

BUILDING SOLIDARITIES

Racial Justice in the Built Environment

Building Solidarities is a form of mutual pedagogy between the campus and the public, through dialogues on urgent questions about constructed environments, urban life, and ecologies.

Building Solidarities: Racial Justice in the Built Environment foregrounds the communities of Minneapolis, Nairobi, and New York, in dialogues between students, activists, artists, and academics.

While building mutual solidarities between our campus and our partners, we aim to extend the political imaginaries, community futures, and solidarities that our partners may build with each other.

As we study racial and environmental complexities and injustices, we remain vigilantly reflexive about the relationship between our campus and our neighbors, in Harlem and elsewhere.

The series is supported by the course "Colonial Practices," taught by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi. Web/podcasts are hosted by community organizations. To receive a research guide and link to attend, register by emailing the event title and date to buildingsolidarities@gmail.com.

Institutional Inhabitations

4:30-5:30 PM EST, September 23 2020

Guests: The GoDown Arts Centre and Navatman

On structuring cultural institutions and critical communities of black-brown solidarity in the African and South Asian diasporas of Nairobi and New York. Web/podcast by the GoDown Arts Centre (www.thegodownartscentre.com) and Navatman (www.navatman.org).

Building Historical Consciousness

4:30-5:30 PM EST, October 14 2020

Guests: Chris Cornelius, Elsa Hoover, and Nick Estes

Indigenous thinking on infrastructure and architecture as sites for historical consciousness and contemporary creative practice in North America. Web/podcast by The Red Nation (www.therednation.com)

Monumental Landscapes

4:30-5:30 PM EST, November 11 2020

Guests: Kate Beane, Lydia Muthuma, and Bhakti Shringarpure

A consideration of landscapes of monumentality through iconoclasm, replacement, and renaming of built and natural structures in Nairobi and Minneapolis. Web/podcast by Warscapes (www.warscapes.com).

Environmental Reclamations

4:30-5:30 PM EST, December 9 2020

Guests: Alishine Osman, Anisa Salat, and Huma Gupta

Environmental diasporas and ecological reclamation in the 'Somalias' of Dadaab, Minneapolis, and Mogadishu. Web/podcast by Jadaliyya, "Environment in Context" (www.jadaliyya.com Environment page) and Status podcast (www.statishour.com).



INSTITUTE FOR COMPARATIVE
LITERATURE AND SOCIETY
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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Office of the Provost, Barnard College
Barnard and Columbia Colleges Department of Architecture

Monumental Landscapes

A consideration of landscapes of monumentality through iconoclasm, replacement, and renaming of built and natural structures in Nairobi and Minneapolis.

November 11, 2020

4:30-5:30 PM EST

Guests: Kate Beane, Lydia Muthuma, and Bhakti Shringarpure, Warscapes web/podcast

To our guests:

The focus of your discussion will be “Monumental Landscapes,” and we will discuss your experiences with the construction of monuments, their iconoclasm, and/or their restoration in the intellectual or popular consciousness. We would like you to reflect upon your own work in decolonial practice and theory, including your research, writing, pedagogy, and organizing. Our readings in the first half of the course have considered the construction of knowledge and institutions, the partitions of land and the self, and building historical consciousness through architecture and infrastructure. We will ask you about how monuments construct or erase collective knowledge, what they violate or uphold and what it means to violate them or restore them. We will talk about the uses of knowledges of the past. We will also reflect on the larger arc of the dialogue series, “Racial Justice in the Built Environment,” through our preoccupations with Minneapolis, New York, and Nairobi, threaded through many of the talks in the series, and particularly building upon your and our positions in these three cities. Our goal is not merely to consume information but to build solidarities. In that spirit, we hope that this may be the beginning of a discussion and collaborations between the three of you.

Kate Beane (Flandreau Santee Dakota and Muskogee Creek) holds a BA in American Indian Studies and a Ph.D. in American Studies at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. She served as a Charles A. Eastman Pre-doctoral Fellow at Dartmouth College, and as a President’s Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is currently a public historian and Director of Native American Initiatives at the Minnesota Historical Society. Kate worked with her family to champion the cause of restoring the Dakota name Bde Maka Ska (from Lake Calhoun) in her ancestral homeland of Bde Ota (Minneapolis). Kate is proud to serve as a board member for the Native Governance Center and was recently appointed by Minnesota Governor Walz to the Capitol Area and Architectural Board. Kate advocates for the dominant narrative of history to be updated and rewritten to honor the languages, lives, and legacies of Indigenous peoples, and feels empowered that in 2020 Native people are key decision makers and influencers for systems change.

