason’s

rooming house); and the instrumentalization of the slave body that (in the figure of Captain Lockheart) defines *literal* sexual “parasitism,” a parasitism that is one of slavery’s great ironies just as it is one of its crucial benefits for the freedom-affirming master. In sum, the sexual violence that narratively frames *Die the Long Day* and analytically frames *Slavery and Social Death*—that slavery-as-sexual labor and reproduction, rather than slavery-as-plantation labor and economic production, should be the primary mode of understanding America’s “peculiar institution.” Though Patterson’s bushas *may* establish labor relations in the service of their financial interests, they *must* establish sexual relations in order for the experience to count as slavery. And it is this intrinsic claim that testifies to Patterson’s crucial contribution to the revisionist American history that replaces labor and economics with sex and social death.

Patterson’s affirmative account of slavery is, for our purposes, perhaps most relevantly stated in his claim that “the primary objective” of many slave societies “was not to increase the consumption of goods but to convert wealth into power over nonslaves.”¹⁰³ Whereas many scholars resist any logic-based explanation of slavery by ascribing slaveholders’ motives to inexplicable “evil,” Patterson is willing to acknowledge slaveholders as rational agents, so long as he defines their agenda to be the socially “honorable” status they gain in relation to the “dishonored” slave. The fact that his description of this dishonor—name changing, head shaving, and physical branding—so closely (if unintentionally) resembles the immediate markers of camp life in Primo Levi’s Auschwitz memoirs only underscores the portability of Patterson’s depiction of social death-in-practice.

Bringing this logic to further bear on the Holocaust—the recognition that, as for slavery, the model of racial oppression and social death were distinctly disconnected from

markets and money—we begin to understand what it means to make labor irrelevant on the mandingo plantation if we consider David Kehr’s suggestion that *Mandingo* was a “thinly veiled Holocaust film.”¹⁰⁴ Insofar as the sense that the market was central to ethical visions of society—imagined as the guarantor against the extremes of bad behavior imagined on the mandingo plantation, as well as the violence perpetrated during the Holocaust—we can see how these histories were increasingly used as evidence to legitimize market behavior, with the suggestion that they would have foreclosed any and all forms of such extreme violence. That’s why for Patterson it makes sense that the breeding plantation has nothing to do with (as Fogel and Engerman might argue) the production of more workers, but has everything to do with his version of evil. We can now see that the whole function of the mandingo genre is to render once again any explanation of slavery that seems to acknowledge its central premise, i.e. labor, totally irrelevant.

NOTES

¹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 99.

² “Mandingo II,” Saturday Night Live Season 3, Ep. 12, February 25, 1978, O.J. Simpson, host, *Saturday Night Live: The Complete Third Season, 1977-1978* (DVD, Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2008).

³ Ibid.

⁴ The skit is made even more ludicrous, although not more “hilarious,” by the fact that O.J. Simpson, former football star and infamous murder defendant, was the featured host.

⁵ For an overview of the *Mandingo* franchise see Rudy Maxa, “The Master of Mandingo,” *Washington Post*, July 13, 1975, 12-13, 20-25. Also, Paul Talbot, *Mondo Mandingo: The Falconhurst Books and Films* (New York: iUniverse, 2009).

⁶ Kyle Onstott, *Mandingo* (New York: Crest, 1958), quoted in Talbot, *Mondo Mandingo*, 23; emphasis in the original.

⁷ Maxa, “The Master of Mandingo,” 22.

⁸ Unsigned review of *Die the Long Day* by Orlando Patterson, *Kirkus Reviews*, 1972, <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/orlando-patterson-3/die-the-long-day/>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Maxa, “The Master of *Mandingo*,” 16.

¹¹ His choice of name for the main character is particularly interesting given his later explanation of naming patterns for Caribbean plantations in *Slavery and Social Death*. According to Patterson, “in Jamaica, African day-names and tribal names were either selected in their pure form or adapted English names. During the nineteenth century these African names acquired pejorative meanings: Quashee, a day-name that originally meant ‘Sunday’ in Akan, came to signify a stupid, lazy slave.” Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 57.

¹² Orlando Patterson, *Die the Long Day* (New York: Morrow, 1972), 15.

¹³ Ibid., 207.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 208–209.

¹⁶ Ibid., 209.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 210.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Laurence Mordekhai Thomas, *Vessels of Evil: American Slavery and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 225.

²¹ Patterson, *Die the Long Day*, 212–213.

²² Ibid., 213.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 215.

²⁵ Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2009), 241.

²⁶ Patterson, *Die the Long Day*, 215.

²⁷ Ibid., 217.

²⁸ Lawrence L. Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982), 72.

²⁹ Patterson, “From the Author,” back flap, *Die the Long Day*.

³⁰ Ibid., 30.

³¹ Ibid., 252.

³² Ibid., 251.

³³ Tim A. Ryan, *Calls and Responses: The American Novel of Slavery Since Gone with the Wind* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 73.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Leonard Maltin, *Leonard Maltin's Movie Guide*, quoted in Talbot, *Mondo Mandingo*, xii.

³⁶ Harry Medved and Michael Medved, *The Golden Turkey Awards* (1980), quoted in Talbot, *Mondo Mandingo*, xii-xiii.

³⁷ Tim Hunter, *Movieline Magazine* (1996), quoted in Talbot, *Mondo Mandingo*, xiii.

³⁸ Robin Wood, "Mandingo: The Vindication of an Abused Masterpiece," *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 265.

³⁹ Maxa, "Master of Mandingo."

⁴⁰ Catherine Clinton, "Foucault Meets Mandingo," *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 226.

⁴¹ Kyle Onstott in *True: The Man's Magazine* (1959), quoted in Talbot, *Mondo Mandingo*, 6.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 6-7.

⁴⁴ Venetria K. Patton, *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 14.

⁴⁵ Interview of Hattie Rogers, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*, quoted in Bob Greene, "America's 'Slave Narratives' Should Shock Us," *CNN*, February 17, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/02/17/opinion/greene-slave-narrative/>. As described on their website, the collection of interviews, *Born in Slavery*, is comprised of "more than 2,300 first-person accounts of slavery and 500 black-and-white photographs of former slaves. These narratives were collected in the 1930s as part of the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and assembled and microfilmed in 1941 as the seventeen-volume *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*." They are available online at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>.

⁴⁶ Clinton, "Foucault Meets *Mandingo*," 224.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Patterson, *Die the Long Day*, 15.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 22.

⁵¹ Ibid., 23.

⁵² Ibid., 24.

⁵³ Ibid. 24–25.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Unsigned review of *Die the Long Day*, *Kirkus Reviews*.

⁵⁸ Orlando Patterson, *Freedom Volume 1: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

⁵⁹ Emily Miller Budick, *Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation* (see chap 1 n. 118), 208–209.

⁶⁰ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 5.

⁶¹ Ibid., 215.

⁶² Ibid., 11.

⁶³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), paras. 178–196.

⁶⁴ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 11.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 11, 99.

⁶⁸ Susan V. Donaldson. “Telling Forgotten Stories of Slavery in the Postmodern South.” *The Southern Literary Journal* 40 no. 2 (2008): 275. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 96.

⁶⁹ Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post Holocaust America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005), 225.

⁷⁰ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 99.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 11.

⁷³ Ibid., 99.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 99.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *Vessels of Evil*, 150n.

⁷⁷ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 58. In an interesting aside about the challenge of defining slave dress, Patterson both admits the limits of such an over-arching analysis of slavery and reveals an early attempt to

avoid a primitive union (or more probably, an armed insurrection). In ancient Rome, “the slave population blended easily into the larger proletariat, and the high rate of manumission meant that ethnicity was useless as a means of identifying slaves. A ready means of identification seemed desirable, however, and a special form of dress for slaves was contemplated. When someone pointed out that the proposal, if carried out, would lead slaves immediately to recognize their numerical strength, the idea was abandoned.”

⁷⁸ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁸⁰ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, trans. Giulio Einaudi (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 26-27.

⁸¹ Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 99.

⁸² See Eugene D. Genovese, “Preliminary Observations on Afro-American Slavery and the Rise of Capitalism,” *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1969).

⁸³ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁴ Ibid., emphasis mine.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁷ Ulrich B. Phillips, “The Decadence of the Plantation System,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 35, no. 1 (1910), 40.

⁸⁸ John Anthony Scott, “Segregation: A Fundamental Aspect of Southern Race Relations, 1800-1860,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 4, no. 4 (1984), 427.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 430.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 433.

⁹¹ Barbara Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review* 181 (1990), 99.

⁹² Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 176.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 16-17.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 176.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 43.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 33.

¹⁰⁴ David Kehr, "In a Corrupt World Where the Violent Bear It Away," *New York Times*, February 17, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/17/movies/17kehr.html>.

4. EICHMANN AND HITLER GONE MAD!:

PRIVATIZING EVIL IN NAZI FICTION

“We’d like to believe that nice people don’t commit genocide, only Nazis do.”

—Jared M. Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee*¹

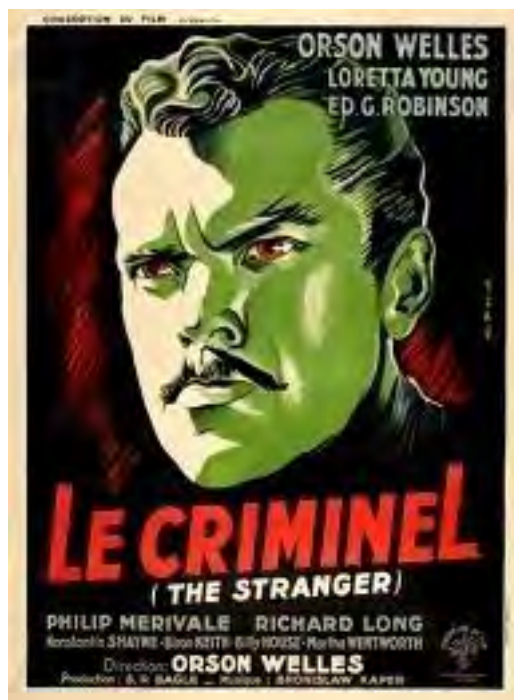
“Do you really think my work at Auschwitz was aimless insanity?”²

—Dr. Josef Mengele, *The Boys from Brazil*

As early as 1946, when Orson Welles used film to bring the Nazi to New England, Hollywood has been preoccupied with the central villains of World War II, asking of its actors and its audiences: What does the figure of the Nazi have to tell us about what it means to be American? And what does an American way of seeing have to tell us about the Nazi perpetrator? Welles was perhaps the first to ask these questions so explicitly in his film noir, *The Stranger*. In his sole box office success, Welles plays Franz Kindler, a Nazi fugitive who uses the uniquely American trope of reinvention to rebrand himself as Professor Charles Rankin. Rankin, who is pursued throughout the film by a representative of the United Nations War Crime Commission, exhibits a fiendish capacity for cruelty and dissembling. And as the popular success of the film demonstrates, Kindler/Rankin proved a compelling canvas on which to theorize Nazi criminality.

What made Rankin, a Harper School professor and surreptitious yet isolated war criminal, such a vivid emblem of the diabolical Nazi writ-large? To an America just recovering from the bloodiest conflict in history, the threat of “a villain disguised among us” was a prelude to the 1940s–50s Red Scare paranoia. Rankin’s smug taunt to a repentant fellow Nazi—“Who would think to look for the notorious Franz Kindler in the sacred precincts of the Harper School, surrounded by the sons of America’s first families? And I’ll stay hidden...’til the day we strike again”³—illustrates early and in-brief everything *Nazi* has come to signify in American representations: an unrepentant and devious criminal who plots world domination, without logic or provocation, through which he can practice his preferred trade of torture and atrocity.

When Mr. Wilson, the film’s Nazi hunter, is forced to justify his pursuit of this particular criminal, he explains to Rankin’s wife the gravity of her husband’s role: Kindler is, according to Wilson, one of the Nazis who “conceived the theory of genocide—mass depopulation of



French film poster for *The Stranger* with Welles looking especially diabolical.⁴

conquered countries.”⁵ It is this most grievous of crimes, illustrated by excerpts from real documentary footage of the concentration camps—an aesthetic approach taken up by several subsequent films, including 1961’s *Judgment at Nuremberg*—that serve as damning evidence of how Rankin/Kindler surpasses the ranks of a despicable war criminal. He and Nazis like him are the result of what Welles elsewhere called a “putrefaction of the soul, a perfect spiritual garbage.”⁶

Using *The Stranger* as a chronological starting point, this chapter examines the ways in which Nazi narratives have become stand-ins for interrogating American notions of right and wrong, and particularly how post-1960s narratives have scapegoated de-historicized war criminals as “spiritual garbage,” consequently obscuring the systematized nature of criminality, either in

1940s Europe or in our own context. This deployment of perpetrator subjectivity itself, as the vehicle for understanding and theorizing atrocity—literally understanding the Nazi in the singular, and outside of the German structural context—stands in contrast to the mandingo genre’s move to particularize embodied sexual suffering as characteristic of the larger institution of slavery, relocating an explanation of atrocity from *sexually violated victim* (in slavery) to *crazed perpetrator* (in the Holocaust).

In this chapter, I will discuss two American narratives about Nazis: Robert Shaw’s theatrical version of *The Man in the Glass Booth* and Ira Levin’s novel *The Boys from Brazil*, and consider how these works, taken together, particularize and essentialize evil in a move that avoids any suggested link between normative socioeconomic values and state bureaucracies, and the negative behaviors for which (in Shaw and Levin’s narratives) these social structures can’t account. This decontextualized understanding of Nazism as reflecting individual rather than structural evil serves to protect socioeconomic and cultural structures from interrogation, if not positing them as a corrective for exceptional evil. I argue that this understanding of Nazi behavior is connected to an increasing resistance to a socioeconomic systematized understanding of bad behavior—that being anything from hate speech to mass torture, and everything in between—in favor of a bio-psychologizing that particularizes motive and guilt and removes the interrogation of institutionalized attitudes. The Nazi types that I analyze in this chapter aren’t, in my argument, necessarily misreadings of the historical record (though as I’ll discuss later, there are quite plausible accounts of Nazism that understand it as a fully rational enterprise); rather, I am arguing that the notions collectively advanced by these representations foreclose the possibility—when using World War II to moralize (as the “Nazi-as-apotheosis-of-evil” thesis enables us to do)—that broader questions regarding institutional morality are logical, urgent, or even relevant. Whereas Styron claims, as we may remember, that Auschwitz is the “despotic apotheosis”⁷ of evil, for Shaw

and Levin the site of criminality is not the place or the people writ-large, but rather, the inexplicably amoral individual.

When I talk about bio-psychologizing, what I am really getting at is the notion of the perpetrator that extracts him from his social context, and attempts to understand him by understanding how the operations of his body and mind define him as uniquely and essentially monstrous. Stanley Milgram in his 1960s “obedience to authority” peer-shock experiments,⁸ and Phillip Zimbardo in his 1971 Stanford prison experiment,⁹ grounded their inquiries in a curiosity about what inspired Holocaust perpetrators (in Milgram’s case) like Adolf Eichmann. The notion of the everyman-perpetrator is an obstacle for advocates of a self-interest-driven free market. In order to support a claim for the generally benevolent outcomes of a market economy, there is a sociocultural need for “Lucifers” whose narratives ascribe atrocity to racist, pathological, or diabolical motives rather than rational and racially-indifferent self-interest. Whereas Primo Levi’s motives for stealing bread in Auschwitz are fully obvious, perpetrator motives are less obvious in the experiments of Milgram and Zimbardo, experiments that by design eliminated motives (like enrichment and self-preservation) which they believed Holocaust perpetrators never had. Their work attempts to answer Milgram’s urgent question—did “Eichmann, and his million accomplices in the Holocaust” commit mass murder “just [to] follow orders?”¹⁰—encapsulated in the seeming absence of a one-to-one relationship between the perpetrators’ compromising actions and their personal interest. Milgram and Zimbardo’s inquiries exemplified a growing aversion to linking atrocity with self-interest, ultimately an aversion to the possibility that, as William Styron posits, Nazis are capitalist monsters that, like Primo Levi, are merely attempting to eat.

My analyses of Shaw and Levin’s texts will show how the cost-benefit calculating perpetrators of Styron’s novels, who are contextualized within their respective criminal systems, get consolidated—in popular historiography and literature—into the kind of perpetrator for whom

essential bio-psychological subjectivity forecloses any rational motive (greed or otherwise).

Ultimately, I consider how 1960s and 70s representations of Nazis reflect resistance to the notion of the rational calculations of (for example) a Fogel and Engerman slaveholder, and at what stakes, if any, these texts gesture when insisting on this kind of particularized account of events.

Andrew Delbanco, in his 1995 book *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil*, broaches these questions when he claims that the idea of evil is “a metaphor upon which the health of society depends.”¹¹ In this social history, Delbanco traces the changing notions of evil to the evolution of commerce in Puritan New England, when “their language was simply at odds with” the structural injustices of the advancing market “and Satan was the name they gave to the contradiction.”¹² Extending this analysis to the present time, I look at a series of post-60s Nazi narratives that serve to resolve this very same moral contradiction as it emerges in socioeconomic conditions of the present. While Delbanco claims that “Puritan New England was the last great flare-up of this visible devil,”¹³ I argue that the move to externalize evil as the isolated perpetrator—acting in the person of Satan much as a Catholic priest acts in the person of Christ—does in fact serve as “the focus of final blame,”¹⁴ and that this has the effect of working as a structural critique of the organizational and cumulative means by which blame is earned and evil is perpetrated.

Delbanco is right when he says that “ambition and entrepreneurship became recognized as talents and even virtues, [so] Satan made less and less sense as a metaphor for the overweening self,”¹⁵ but what he wrongly implies is that the absence of Satan as a metaphor for the American literary self—the subject of his analysis—is an absence of him entirely. Rather, as these Nazi narratives demonstrate, Satan transforms into the metaphor for a distinctly non-American criminal other. So when Delbanco argues that “the first reaction of educated people” to imagined and actual evil and atrocity was “a determination to find some physiological—and spiritually meaningless—explanation,”¹⁶ he precisely misses the ways in which contemporary American narratives of evil rely

on the mystification of motive and absence of logic in the individual, as a continued means of eliding the moral compromises that characterize cross-individual and macro-structural relationships. What is actually present in these narratives, but what Delbanco claims is sadly missing from them, is “the privative conception of evil”¹⁷—understanding evil as manifest at the micro-individual level rather than understanding it as the moral degeneration at the systemic or group level—that, in my reading, defines representations of Nazi behavior and consequently defines what gets classified as potential modes of right and wrong.

With Delbanco in mind, let me come back to my introduction of one of the earliest postwar American Nazi representations, and see whether that film supports my analysis of Delbanco and sets up our reading of the Nazi representations I trace in this paper. Imagining “the stranger,” Rankin/Kindler, as Satan himself, brings this critique of Delbanco to life. Welles’s Nazi narrative, in which the war criminal is caught while living the “American Dream,” brings into relief the intended dissonance between this dream and individual-defined Nazi criminality. Welles’s Kindler doesn’t offer up a restrained escapee who, however despicable or even unrepentant, is looking to enjoy the fruits of life in bucolic New England. Perhaps that unremarkable kind of perpetrator was inconceivable so shortly after an understandably shocking war. Or perhaps Americans were in search of a Lucifer so base in his desire not only to escape justice, but to wreak future havoc at the earliest opportunity and beyond all reason, in order to reveal the (in contrast) exceptionalism of the American investment in dignity, as represented by the professor’s upper-crust “friends” and neighbors in their respective (and realized) “pursuits of happiness.” While Welles’s Nazi may have met the social need to flesh out a postwar American moral identity, the representations I will discuss—in particular, Shaw’s Eichmann narrative—show how the tropes of the Nazi perpetrator evolve to revise historiographies so that they meet the

increasing need to de-institutionalize and individualize notions of wrong, and advance the very “privative conception of evil” for which Delbanco claims a deficit.

The real—and as we’ll see, imagined—story of Adolf Eichmann offers much to discourses of Nazi motives and notions of evil. In 1960, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion announced Mossad’s capture of Holocaust architect Adolf Eichmann to the Knesset and the world: Israel would finally hold accountable one of the so-called architects of the Final Solution who had eluded the tribunals at Nuremberg, and bring him to trial in the courts of an aggrieved nation. Justice would finally prevail. But Israel’s breach of Argentina’s sovereignty by kidnapping Eichmann gave pause, as did their assumption of jurisdiction for a crime that had been committed over a decade earlier on a different continent. Because of its controversial genesis, the Eichmann trial did not win Jews in the diaspora or in the young Israeli state many friends, especially in the American media. In remarkably Christological—and barely restrained anti-Semitic—language, the *Washington Post* called Israel’s trial of Eichmann a “passion play in the guise of a trial” and “a prostitution of the forms of law,” whereas the *Wall Street Journal* suggested that his prosecution had “an atmosphere of Old Testament retribution.” Aside from what amounts to veiled Jew-baiting, the trial was also framed as an instrument of “Communist aims” in the shadow of an escalating Cold War, and the attending need for US-Germany solidarity.¹⁸ But however much it upset people, the trial *did* succeed in doing one thing that Jews had failed to do following the Second World War: it brought the Holocaust into the public imagination and conversation and, according to historian Peter Novick, branded the genocide as “a distinct—and distinctively Jewish—entity.”¹⁹ As one of the earliest televised trials in the history of television, Israel’s prosecution of Adolf Eichmann was accessible and theatrical in a way that the Nuremberg Trials never were.

Although several popular American media outlets memorialized the tenor of debates around Israel's trial of Eichmann, Hannah Arendt's series of essays for the *New Yorker*, later published as *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), had a dramatic influence on this public discourse. Although the televised trial made the home of every viewer a private theater-cum-courtroom, Arendt's credentials differentiated her gaze, privileging her account over others. Already the distinguished author of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and, perhaps more importantly, a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany for whom the trial was, necessarily, both professional and personal, Arendt undertook the task of describing the Jerusalem courtroom, the judges, the prosecutor, and the defendant. Arendt's Eichmann is a mediocre man in just another government job, and this unexceptional character embodies her provocative thesis regarding the "banality of evil." Arendt describes the trial as profound for what it reveals about the nature of the Nazi perpetrator: he is a "terribly, terrifyingly normal" careerist who represents one of many orderly totalitarian cogs.²⁰ For Arendt, as with Styron and his institutional critiques, Eichmann wasn't an individual perpetrator so much as he was an actor working within a criminal system, one who was replaceable inasmuch as his values were reproduced throughout the system. In the words of one Eichmann scholar, "Eichmann struck Arendt as being entirely honest when he presented himself in court as a thoughtless bureaucrat...who could easily have been replaced by someone else."²¹

Hannah Arendt's reporting on the trial of Adolf Eichmann failed to define his behavior by a "privative conception of evil"; in fact, it was Arendt's appeal to the underwhelming banality of evil, and Eichmann as a mundane bureaucrat rather than an incarnation of Satan, that rendered her reporting, and her very self, so despicable to the mainstream. In her insistence on the surface-level nature of his motives, she moved away from the veil of mystification that ascribed his deeds to personal inclination. As Arendt put it, she was "struck by the manifest shallowness in the doer that made it impossible to trace the incontestable evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots or

motives.”²² When she went on to describe Eichmann as “neither demonic nor monstrous,” but rather an illustration of “thoughtlessness,” she did so at the very moment when the shift in social temperature made the need for a demonic notion of evil all the more urgent.²³

Although the American media was preoccupied by Arendt’s unique analysis of Eichmann, she was not entirely alone in this assessment. Muriel Spark, the Scottish journalist and novelist who wrote extensively on the Eichmann trial, actually presents Eichmann, in her novel *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965), as having a “detached, mechanistic way of thinking...devoid of original, independent thought, and shackled instead to the conditions of Nazi law.”²⁴ According to Spark, it was this conformity to a macro-bureaucracy, described in the “banal phras[ing]” that characterized his testimony, that made Eichmann “a little bad man, not a big bad man.”²⁵ This echoed in fiction the mundane bureaucrat of Arendt’s essays. And yet, the public ire toward this deflation of such a notorious Nazi was reserved almost exclusively for Arendt and focused almost exclusively in the American context.

The critical outrage over Arendt’s journalistic construction of Eichmann—what Rabbi Joachim Prinz, president of the American Jewish Congress, claimed was a portrait of a “sweet, misguided man”²⁶—reflects the moral anxieties of 1960s America. And the hysteria caused by Arendt’s suggestion that a mass murderer may not be all that interesting or special, took many and varied forms. As Peter Novick puts it, “Arendt’s picture of Eichmann upset long-standing and deeply-rooted assumptions,” such as neoconservative journalist Norman Podhoretz’s belief that “No person could have joined the Nazi party, let alone the S.S., who was not at the very least a vicious anti-Semite.”²⁷ When he went on to argue, in his 1963 book *Hannah Arendt on Eichmann: A Study in the Perversity of Brilliance* and elsewhere, that “‘no banality of a man could have done so hugely evil a job so well; to believe otherwise is to learn nothing about the nature of evil,’ Podhoretz was also voicing a widespread feeling...that the traditional version—pure evil versus pure

good—was preferable to her story: ‘complex, unsentimental, riddled with paradox and ambiguity.’”²⁸ As with critics’ outrage with Fogel and Engerman *not* for their (in)accuracy, but for the distasteful implications of their conclusions, so was Arendt dismissed for what her portrayal of Eichmann meant for the “nature of evil” rather than her methodology in interpreting (what could be called) the Eichmann trial’s “data.” Unlike Fogel and Engerman, Arendt finds Eichmann no less despicable for her account of his actions, but the account itself is sufficiently nuanced as to be utterly unacceptable, in part because her “scaled-down version of Eichmann” “could be read as trivializing” Israel’s capture and prosecution of a notorious Nazi leader and “undermining the claim that he was an appropriate symbol of eternal anti-Semitism.”²⁹

The preferred account of Eichmann, which Arendt was implicitly challenging, looks something like the Anti-Defamation League’s suggestion that “Eichmann himself deliberately planned the cold-blooded senseless liquidation of an entire people.”³⁰ As opposed to what Arendt implied was a bureaucratic functionary, the ADL insisted that “Eichmann personally conceived the idea of liquidating Jews as a means of ‘solving’ the Jewish problem,” and although (as Arendt argues) “these were the orders he had from his Nazi bosses.... He probably could have successfully proposed mass Jewish emigration to his superiors.”³¹ Monster that he was, though, Eichmann “instead...selected the gas chamber, the crematorium and the soap factory.”³² Considering for a moment the ahistorical nature of the ADL’s latter claim—the fact that, in the words of Holocaust scholar Michael Berenbaum, “We don’t have any evidence that the Nazis actually manufactured soap with human bodies”—it becomes clear how the “soap myth” becomes part and parcel of a desire to create a hyper-villain in direct contrast to the mundane subject of Arendt’s report.³³ This is perhaps best put by the *New York Times Magazine* reporter who called Arendt’s essays “a natural outgrowth of the behavioristic, materialistic interpretation of the world,” that counter the “Judeo-Christian principle of free will.”³⁴ In other words, Arendt’s Nazi isn’t a sufficiently privative

Satan, and is too much an organic actor among many, the result of a macro-social worldview rather than a micro-psychological one.

In fact, the public resistance to Arendt's thesis of criminality is rooted in precisely her insufficient application of a good/evil dichotomy. As Novick puts it, "There was...a great deal of visceral resistance to [the Holocaust] being discussed in terms other than the confrontation of pure evil and pure virtue."³⁵ Arendt's subversion of "these norms—her insistence on stressing complexity and ambiguity—was clearly, and understandably, one of the things that gave the greatest offense."³⁶ As he notes here, this impulse for a "pure evil" analysis wasn't new in the 1960s. My argument isn't that the proclivity to create an individuated Satan-Nazi was something new—as Delbanco has shown, there was this same impulse in Puritan New England. However, I'm arguing that the stakes for the notion of evil as essentially individual and private were particularly high after this period. The reasons for this were similar to those which Delbanco has named as the explanation for the Puritan impulse—namely: the moral contradictions of a commerce-driven society.

The fact that Arendt was not an advocate for Eichmann, and was actually quite the opposite, appears not to have mattered. According to Novick's analysis, "Arendt's loathing and contempt for Eichmann was manifest on every page of her book."³⁷ Rather than offering an exculpatory account, one which would suggest that Eichmann's pursuit of self-interest implicitly excuses his behavior, her "banality of evil" thesis "refers to what Arendt found most striking about Eichmann: his terrifying ordinariness, the fact that far from being [a] demonic monster...he was a bland and mindless though-all-too-efficient bureaucrat, motivated principally by personal ambition; that while he zealously carried out orders, he had no influence on policy; that he was not even particularly anti-Semitic."³⁸ In point of fact, Arendt never in the least doubted Eichmann's guilt, only the narrative of his motivations and moral character. In the view of her critics, we aren't allowed to see the relevant, if not exculpatory, defense that he was a cog in a totalizing Nazi

machine; whether or not he was the most important cog, or in fact the man who helped build the machine (and he should be punished accordingly), makes it no less true that Eichmann operated in a system that circumscribed certain kinds of outrageous and criminal behavior. The accusations that Arendt was on his side because she acknowledged this and doubted the narrative of Eichmann's motives recalls the public response to the work of Fogel and Engerman, who were denounced because their claim that the slavery perpetrator wasn't barbaric was perceived as akin to claiming that he wasn't a perpetrator at all. The furor against Arendt was only made worse at her implicit suggestion that Eichmann's careerism and ambition were at the roots of his crimes, particularly in a professionalizing and commerce-driven American culture.

It was into this morass that the English author and Hollywood-based actor Robert Shaw waded with his 1968 play *The Man in the Glass Booth*, which was based on the 1967 novel. These were succeeded by the 1975 film of the same name. While my focus is on American texts in this dissertation, and Robert Shaw is by birth and citizenship British, his inclusion in this project is pertinent because of the American context of its production (as a novel, play, and film), the centrality of the New York city backdrop staging the narrative, and the particular American urgency of the Arendt-Eichmann representational drama. Because during his trial, Eichmann was placed in a glass booth, the title is transparently reminiscent of the case itself. The film tells the story of Arthur Goldman, a wealthy Jewish property magnate living in a Manhattan penthouse who is kidnapped by Mossad, taken to Israel, and tried as a Nazi SS officer. The first half of the film shows Goldman's eccentric and erratic behavior in New York, where he abuses his assistant, Charlie, expresses constant anxiety about being under surveillance, and holds private Jewish rituals only moments after spouting anti-Semitic epithets. He is represented as being on the edge of sanity and is shown wielding a gun and hoarding cash in fits of paranoia.



Still shot of Maximilian Schell as a boxed-in Adolf Karl Dorff in 1975's *The Man in the Glass Booth* (left); 1961 photograph of Adolf Eichmann in his real glass booth in a Jerusalem courtroom (right).³⁹

After Mossad captures Goldman and identifies him as their (Rankin/Kindler-esque) Nazi in hiding, using dental records as confirmation, Goldman is flown to Israel where the second half of the play takes place. Here, Goldman transforms himself from Jewish tycoon into Nazi Colonel Adolf Karl Dorff and incites his captors by refusing to disguise or repent for his actions. Mrs. Rosen, the Israeli prosecutor, deposes him, asking why “in the reports of the Einsatzgruppen I notice plain words do not occur: we have ‘final solution,’ ‘evacuation,’ and ‘special treatment,’ [while] on the other hand, in your reports, you always stated ‘extermination’ or ‘killing.’ Why is that?” The smug Dorff offers his maxim—“always call a spade a spade”—before going on to explain how “those euphemisms you speak of were best for keeping orders—they didn’t want the typists to get the message.... But in my case, I’m not here to tell you I didn’t enjoy it—I’m here to tell you I did. No clerk, Rosen! Issued my own orders, plotted my own plots, had a ball.”⁴⁰ Here and elsewhere, the figure of Goldman/Dorff seems to be fulfilling the implicit threat of Orson Welles’s “stranger” and its negative fantasy of duplicitous evil hiding in the “sacred

precincts” of American wealth until a chance opens up to “strike again,” if only (as in Dorff’s case) with words directed at his former victims-cum-courtroom attendees.⁴¹ Dorff wears his Nazi uniform and seems eager to use the trial as a larger stage from which to repeat this message, unremorseful and cruel, as he makes his opening statement and questions witnesses in a courtroom full of Holocaust survivors. Like Eichmann, Dorff endures his trial in a bulletproof glass booth for his own protection; unlike Eichmann’s booth, Dorff’s is soundproofed, and the judges operate an off-switch when Dorff has one of his many long-winded outbursts.⁴²

Following the climactic revelation that the medical doctors, two key witnesses, have been paid to provide false testimony, the story quickly evolves from drama into tragedy, a shift that is well-captured in a short passage from the play. Just as we learn that Dorff is, in fact, Arthur Goldman—not a ranking Nazi officer, but a Holocaust victim who inexplicably falsified a Nazi identity by faking medical records and grafting his arm where the conspicuous SS blood group tattoo would have been—the suddenly frail and silent Goldman can only listen as the prosecutor and judge offer conjectures regarding his motivation, ranging all the way from “he likes bad jokes” to a presumed “need to put a German in the dock, a German who would say what no German has said,” and ending with the explanation of “his [survivor’s] guilt.”⁴³

In the final scene of both the play and its film adaptation, Goldman stands paralyzed in his booth, and the viewer recalls Goldman/Dorff’s post-abduction references to himself as a Christ-like martyr. The viewer can only wonder, along with the court officers, at Goldman’s ultimate motivation for this deception: Is he a repentant collaborator, as one witness seems to suggest? Is he using this ruse to work through survivor’s guilt? Or is it Goldman’s answer to the simple need for, as the judge puts it, “a German who would say what no German has said in the dock”? As the guards attempt to get into the booth, the lights fade on Goldman who, dying from this final trauma, is exhibiting the extremities of isolation—for both guilt and suffering—before being silenced forever.

In her final analysis, Arendt reports that “the trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal.”⁴⁴ This is a good distillation of her portrayal of Eichmann, and her insistence on his place within a matrix of criminality—that there were “so...many like him”—is exactly the kind of institutional indictment that his representational isolation in *The Man in the Glass Booth* was helpful in solving. There can be no co-defendants because the grotesque novelty of the crime puts it beyond the realm of co-conspirator and, at the most basic level, there is simply no defense. And yet, the individuating of guilt established by the play is complicated by Shaw’s unwillingness to adhere to a strict evil/good dichotomy—something mastered by Levin and more contemporary Holocaust novelists. Rather than allow blame to rest with this Einsatzgruppen colonel, near the end of the trial Dorff/Goldman appeals to the “people of Israel” in remarkably biblical language, stating that “if [Hitler] had chosen you...if he had chosen you...you also would have followed where he led.”⁴⁵

Following the Eichmann kidnapping, several media figures accused Israel of acting like a rogue Nazi state, advancing a trope that is central to the play: namely, the eliding of difference between Jews and Nazis. According to playwright and Holocaust literary scholar Robert Skloot, “There are a variety of problems associated with the emerging trope of ‘Nazi as victim,’” the principal of which is this precise problem of subjectivity-collapse: this trope finally “leads from ‘Nazi as victim’ to ‘Nazi as Jew.’”⁴⁶ *The Man in the Glass Booth* provides us with a despicable Nazi who celebrates his crimes, earning the viewer’s disdain and desire for a swift and just retribution. However, the author turn this disdain on its head by blurring Jewish and Nazi identities in a way that reflects the very shift in aesthetic attitudes towards Holocaust justice that Skloot fears. Annette Insdorf writes that the story’s focus “on individual responsibility...depict[s] the breakdown or transfer of identity among bystander, survivor, and victim, and [this focus] locate[s] the drama

within the self, where a Jewish or Nazi identity is gradually assumed.”⁴⁷ This narrative construction of a localized drama of guilt, one that indulges a privative notion of evil at its very core, takes our inquiry into Dorff’s crimes out of the macro-account of bureaucratic criminal enterprise. It is extremely meaningful, then, that a narrative that ostensibly retells Eichmann’s story actually turns into the story of a trauma-ridden Jew. Quite literally, this story turns a Jew (Goldman in New York) into a Nazi (after Dorff’s capture by Mossad) and back into a Jew (during the courtroom climax in which Goldman and Dorff are revealed to be one and the same).

Shaw’s iteration of Eichmann is anything but the civic-minded bureaucrat. There are several examples: First, when a Nazi, Dorff’s defense of his actions is firmly self-defined, and stated in a way that reflects irrational hatred rather than dispassionate ambition. Next, he is utterly isolated in his guilt and innocence: he is abducted from a Nazi-free environment, is never truly defined by his official organizational role, and spends the majority of the narrative as a specimen on display. Finally, his insanity is fully realized in the climactic revelation that his madness defies boundaries, and most certainly cannot accommodate anything close to dispassionate calculation.

The Man in the Glass Booth provided an answer to the implicit threat to people like Podhoretz who are deeply invested in advancing an American ethic of self-interest as fulfilled by bureaucratic corporatism, created by Arendt’s Eichmann; that neoconservative Norman Podhoretz insists only a “vicious anti-Semite” could participate in the Holocaust is merely symptomatic of the ideology behind an enthusiastic treatise like *The Defenders of Capitalism* (1981). Instead, Shaw’s sort-of-Eichmann figure is, to put it crudely, something of a nutcase. He is from the first, a self-hating and paranoid Jew who we engage with at first not on the basis of his Nazi identity, or even on his identity as a Jew, but instead on the basis of his utter insanity. In the end, this 1960s representation of an infamous Nazi—an improvement on the perceived problems with Arendt’s construction of the Nazi, but perhaps with too much room for gray—just opens the door

for the causal explanations for Nazism taken up after 1970, and for that most notorious of historical figures: Adolf Hitler.

The Adolf Hitler of post-1970s representations, in novels ranging from George Steiner's *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.* (1981) to Norman Mailer's *The Castle in the Forest* (2007), can't be understood as a deviant formed by negative social values or institutions. Rather, this collectively redefined Hitler is as much the source of his own inborn evil as he is its fulfillment, a man with no greater purpose than to fulfill some indwelling motive, and this characterization serves to particularize and essentialize his criminality. The most basic way to understand the Hitler of competing historiographies is through what Holocaust historian Doris Bergen outlines as the intentionalism/functionalism debate. In her words, "Scholars in fact disagree about just how crucial Hitler was. One group, often referred to as intentionalists...emphasize[s] Hitler's intentions and...describes Hitler as the mastermind of mass murder.... Others, sometimes called functionalists," who used to be more prevalent, "described the Holocaust as a function of other developments, especially during the war...[and] downplay the role of Hitler."⁴⁸ She takes up the moral and historical implications of these separate analyses when she notes that critics of intentionalism "think it focuses too much on Hitler and lets everyone else off the hook"; at the same time, opponents of functionalism, who also happen to be opponents of "Marxist positions for depersonalizing the past," say that in describing "the Holocaust and other crimes of Nazism as the results of developments or events, [functionalism] draws attention away from the people who in fact made the decisions and took the actions."⁴⁹ My argument about *The Boys from Brazil* is that, according to Bergen's categories, this aesthetic account of Hitler falls squarely on the side of (the present-tensed) intentionalism and provides an account of the deliberate exclusion of functionalist explanations for atrocity.

When analyzing the stakes of each type of Hitler historiography (based either on an intentionalist or a functionalist model), Bergen makes a good point about what certain understandings of Hitler mean for our attitude toward economics and labor. “Scholars influenced by Marxism have also tended to pay little attention to Hitler. In their interpretations, Nazism was an extreme form of capitalism that had much more to do with broad, economic structures than with the ideas or actions of any one individual.”⁵⁰ It is no coincidence that the functionalist, Marxist critique of structural injustice stands in direct contrast to the increasingly safe intentionalist critique that points to the individual—in this case Hitler—and calls him an isolated anomaly—much in the way that the morally marginalized, soap-manufacturing Eichmann was more to the taste of the neoconservative journalist Podhoretz. For although Hitler is quite obviously unique for his role in the war—something even functionalist historians would hardly deny—it is also obvious that Hitler’s criminal ambitions couldn’t have been realized on their global scale had they remained his alone.

Another historian who lays out the basic narrative of Hitler historiographies, and the evolution of this narrative of motive over time, is Raul Hilberg. His opus, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, is the first comprehensive history of the Holocaust and, as such, its shifting account of the causes and motives for the Holocaust over the course of the different editions of the book is extremely valuable for seeing how changing stories of the Holocaust align with the move toward values that privilege individual accounts over systemic critiques.⁵¹ I’m particularly interested in the changes between the initial 1961 publication and the second three-volume edition from 1985. This edition-to-edition analysis of Hilberg shows how the acceptability of different kinds of Hitler narratives evolved over time.

The first of Hilberg’s major editorial changes was his revision of two factors that he had originally described as driving the decision-making process behind the Holocaust: First, he revisited “Hitler’s role as the key decision maker” and second, he introduced the idea of a

Consensus Model of Nazi governance. Holocaust historian Christopher Browning notes that, as an intentionalist mode of historiography took hold and Hilberg began to rewrite the story behind the Holocaust, “decisions were not taken and orders were not given” as they would have been in a dispassionate criminal enterprise.⁵² “Rather Hitler prophesied, commented, and wished,” and when he was acting in the person of Satan, the “atmosphere and expectation” that surrounded him ultimately “facilitated individual initiative.”⁵³ In this way, what was in the first edition a criminal corporation with an interdependent team of criminals became a cult of rhetoric made up of a related but ultimately distinct group of individually moved actors. Further dissociating actions from actors, Hilberg goes on to imply that “the destruction of the Jews was not so much a product of” the kinds of “laws and commands” that could be understood as causal; rather, “it was a matter of spirit, of shared comprehension, of consonance and synchronization.”⁵⁴ As opposed to the Nazis of Hilberg’s first edition—who had a conscience-driven search to find logical justifications for their actions (e.g., “as defensive measures against the alleged Jewish threat of hostility, criminality, and parasitism,”)⁵⁵—the Nazis in the 1985 edition were no longer logically or morally cautious. Rather, they became subject to “Faustian temptation,” which led to a Nazi enterprise that became “an undertaking for its own sake.”⁵⁶ In fact, this shift from restrained and pragmatic criminal to crazed villain resembles the similar shift from the more logical and mundane slaveholders of Styron’s Tidewater plantation to the craven rapists of Onstott’s Falconhurst plantation.

The historiographies that were contemporary to this 1970s representation were principally the story of tension between an intentionalist and functionalist account of Hitler role, as represented in Hilberg’s editorial changes in his second edition. This growing interest in interrogating the role of the individual was expanded by the biosocial curiosities of the period, as displayed in the experiments of Milgram and Zimbardo. These studies buttressed an intentionalist account and focused attention on the special culpability of the figure at the top of top-down

institutions—indicting the very authority figure (Hitler) which changing historiographies of the Holocaust were beginning to emphasize with the lean away from a de-particularizing functionalism. What Levin did was to take their determinism and turn the inclination to perpetrate into a genetic mutation; guilt was a function of evolutionary biology and the impulse to genocidal criminality was, in certain circumstances, a function of DNA. These accounts exculpated institutions inasmuch as they ultimately set responsibility at the door of the authority to whom the masses are biologically inclined to appeal; they also made inquiries like those pursued in *The Boys from Brazil*—inquiries into the logic of bio-psychological accounts of behavior—marginally plausible, if (as in Levin’s case) fantastically represented.

By looking at this narrative of Hitler as it emerges in the 70s, in Ira Levin’s 1976 novel *The Boys from Brazil*, we can see how the nuances of this Hitler trope responds to shifting American discourses of morality that individualize guilt and release political and social structures from moral inquiry. In response to the increasing preference for an individualized notion of guilt, *The Boys from Brazil* disrupts a competing structural (i.e., functionalist) account of Nazism by introducing a genetic account of criminality into a kind of bio-psychological intentionalism, or determinism. In the novel’s intricate plot, written by the author also responsible for *Rosemary’s Baby* (1967) and *The Stepford Wives* (1972), the infamous Auschwitz “Angel of Death,” Dr. Josef Mengele, is leading the initiative for a Nazi revival from his new base in South America.⁵⁷ Under the watchful eye of Nazi hunter Yakov Liebermann—a veiled representation of famous Nazi-hunter Simon Wiesenthal—we ultimately learn of Mengele’s strategy: he has genetically cloned ninety-four identical copies of Adolf Hitler, breeding them to mothers with similar family structures and socioeconomic backgrounds, and his group must now set out to kill the surrogate fathers of these globally dispersed spawn in order to mimic the particulars of Hitler’s parentage and upbringing. What are the social circumstances that Mengele is attempting to replicate with his family

placements and attempted paternal assassinations? For each of his ninety-four clones, he tries to find some approximation of Hitler's family life: "His father was a civil servant... He was fifty-two when...the boy was born. The mother was twenty-nine.... The father died at sixty-five...when the boy was thirteen, almost fourteen."⁵⁸ In the Academy Award-nominated 1978 film,⁵⁹ Hitler's father is further described as "domineering," and his mother as "affectionate" and "doting."⁶⁰ But Mengele's strategy is more high-tech than just finding a similar family with similar people in it; in the service of this rather insane project, he takes the rational approach of placing replicated DNA into replicated family structures with parents of nearly identical age and demeanor. As a result of the clonings, Hitler's "alive.... The boys are exact genetic duplicates of him.... Exact genetic duplicates."⁶¹ Although surrogate mothers were used, "the boys bear no taint of them; they're pure Hitler, bred entirely from his cells."⁶² When describing his project, Mengele explains how Hitler "denied himself children...because he knew that no son could flourish in the shadow of so...godlike a father; so when he heard what was theoretically possible, that I could...create some day not his son but another himself, not even a carbon copy but...another original, he was as thrilled by the ideas as I was."⁶³ In the words of literary scholar Elizabeth Bridges, Levin's Mengele "attempts to equalize the 'nurture' experience of his young guinea pigs through the elimination of their fathers," and thus "creating optimal conditions for the development of at least one new Führer among them."⁶⁴ As she significantly points out, this isn't a mission to create Hitler, Jr. or even a "reincarnation," but is instead Mengele's vision for "an artificially created identical twin."⁶⁵

Of course, this appeal to rational science comes only pages before Mengele's maniacal vision for the future: "The Fourth Reich is coming: not just a German Reich but a pan-Aryan one. I'll live to see it, and to stand beside its leaders. Can you imagine the awe they'll inspire? The mystical authority they'll wield? The trembling of the Russians and Chinese? Not to mention the Jews."⁶⁶ In sum, Mengele's dream is to create "the right Hitler for the right future! A Hitler tailor-

made for the 1980s, the 1990s, 2000!”⁶⁷ As Liebermann expresses incredulity at the prospect of “ninety -four Hitlers” being cloned into existence, insisting that is “it’s not possible,” his scientist-colleague Nürnberger assures him that he is correct: “There are ninety-four boys with the same genetic inheritance as Hitler. They could turn out very differently. Most of them probably will.”⁶⁸

In other words, “even though they are exact copies of the Führer, the boys merely possess the potential to commit cruel acts.”⁶⁹ Liebermann, however, quite reasonably expresses his displeasure that the elimination of “most” still leaves room for “some” Hitlers of the future.⁷⁰ Nürnberger’s continued insistence on the distinction between “genetic inheritance” and behavior, while remaining unchallenged, doesn’t come across as having especially convinced the astonished Liebermann. Perhaps it is the philosophical implications of Mengele’s plan that he finds most disturbing, and the problem of self-determination in this plan. “The cloned Hitler would have free will and...his maker could only create conditions in which he might fulfill his intended destiny. Yet the idea of an ‘intended destiny’ already limits certain aspects of the cloned individual’s life.”⁷¹

Jürgen Habermas, in his article, “Enslavement of the gene: moral limits of progress,” explores the implications of cloning at length, referring to “a ‘we,’ whose genes are a product of *Schicksal* (fate) versus ‘they,’ the products of genetic manipulation.”⁷² For Habermas, the “we” are those who “have the opportunity to discover our own purpose and deal with basic questions of our own existence, whereas the clone, a product of someone else’s designs and intentions, does not fully have this opportunity.”⁷³ Bridges summarizes the meaning of this for Levin’s story quite succinctly when she writes, “In the case of the 94 mini-Hitlers in *The Boys from Brazil*, their intended purpose is determined by the fictionalized Josef Mengele. The real ‘Führer’ is Mengele.”⁷⁴

Liebermann, upon locating these Hitler clones, finds exactly what the fantastical science of the novel would suggest: boys who are indistinct from one another (lithe, dark hair, pale skin, “sharp nose, forelock”⁷⁵), with the surly impoliteness of a future tyrant. Traveling to the United

States, which he supposes to be Mengele's next stop in his mission to kill the clones' surrogate fathers, Liebermann unknowingly joins Mengele's kill-list for his interference in the doctor's master-plot. The two ultimately meet at the home of the boy in question, Bobby Wheelock, where Mengele succeeds in killing the surrogate father only to be killed himself at the order of the Hitler clone. When trying to discredit Mengele, Liebermann gestures to Bobby, "circl[ing] a finger at his temple, point[ing] to Mengele." In response, Mengele cries that he is "not mad!"⁷⁶ If there was any possibility that we might fall for this, it disappears as Mengele has so excited himself that he launches into a further, hyperbolically ridiculous celebration of Hitler, describing him to Bobby as "the best and finest and wisest of all mankind!"⁷⁷ Speaking for the reader, Bobby responds by calling Mengele "the biggest nut I ever met. You're the weirdest, craziest."⁷⁸ Even this mini-Hitler is sure to reinforce an account of Mengele—and thus, of his progenitor—in which he is in fact driven by "aimless insanity."⁷⁹

Ultimately, mini-Hitler Bobby Wheelock has the chance to sic his Doberman Pinschers on Liebermann, but chooses instead to have them attack Mengele, "and the boy appears to enjoy watching his dogs maul the doctor."⁸⁰ Later, after exacting Liebermann's promise that he won't "tell them what I did"⁸¹ in killing Mengele, Bobby again calls Mengele "a real nut."⁸² After recovering from his violent struggle with Mengele, Liebermann travels to New York City where he meets with fellow Jewish Nazi hunters who are equally committed to eliminating any existing Nazi threat. Despite the intentions of his fellow Jews to find and kill the nascent Hitlers on his list, Liebermann destroys the list, explaining that "killing children, any children—it's wrong." When one of his compatriots, Gorin, protests Liebermann's destruction of a list that belonged to "The Jewish People,"⁸³ he goes on to say "It's Jews like you...that let [the Holocaust] happen last time"; Liebermann's calm response is: "Jews didn't 'let' it happen.... Nazis made it happen. People who would even kill children to get what they wanted."⁸⁴

Though faced with a roll of potential enemies, defined as such by their genes—a list not unlike the Nazis’ heritage-defined lists of Jews—Levin’s lead Jewish Nazi-hunter opts not to preemptively exterminate this potential threat. And based on the ominous close of the novel, in which Bobby Wheelock shows early signs of the real Adolph Hitler’s appetite for art as well as his fantasies of the adoring crowd “cheering, roaring” and making “a beautiful love-thunder.... Sort of like in those old Hitler movies”⁸⁵—Liebermann’s decision may turn out to be an inadvisable failure to act after all (though the novel ends too soon for us to find out). Bridges alludes as much when she compares the close to the novel and the film: “Levin’s novel...leaves the story open-ended. It closes with one of the Hitler clones drawing a picture of himself being admired by huge crowds, Führer style. Similarly, the film ends with Bobby eerily smiling as he develops pictures of Mengele’s bloody corpse following the dog attack.”⁸⁶

Whereas Liebermann’s negotiation of this dilemma—what to do with the list of Hitler clones—allows Levin to explore the moral nuance of the scenario, the one-dimensionality of the novel’s antagonist rings clear throughout. Mengele is portrayed as racist within the American context, beyond his disgust for “Jew-bastard[s]”⁸⁷ like Liebermann. When settling into New Providence, the hometown of Bobby Wheelock where he ultimately has his showdown with Liebermann, the omniscient narrator of Mengele’s movements describes how the “clientele in the lobby” of his hotel “was partly black, which meant, of course, that crime on the premises wasn’t unheard of. As proof of this, as if proof were needed, the door of his room, 404, bore the gouge-marks of forcible entry, and *For your own protection please keep door bolted at all times*, a red-lettered sticker on the inside urged.”⁸⁸ Given the racial threat all around him, Mengele “complied.”⁸⁹ Later, when shopping for a weapon, Mengele “couldn’t find what he wanted, and finally asked a young black man—who would know better?”⁹⁰ When he ultimately purchases a knife “for hunting” from another “black man behind a counter,” we can only note the irony that, in a

town full of black people presumably waiting to do violence, Mengele is actually the proven villain-in-hiding.⁹¹

In relegating diabolical blood-thirst to a genetic mutation, Levin's Mengele ensures our ability to "other" this capacity for violence. Marking Hitler as unique among men, Mengele asks the clone Bobby Wheelock, "Have you never felt that you were superior to those around you? Like a prince among commoners?"⁹² When Bobby answers that he feels "different from everyone sometimes," Mengele goes on to tell him that he is "infinitely different, and infinitely superior" because Bobby was "born of the finest blood in the world.... You have it within you to fulfill ambitions a thousand times greater than those of which you presently dream. And you shall fulfill them!"⁹³ By insisting that Hitler was "the greatest man who ever lived," and that with Hitler's cells Bobby is actually "reliving his life," Mengele's next statement—to name a Jew as Bobby's "sworn enemy"—is altogether unnecessary.⁹⁴ For Hitler's twin, in genes and inclination, Bobby's hatred of Jews would be unintentional and second nature.

As opposed to a notion of Nazi evil that would require the counterfeiting of a whole matrix of institutions and relationships to make Nazism-redux possible, all Mengele needs is the causal genetic anomaly reproduced on a global scale and uniquely configured nuclear families to act as incubators. In this story, the very possibility of a Nazi revival lies in the reintroduction of Hitler's incidental deformity of genes—presumably "caught" through no fault of his own—as the new Nazism can't exist without Hitler's special role as a visionary and leader. Mengele's motivating premise, that he must locate and kill the clones' surrogate fathers, may seem to suggest that the boys' cloned DNA isn't enough to ensure a behavioral replication of Hitler, the idea that the circumstances of Hitler's upbringing must themselves be replicated in order for this to work might imply some kind of functionalist investment in context. However, these particularities of upbringing are themselves mutations of the natural order; not only the elimination of a nuclear

family, but the very need to eliminate the father, sets his childhood as deviant by happenstance, a causal factor in isolation from the “good” that a more normative family life would have presumably inspired. It isn’t that Hitler has to have two parents with the same job (which could fit the broader population), but he must lose his existing father figure at a specified moment in his life and suffer all of the social, emotional, and financial challenges that such a loss creates. In the end, the story’s Nazis are diabolical (Mengele) and genetically unique (Mengele’s Hitlers), not regular people who make rational choices. Rather than rational self-interest leading to monstrous outcomes, madness and genetics are to blame. In other words, evil results from a mutated *nature*, rendering it behaviorally unique, and not a more socio-structurally contingent version of *nurture* that might suggest that more mundane factors are to blame.

Although the tendency in this period (the 1970s) was to move away from indicting institutions and moving toward locating guilt in individuals, neoliberalism is in fact willing to indict some institutions. In particular, proponents of the untethered market are fully comfortable indicting bureaucracy when the offending system can be understood as communo-fascist. But this type of system is necessarily cast as mutated and disordered—particularized and denaturalized. In such cases neoliberalism reads the elements of the status quo (like power and resource differentials in public life) as definitionally distinct from—and thus necessarily impediments to—crimes of atrocity. The natural order, when untainted by mutation, is intrinsically a kind of Darwinian competitive genetic “market” much like the economic free market: the invisible hand of biology is triumphant evidence that untethered competition organically and fairly weeds out the weak and perfects the strong. And just as Levin would have us believe that only isolated perversions of nature are behind evil, so would neoliberalism suggest that only socioeconomic perversion (such as a disruption of the natural order of market competition) could yield the Holocaust.

However entertaining or compelling these narratives—of Eichmann, Hitler, and Mengele—may be, and despite the fact that they seem to foreclose any other reading of Nazi behavior, there are plausible alternatives to the potentially reductive narrative of the bio-psychologically isolated, even nutty, Nazi. This particular brand of storytelling effectively helps obscure the potential to seriously consider a dispassionate, calculating perpetrator. In fact, there is plenty of historical evidence to suggest that Nazis were rational within their own flawed system of premises; thus the rejection of a historical interpretation that, for example, provides for an un-mutated and altogether well-adjusted Nazi, ultimately serves to dismiss the capacity of values-based institutional actions to lead to large-scale atrocity. It allows us to entertain the problematic idea that Nazi actions were inexplicable behavioral or genetic anomalies rather being inextricably tied to state and social systems.

A quote from the film *Conspiracy* encapsulates the banality of evil quite succinctly. *Conspiracy* is a docudrama of the Wannsee Conference, held in January 1942, in which senior officials from the Nazi government, led by General and Chief of the Gestapo Reinhard Heydrich and Adolf Eichmann, came together in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee and collaborated on a plan for the extermination of European Jewry, the so-called Final Solution. In the film, after discussing the best means of efficiently murdering the millions of Jews remaining in Europe, and one man's remark that their plan is sure to send the Jews to hell, Undersecretary Martin Luther asks Heydrich if the Jews "even have a hell."⁹⁵ And Heydrich's immediate and chilling response: "They do now. We provide it."⁹⁶ Not only does Heydrich bring this cool, calculating tone to these conference asides, but he brings this affect to bear on a discussion that—although its sole agenda is to iron out the details of mass murder—nonetheless contemplates the very material motives (cultural and financial protectionism, i.e. "a Jew-free society, a Jew-free economy") and

consequences (the redirection of much-needed war resources) of their choices. Yet here they are, giving their attention to, and ostensibly resolving, the “Jewish question.”

The problem, as posed by Heydrich, is not that they must murder the Jews out of frantic hatred, but rather, that given the cultural and economic threat posed by Jews, they must be physically and socially marginalized, and since the war-taxed German empire has “a storage problem...with these Jews”—and “every border in Europe rejects [the displaced Jews] or charges outrageously to accept them...even America”—they must be “evacuated” by a more final means.⁹⁷ And though the film’s dialogue is necessarily fictionalized, the only surviving notes from the conference support this dramatization, showing how at the moment the group was determining logistics of the Final Solution, economic motives and consequences were being evaluated. Indeed, their planning was deeply economic, despite the fact that it was based on false premises, such as the supposed economic devastation of “Jewish black-marketeering.” The only surviving record of the meeting notes a clear policy that, in the spirit of Albert Speer, “the Jews should be put to work...constructing roads” and otherwise supporting the war effort.⁹⁸ Looking at Wannsee alone, it becomes clear that there are readings of the historical record that make the Final Solution completely logical within the Nazi landscape—and no less grotesque for being so. Mapping an institutional view onto the exchange between Luther and Heydrich makes it no less horrifying—just as the bureaucratized outlook of Eichmann didn’t mitigate his crimes for Arendt, nor did the market-principled behaviors of slaveholders and Nazis undermine culpability for Styron.

There are real, plausible alternatives to the counter-rational Nazi account that reflects a more dispassionate and calculating enterprise. The representations of Nazi behavior discussed above obscure the plausibility of these alternatives in American discourse. In actuality, Nazi logic structures existed and economic prosperity was in reality a key end in their calculated means (Jewish murder). One version of this reading of German perpetrators and policy is in the context

of “the advent of modernity [which] meant the destruction of order and security”; according to historian Zygmunt Bauman, Jews were perceived as “standing close to the centre of the destructive process, their own” social existence seen as “epitomiz[ing] the havoc visited by advancing modernity upon everything familiar, habitual and secure.”⁹⁹ The mistreatment of Jews “could easily—and rationally—make sense” as a reaction against this “imprint of subversive incongruity.”¹⁰⁰ In the hyperbolic words of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, the “judgment...being visited upon the Jews” may be “barbaric,” but it is the simple, necessary, and natural response to the reality: “If we did not fight the Jews, they would destroy” both the cultural modes and economic means of existence.¹⁰¹

For Goebbels, killing Jews is a means of quashing the imagined, but conceivable “Judeo-Bolshevik threat”¹⁰²—conceivable inasmuch as it exists in the realm of the possible whereas, for example, a cloned cohort of ninety-four Hitlers does not. Such killing was a very cruel but altogether effective means of protecting socioeconomic security. In fact, where Aryanization created serious economic disruptions, and where there were the kinds of perceived market risks of racism that Becker describes in Chapter 1, there were counter-measures that put the market ahead of anti-Semitism. In Hamburg, for example, “antisemitic campaigns were damaging to its economic policy which was ‘responsible for the upkeep of job opportunities.’”¹⁰³ This, combined with the threat of international boycott should other countries learn of anti-Jewish business practices, meant that “Jewish businesses in Hamburg were able to hold their own for much longer than in other places.”¹⁰⁴ The Chamber of Commerce’s insistence that it had to “remain free in its economic decisions” is a clear moment in which those Germans who later, sometimes enthusiastically, participated in the Holocaust initially stayed their hands because the financial costs of treating Jews a certain way outweighed the bureaucratic costs of thwarting the new state measures against Jews.¹⁰⁵ We can only suppose that later changes in Hamburg’s policies had as much to do with a ramping

up of Nazi anti-Semitism as it did with a change in the economic calculations around excluding Jews from the market.

Representations that construct the maniacal Nazi leader such as those by Mailer, Levin, and Steiner elide the fact that the Nazis were acting eminently rationally within their framework, which included the deeply-held notion that Jews were out to get them. In their schema, protecting Germany's global and economic power made eliminating the threat of Jews essential, no matter how costly.¹⁰⁶ But when the representational archetype of Nazism rejects the internal rationality of Nazi behavior in favor of the "nutcase" principle, a critical thing happens: ignoring the arguably reasonable ends (e.g. preservation of the state economy against the Bolshevik threat) for which, in the Nazi imagination, Jewish murder was the means, becomes a way to dismiss the capacity of rational institutional decision-making to lead to large-scale atrocity. By bio-particularizing evil, we dismiss the power of state preservation of markets, for example, as a predicate for evil and—by extension—similar American structures get a pass.

By bio-psychologizing motive and randomizing those defining features of the perpetrator—including the states of physical and mental health assigned at birth, and by particularizing motive to those few who were unfortunate enough to have these features, we can surrender to what Novick calls a "comforting" notion: if the only "precondition for mass murder" is "deep and long-standing hatred" resulting from physiological anomaly, rather than the result of following the unspoken socioeconomic rules-for-success that govern commerce or anything else, then "we're a lot safer than many of us think," either from falling victim to or becoming perpetrators of atrocity.¹⁰⁷ So why are Nazis so useful in demonstrating how very safe we are? Because, as film scholars Caroline Picart and David Frank argue, "Despite the variety of genres [with] which Holocaust...merge[s], the face of the monstrous after World War II, particularly for American audiences, is the face of the Nazi."¹⁰⁸ The collision between a functionalist view of history and the

privative conception of morality renders the former altogether irrelevant, and is simply a symptom of what Zygmunt Bauman might call our very own capital-driven “modernizing revolution.”¹⁰⁹

NOTES

¹ Jared M. Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee: The Evolution and Future of the Human Animal* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), 277.

² Ibid.

³ *The Stranger*, dir., Orson Welles, (1946; DVD, New York: Kino Classics, 2013).

⁴ Image from Ira Joel Haber blog post on *The Stranger*, last modified July 13, 2012, http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-471VCp8nq2o/UACSo55WgwI/AAAAAAAAAEnY/MfkcdKL3vbE/s1600/tumblr_m4xx7dixfh1r5h8m2o1_1280.jpg.

⁵ *The Stranger*, dir. Orson Welles.

⁶ Orson Welles quoted in Jennifer L. Barker, “Documenting the Holocaust in Orson Welles’s *The Stranger*,” *Film and Genocide*, eds. Kristi Wilson and Tomás F. Crowder-Taraborrelli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 57.

⁷ Styron, *Sophie’s Choice*, 255 (see chap 1 n. 4).

⁸ Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted a series of experiments—which he claimed were partly inspired by the contemporary trial of Adolf Eichmann—on obedience to authority figures, in which he tested the willingness of study volunteers to follow a previously unknown authority figure’s instructions to administer what they thought were painful and permanently harmful electric shocks to an unknown and unseen co-participant (but who was actually a confederate of Milgram). His findings, replicated across time and cultures overwhelmingly (65% or more) showed that participants would disregard their consciences in favor of obeying authority. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper Collins, 1974).

⁹ The Stanford Prison Experiment was a 1971 study in which psychologist Philip Zimbardo recruited 75 volunteers, 24 of whom were to play the role of mock prison guards and the remainder of whom became mock prisoners. Zimbardo acted as superintendent when the volunteers were taken to “prison” and he became so disturbed by the emergence and escalation of prisoner guard abuse, and his willingness to tolerate it, that he called off the two-week role-play after only six days. His summary findings concerned the impressionability of people to social and institutional ideological—even in a mock situation—and their susceptibility to disregard moral boundaries when doing so under the direction of a perceived authority figure. Craig Haney, Curtis Banks and Philip Zimbardo, “A Study of Prisoners and Guards in a Simulated Prison,” *Naval Research Reviews* 9 (1973): 1-17.

¹⁰ Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 7.

¹¹ Andrew Delbanco, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 73.

¹² Ibid., 14.

¹³ Ibid., 61.

¹⁴ Ibid., 40.

¹⁵ Ibid., 38.

¹⁶ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷ Ibid., 20.

¹⁸ Quoted in Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* ((see chap 1 n. 18)), 129–130.

¹⁹ Ibid., 134.

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1963), 276.

²¹ James Bailey, “‘Repetition, Boredom, Despair’: Muriel Spark and the Eichmann Trial,” in *Representing Perpetrators in Holocaust Literature and Film*, eds. Jenni Adams and Sue Vice (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2013): 166.

²² Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1978), 3–4.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Bailey, “‘Repetition, Boredom, Despair,’” 167.

²⁵ Benjamin Ivry, “A Sinister Affair: Muriel Spark in Conversation,” *The Economist*, November, 23 1991, 102.

²⁶ Quoted in Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 135.

²⁷ Ibid., 136.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Michael Berenbaum quoted in “Jewish Victims of the Holocaust: The Soap Myth,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Holocaust/soap.html>.

³⁴ Quoted in Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 136.

³⁵ Ibid., 141.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 135.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Image on the left from “The Jew in the Glass Box,” *Holocaust Visual Archive*, <http://holocaustvisualarchive.wordpress.com/2013/03/30/the-jew-in-the-glass-box/>. Image on the right from Klaus Wiegrefe, “Auschwitz’s ‘Angel of Death’: Looking for Nazi Doctor Josef Mengele,” *Spiegel Online International*, April 21, 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/auschwitz-s-angel-of-death-looking-for-nazi-doctor-josef-mengele-a-758276.html>.

⁴⁰ *The Man in the Glass Booth*, Arthur Hiller, dir., (1975; DVD, New York: Kino Video, 2003).

⁴¹ *The Stranger* Welles, dir..

⁴² This is reminiscent of Shoshana Felman's commitment to prioritizing testimony—privileging speech as the signifier of (for her, victim) enfranchisement in the courtroom—and the suggestion that its repression is a form of violence; in this case, Dorff's silencing is tantamount to suffering violence at the hands of his Israeli judges. Shoshana Felman, "Theaters of Justice: Arendt in Jerusalem, the Eichmann Trial, and the Redefinition of Legal Meaning in the Wake of the Holocaust," *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 106–130.

⁴³ Robert Shaw, *The Man in the Glass Booth* (New York: Grove, 1968), 71.

⁴⁴ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 276.

⁴⁵ Shaw, *Man in the Glass Booth*, 71.

⁴⁶ Robert Skloot, "Holocaust theatre and the problem of justice," ed. Claude Schumacher, *Staging the Holocaust: The Shoah in Drama and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 18.

⁴⁷ Annette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 159; emphasis mine.

⁴⁸ Doris L. Bergen, *War & Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 29–30.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ One analysis of these changes in subsequent editions is Christopher Browning, "Spanning a Career: Three Editions of Raul Hilberg's *Destruction of the European Jews*," *Lessons and Legacies, Vol. 8: From Generation to Generation*, Ed. Doris L. Bergen (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 195.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 196–197.

⁵⁴ Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 2nd ed. (Teaneck, NJ: Holmes and Meier, 1985), 958.

⁵⁵ Browning, "Spanning a Career," 197.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ In the 1970s, when the novel was published and the film was produced, the real Josef Mengele was actually still alive and residing in São Paulo, Brazil, under the name Wolfgang Gerhard. Gerald L. Posner and John Ware, *Mengele: The Complete Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986).

⁵⁸ Ira Levin, *The Boys from Brazil*, (1976; repr. New York: Pegasus, 2010), 194.

⁵⁹ *The Boys from Brazil* received several prestigious award nominations, including three Academy Awards nods—for Laurence Olivier as Best Actor, Robert Swink for Film Editing, and Jerry Goldsmith for Original Music Score—as well as a Golden Globe Award nomination for Gregory Peck as Best Motion Picture Actor; the film was also nominated for six of the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films's Saturn Awards. "The Boys from Brazil," *Internet Movie Database*, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0077269/?ref_=ttawd_awd_tt.

⁶⁰ Schaffner, *Boys from Brazil*.

⁶¹ Levin, *Boys from Brazil*, 240-241.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 241.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Bridges, "Reproducing the Fourth Reich: Cloning, Nazisploitation and Revival of the Repressed," *Nazisploitation!: The Nazi Image in Low-Brow Cinema and Culture*, eds. Daniel H. Magilow, et. al. (New York: Continuum Books, 2012), 76-77.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶⁶ Levin, *Boys from Brazil*, 245.

⁶⁷ Schaffner, *Boys from Brazil*, 1978.

⁶⁸ Levin, *Boys from Brazil*, 194.

⁶⁹ Bridges, "Reproducing the Fourth Reich," 77.

⁷⁰ Levin, *Boys from Brazil*, 194.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 253-254.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁸⁰ Bridges, "Reproducing the Fourth Reich," 77.

⁸¹ Levin, *Boys from Brazil*, 255.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 256.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 280.

⁸⁶ Bridges, "Reproducing the Fourth Reich," 77.

⁸⁷ Levin, *Boys from Brazil*, 245.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 197.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 200.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 253.

⁹³ Ibid., 252.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 253.

⁹⁵ *Conspiracy*, Frank Pierson, dir. (New York: HBO Studios, 2002).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Mark Roseman, "The Protocol of the Wannsee Conference," *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 164.

⁹⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, "Modernity, Racism, Extermination I," *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 45.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Joseph Goebbels, "March 27, 1942," *Diaries: Excerpts, 1942-43*, 147-48, <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/g/goebbels-joseph/goebbels-1948-excerpts-02.html>.

¹⁰² Waitman Beorn, "Negotiating Murder: A Panzer Signal Company and the Destruction of the Jews of Peregruznoe, 1942," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23 no. 2 (Fall 2009): 190.

¹⁰³ Frank Bajohr, "The 'Aryanization' of Jewish Companies and German Society: The Example of Hamburg," *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism, 1933-1941*, ed. David Bankier (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 228.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 229.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 230.

¹⁰⁶ This can be compared to the historical US rejection of particular immigrant groups because of their perceived threat rather than their demonstrably positive economic role and their significance for a market-driven labor force. Alfonso Serrano, "Why Undocumented Workers Are Good for the Economy," *Time Magazine*, June, 14 2012, <http://business.time.com/2012/06/14/the-fiscal-fallout-of-state-immigration-laws/>.

¹⁰⁷ Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, 137.

¹⁰⁸ Bridges, "Reproducing the Fourth Reich," 83.

¹⁰⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, "Modernity, Racism, Extermination I," 45.

5. CONCLUSION:

WHEN NAZIS BECAME SLAVEHOLDERS, AND WHY

Political scientist Adolph Reed, in his critique of *Django Unchained*, is dissatisfied with director Quentin Tarantino's version of the plantation, populated as it is by "comfort girls' and 'Mandingo fighters,'" a depiction that would seem to suggest that "slavery had nothing to do with making slave owners rich."¹ In an analysis that could just as easily be leveled at *Mandingo*, Reed explains how, "by reducing [slavery] to its most barbaric and lurid excesses," Tarantino has effectively "trivialized" it.² And reaching the same conclusion but for entirely different reasons, director Spike Lee made the first of many public screeds against Tarantino's film when, three days before the theatrical release of *Django Unchained*, he posted a preemptory critique to his Twitter feed: "American Slavery Was Not A Sergio Leone Spaghetti Western. It Was A Holocaust."³ These critiques of the film are differently motivated, we might suspect, given the general preoccupation with racism that defines Lee's film (such as *Bamboozled*), and the unrestrained ire for exactly these kinds of preoccupations in Reed's work. If what they have in common is a shared—and in both cases, quite enthusiastic—disdain for Tarantino's lack of realism, they are distinct in their vision of what defines realism for slavery and what essential feature is missing: in Reed's case, the absence of economics, and in Lee's case, the absence of "a Holocaust."

What Spike Lee does not explain, and what he assumes his Twitter followers will understand, is exactly what Tarantino would have to do to make his version of slavery more like "a Holocaust" and, more importantly, precisely why he should. Implicit in Lee's two-sentence, unqualified protest is the suggestion that slavery was somehow worse than Tarantino's presumably un-Holocaust-like narrative would have us believe. However, as Reed mentioned, the film was "barbaric and lurid" to the point of excess; as with *Mandingo*, Tarantino's film can be criticized for

many reasons, but a light touch isn't one of them. Why, then, should Lee approach the film with dismay? Because, whereas David Kehr's (the *New York Times* reviewer mentioned at the end of Chapter 2) ultimate praise of *Mandingo* was that its comfort girls and Mandingo fighters made it a Holocaust film (what he implies is a very good thing), for Lee these same tropes are no longer enough. The ubiquity of Holocaust representations that I discuss in this project—fictions that define the Holocaust by a new paradigm of evil, encapsulated in theories like Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's "exterminationist anti-Semitism"—renders it unnecessary for Lee to explain what Tarantino would have to do to make *Django Unchained* acceptable; for his Twitter followers, it is presumably understood that a more sacralized treatment of the subject matter, while preserving an "exterminationist" ethos, is called for (but as Lee protests, not with too many white people using the word "nigger," thank you very much).⁴ For Reed, Tarantino's resurrection of the theatrical mandingo genre crowded out truth with gratuitous barbarism, while for Lee the tongue-in-cheek, "Spaghetti Western" nature of this barbarism made it not gruesome (i.e., truthful) enough.

Adolph Reed's essay and, indeed, the notion of historiographical revisionism that I've been discussing in one form or another throughout this dissertation, point to the increasing tendency in contemporary American aesthetic production to fixate on one mode of causal explanation over another. Of the dozens of articles castigating Tarantino's film, Reed's is an outlier in its suggestion that issues of money, and not racism, are being treated with insufficient seriousness. My interest in these competing analyses of *Django Unchained* is not solely that they highlight the separate points of view of Holocaust and slavery representations, with a strong preference for the latter. Rather, Spike Lee's response points to something that my larger project gestures at: when writers began to reject the kind of economic explanation of both slavery and the Holocaust, like those representations in William Styron's novels, this was not merely a simultaneous move (on the part of both slavery- and Holocaust-focused authors) in implicitly subsuming a neoliberal politics.

Rather, this shared move, toward explaining the Holocaust and slavery in ways that explained it to the dramatic exclusion of economics, signals the interdependence of Holocaust fiction and slavery fiction. I have attempted to show how, while the historical record of the Holocaust shows the Nazis' consistent deprioritization of financial interests in their campaign to murder the Jews, it also supports a more nuanced understanding of motive than Holocaust fictions tend to suggest; the strong preference for rabid Nazism in representations (both fictional and historiographical) does the hard work of exculpating financial motives where more subtle scholarship only implies as much. It makes sense that, given the increasing influence of neoliberal discourse after 1970, representations of the Holocaust—an event that was, in fact, principally non-economic—was used to endorse the Ordoliberal zeal for free markets, and made satisfying fictional fare for a money-defined popular culture. This is just one explanation for the prevalence of Holocaust novels and films in a country that had arguably little to do with perpetrating the Holocaust.

The basic facts of Nazism—the perpetrators' general predilection for murder over material production—enable representations to support the new moral paradigm of neoliberalism without leaning on comparisons to other atrocities. In other words, popular Holocaust novels—such as American author Lois Lowry's children's book, *Number the Stars* (as it happens, my very first Holocaust novel, assigned in grade school), Australian novelist Mark Zusak's novel *The Book Thief* (among other accolades, Chicago's fall 2012 selection for the city-wide reading program, "One Book, One Chicago"), and French writer Tatiana DeRosnay's international bestseller *Sarah's Key* (also turned into a feature film)—do not have to gesture at other traumas as a means of credentialing the serious nature of the Holocaust. None of these novels set their narrative stages by making epigraphic allusions to American slavery, Aboriginal massacres, or Algerian war crimes in order to demonstrate the traumatic nature of the concentration camps.

On the other hand, American narratives of plantation slavery are often framed on a referential basis, as Kehr's praise for *Mandingo* and Lee's critique of *Django Unchained* would illustrate. Because the documentary record of chattel slavery does not support the same deprioritization of profit on the part of perpetrators, fictions of slavery must seek a causal and representational alternative to any suggestion that "the money made him do it," lest these narratives breach the rules of the political economy. In order to join the body of Holocaust literature, filled with its different iterations of profit-hating and irrational Nazis, narratives of slavery had to revise their own history. The horrific abuses of slavery, so often inflicted in the service of profit, were exactly the kind of story neoliberalism can't accommodate. To avoid disrupting the supposed moral purity of the market, an aesthetic change had to happen: slaveholders could no longer be slaveholders; they had to become Nazis. In this way, fictions of slavery followed the example set by Holocaust fiction. Where the latter was rife with Jew-hating murderers, so too were novels of the plantation. Where any hint of financial motive in Holocaust novels was extinguished, so too followed novels of the plantation. The shared history of American slavery and Holocaust fiction is not as much a history of competing traumas, as so many readers of Toni Morrison's "sixty million" dedication would suggest; it is the history of a shared perpetrator, re-cloaked but essentially unchanged, the bringing together of two histories into one macro-history. It is, as William Styron claimed, the narrative affirmation that "the etiology of Auschwitz...stretches back to the Middle Passage from the coast of Africa."⁵ But while Styron emphasized the ways in which Nazis learned their mode of exploitation (labor) from slaveholders, the slaveholders of popular fiction instead "stretch forward" and look to Holocaust perpetrators as their models and, asserting historical dominance, implying (as Morrison did) that the Holocaust was actually slavery's less egregious successor.

By putting together American film, fiction, and historiography about slavery and the Holocaust, with particular attention to the years between 1960 and 1980, I have tried to show how one mode of explanatory history—economic history—began to lose plausibility just as other ones—racism, social death, evil—became more plausible. What I have not addressed at any length is whether the move away from economic explanations is, itself, desirable or destructive. Although it is outside of the purview of my project to look at the qualitative or quantitative consequences of a popular culture that endorses causal narratives of atrocity that exclude the economic, I think it is safe to say that it is not altogether helpful to reflexively exclude the potential for an economic account of these events. Unlike critics of what Tarantino dubs “rewritten history,”⁶ who consider certain kinds of Holocaust and slavery narratives morally corrupt—or people, like Elie Wiesel, who would morally outlaw them altogether—I hesitate to approach, in isolation, even the most problematic texts with such outrage. After all, as Peter Novick points out on the topic of Holocaust film—but which equally applies to other kinds of narratives—the “substantial” academic literature that “has developed on special problems” in atrocity representations (like the oversimplification of motive) may be interesting to other scholars, but these academic articles and books are “probably not” so “consequential” to the majority of people who make and watch these films.⁷ In other words, raging as Adolph Reed does that a specific film, like *Django Unchained*, is “pure neoliberal bullshit” is a perfectly acceptable opinion, but in some ways misses the point.⁸ To be angry at Quentin Tarantino is to somehow imagine that he plotted with the neoliberal powers that be, to construct a narrative endorsement of a nefarious political and economic status quo. I don’t resist Reed’s critique of what the film is doing, but rather question his impulse to turn his anger so passionately towards what he deems as Tarantino’s knowing irresponsibility. While I may tend to agree that a nefarious and harmful political establishment exists and is advancing troubling narratives in the service of their agenda, and I do on occasion have my own strong moral reaction

to a particular book or film, I enjoyed *Django Unchained* on its own terms and am unconvinced that it is a deliberate addition to a neoliberal strategy. To put it differently, Quentin Tarantino and Robert Shaw are not the aesthetic equivalent of the infamous Koch brothers.

This dissertation may help illuminate an unarticulated analysis of or unease with certain works of fiction or historiography, perhaps pinpointing the convergence of narrative Nazis and slaveholders in a way readers have noticed but not fully understood. Likewise, it might reveal with greater depth the implications of neoliberal discourse for cultural production. However, my primary interest here is not to castigate works that amount, in many cases, to a tacit endorsement of ideology, or to answer the simple but important question of how “blacks and Jews [are] in literary conversation.”⁹ Rather, this project will be most useful if it helps answer the question of *why* they’re in literary conversation. More accurately, considering that Styron and Onstott (both white men) disprove the suggestion that fiction follows identity, this dissertation asks and begins to answer the question, *How does the fact that authors of Holocaust and slavery fictions are in literary conversation have consequences beyond reading Holocaust and slavery literature?*

The intellectual history that I am tracing here is one that illuminates the degree to which American economic values produce, and are reproduced by, artifacts of popular culture. There is a difference between a deliberate deviation from the historical record to creative ends and revisionist historiography advanced in ignorance. A more obvious example of this is in Tarantino’s famous “rewritten history,” *Inglourious Basterds*, in which he both invents a revenge-seeking American Jewish army division and totally reimagines the end of the Second World War, placing the dramatic annihilation of Nazi leadership in a burning Parisian movie theater. Among the prolific critiques of the film, so often focused on what they deem as the irresponsible nature of rewriting history, I have yet to find a negative review that would argue that Tarantino wasn’t deliberately revising history. In other words, he was in on his own joke. But perhaps what is so

upsetting to Reed is that *Django*, set in what amounts to a plantation theme park, complete with Mandingo fighting ring and a house-slave brothel, Tarantino no longer seems clued in to his own parody. This especially came through during an interview with African American studies scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in which Tarantino described the more ahistorical, mandingo genre-esque material as “just part and parcel of dealing truthfully” with the “story,” “environment,” and “land” of slavery.¹⁰

There are several approaches to talking about how literature reflects the acceptable ways of understanding what Holocaust and slavery perpetrators are (motivated by hatred or an intrinsic evil) and what they are not (motivated by the free market). In Chapter 1, my explication of William Styron’s two best known novels, *Sophie’s Choice* and *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, served as the ideological counter-example of how an economic explanation for slavery and the Holocaust might function at the level of fiction. Just as importantly, by looking at the nature of the attacks against Styron as well as several other scholars (Rubenstein, Fogel, and Engerman), we begin to parse out exactly how these men were breaking the new social rules as to what kind of motives define “right” and “wrong.” Where critics might have rightly taken issue with their flimsy defense of claims such as Auschwitz being primarily a labor factory (Styron) or that slaves were permitted to remain in nuclear families (Fogel and Engerman), they instead passionately pronounced the insufficient prominence of racism in their collective accounts. Where Styron, Fogel, and Engerman set up the market as itself a perpetrator, the critical backlash against them effectively rescued the market from those who might damage its budding reputation.

While Orlando Patterson, Kyle Onstott, Robert Shaw, and Ira Levin were only indirectly—if unintentionally—participating in this defensive discourse, they were no less passionate in advancing their own accounts. For these writers, slavery and the Holocaust were not only about sexual violence and privatized corruption; they are the very definition of “wrong,” in a moral

dichotomy in which “right” equals liberal democracy and unregulated capitalism. It is this moral dichotomy, and not its symptomatic narratives in isolation, that could more fairly be called “pure...bullshit.” So what if, as I claim, economic ideology is the cause of this narrative trend and not its effect? If we are in fact suspicious of the emerging vacuum, in which greed saves rather than harms, what is there to do except bring that suspicion to the purveyors of the offending works? Reed rebukes Tarantino for the folly of using an exceptional individual case to characterize the whole of slavery, claiming more that the exaggerated emphasis on individuality in narrative is itself a way of deemphasizing and disregarding political economy and social relations. Unlike the utterly unique title character himself, the film *Django Unchained* is in many ways unexceptional; however, the film, like the texts that I discuss throughout this project, are consequences of a pervasive mode of seeing, however ahistorical this point of view may be. If the larger culture has authors like Onstott or Levin convinced that money or logic, respectively, had nothing to do with slavery and the Holocaust—if they are, themselves, uncritical participants in a macro-narrative in which the way of protecting the seriousness of these events is to emphasize their non-economic evil—then it is the increasingly normalized versions of history (non-economic, bio-psychologized) that needs disabusing, less so the ignorant reproducers of this history.

NOTES

¹ Adolph Reed, “*Django Unchained*, or *The Help*: How ‘Cultural Politics’ Is Worse Than No Politics at All, and Why,” *nonsite.org*, February 25, 2013, <http://nonsite.org/feature/django-unchained-or-the-help-how-cultural-politics-is-worse-than-no-politics-at-all-and-why>.

² *Ibid.*

³ Quoted in Susan Neiman, “History and Guilt: Can America face Up to the Terrible Reality of Slavery in the Way that Germany Has Faced Up to the Holocaust?,” *Aeon Magazine*, August 12, 2013, <http://aeon.co/magazine/world-views/can-america-learn-from-germany-about-historical-guilt/>.

⁴ Explaining the ways in which the film “disrespects my ancestors,” Spike Lee is troubled by what he sees as an overuse of the word “nigger” in *Django Unchained* and Tarantino’s other films; in *Django*, the word makes an appearance approximately 150 times. According to Lee, Tarantino is “infatuated with that word.” He goes on to sneer, “What does he want to be made—an honorary black man? I want Quentin to know that all African Americans do not think that word is trendy or slick.” Quoted in Kevin Jagernauth, “Spike Lee Won’t See *Django Unchained*, Says ‘American Slavery Was Not A Sergio Leone Spaghetti Western,’” *Indiewire*, December 23, 2012, <http://blogs.indiewire.com/theplaylist/spike-lee-wont-see-django-unchained-says-american-slavery-was-not-a-sergio-leone-spaghetti-western-20121223>.

⁵ William Styron, introduction to *The Cunning of History*, ix (see chap 1 n. 1).

⁶ Ben Child, “Quentin Tarantino plans ‘rewritten history’ trilogy,” *The Guardian*, February 11, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/feb/11/quentin-tarantino-rewritten-history-trilogy>.

⁷ Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, 212 (see chap 1 n. 18).

⁸ Reed, “*Django Unchained*, or *The Help*.”

⁹ Budick, *Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation* (see chap 1 n. 118).

¹⁰ Quentin Tarantino, interview by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Root*, December 26, 2012, http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2012/12/quentin_tarantino_and_henry_louis_gates_jr_audio_interview_django_unchained_and_more.html.

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VITA

- NAME:** Danielle Marie Christmas
- EDUCATION:** B.A., English, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, 2005
Ph.D., English, University of Illinois, Chicago, Illinois, 2014
- EXPERIENCE:** Research Assistant to Natasha Barnes, Lynching Postcard Exhibits, Department of African American Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2009
Research Assistant, Carberry Caribbean Literature Collection, Special Collections, Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2009-2010
Consulting Case Writer, Institute for Business and Professional Ethics, DePaul University, 2010
Research Associate, Sierra Leone and Atlantic Slavery Exhibition, Special Collections, Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011
- TEACHING:** Department of English, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2008-2013
TRIO Academic Support Program, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011
- HONORS:** Provost's Award for Graduate Research, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011
Grace Holt Memorial Award, Department of African American Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011
Summer Institute on the Holocaust and Jewish Civilization, Holocaust Educational Foundation Fellowship of Northwestern University, 2012
Chancellor's Graduate Research Fellowship, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2012-2013
Abraham Lincoln Graduate Fellowship, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2012-2013

Anne Hopewell Selby Award, Department of English, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013

Curt C. and Else Silberman Faculty Seminar, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2013

Cummings Foundation Fellowship, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2013-2014

Mellon / American Council of Learned Societies Dissertation Completion Fellowship, 2013-2014

International Summer Research Workshop: Literary Responses to Genocide in the Post-Holocaust Era, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2014

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP: African American Literature and Culture Society
Association for Jewish Studies
Modern Language Association

PUBLICATIONS: Hartman, L., Mead, J., Werhane, P.H., and Christmas, D. "Connecting the World Through Games: Creating Shared Value in the Case of Zynga's Corporate Social Strategy." *Journal of Business Ethics Education* 8 (2011): 199-230.

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