Lydia Muthuma is currently a lecturer in the department of Visual Arts at the Technical University of Kenya as well as a part-time lecturer at Nairobi University. She is the current chair of UNESCO’s National Committee for the memory of the world and a member of the Kenya College of Arms. Her research interests are primarily focused on the meeting point

between culture and art, especially in the historiography of contemporary art in Eastern Africa. She received her PhD in the History of Art from the Université Michel de Montaigne in 2013. In the summer of 2019, Dr. Muthuma curated an exhibition called “Changing Perspectives: Nairobi past and present, a photographic story”, which was hosted by the National Museums of Kenya and the Bristol Archives. Her recently published works include “The Representation of Womanhood in Kenya’s Contemporary Painting: Mukabi’s mama kibanda” (*Paralaxe* 1, 2019: 38-52).

Bhakti Shringarpure is assistant professor of English at the University of Connecticut, where she teaches gender and sexuality studies, comparative literary studies, and post-colonial literature and theory. She is the editor-in-chief and co-founder of Warscapes magazine, which published *Mediterranean: Migrant Crossings* (2018), an anthology that explores the plight of migrants and refugees as they undertake harrowing journeys across the sea. Established in 2011, Warscapes publishes fiction, non-fiction, poetry, interviews, book and film reviews, photo-essays and retrospectives of war literature. Shringarpure’s scholarship focuses on literature emerging from civil wars in the aftermath of European colonialism with an emphasis on the period of the Cold War. Her book *Cold War Assemblages: Decolonization to Digital* (2019) was published by Routledge Studies in Cultures of the Global Cold War. She is the co-translator of *Kaveena*, a novel by Senegalese writer Boubacar Boris Diop (Indiana University Press, 2016). Her edited works include *Literary Sudans: An Anthology of Literature from Sudan and South Sudan* (Africa World Press, 2016) and *Imagine Africa, Volume 3* (Archipelago Press, 2017). Shringarpure’s writing has also appeared in the *Guardian*, *The Funambulist*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Literary Hub* and *Africa is a Country*, among others. She received her PhD in Comparative Literature from the City University of New York, and was awarded the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Award (2019-2020) for her work in Kenya.

This program is supported by the course “Colonial Practices” taught by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi. **Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi**, asiddiqi@barnard.edu Preceptor: *Ada Jiang*, aj2837@barnard.edu

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Guiding Questions

1. Your work on monuments often focuses on structures that are highly visible in the public sphere. However, it also seems that such work is deeply connected to personal and familial histories and intimacies. What roles do intimacy and memory play in your work?
2. How does violence relate to monumentality? Does the violence of creation necessitate the violence of removal? What part does violence play in reversal, community building, imagining a different future...? What can/should be salvaged?
3. Is monumentality symbolic or materialistic? Is the monument inherently an archive or a symbol, and consequently, what is the significance of the void/negative space that is left behind when a monument is removed? What might a counter-monument be?
4. Is there a necessary community building process when people are trying to change their relationship to the monuments around them? What kinds of temporary, durational communities get formed in the praxis of iconoclasm?

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WORLD

Revolution, Reconstruction and Race in the US: The Complex History Behind BLM Protests

The current movement demanding the removal of statues of Confederate leaders goes beyond the focus on monuments to take in the normalisation of a built environment where racism rules unopposed.



A demonstrator with Black Lives Matter holds up a sign during a protest in front of the White House in Washington, US, July 8, 2016. REUTERS/Joshua Roberts



Anupama Rao



WORLD 06/JUL/2020

Current protests against mass incarceration and police violence led by the Black Lives Matter movement have also demanded the removal of statues and monuments that

commemorate the racist history of the Confederacy. Most monuments to this coalition of the slave states were erected during the period of Jim Crow (1877-1950s), the system of segregation that was maintained for nearly a century after the slaves' emancipation. That system was maintained through police power and vigilante violence, in addition to legislation that justified the ideology of "separate but equal." (The resemblance to South African apartheid should be obvious.)

The uprisings against mass incarceration and police violence are thus equally committed to "Fallism," that is, taking down those statues and monuments that commemorate the racist history of the Confederacy. The issue goes beyond the focus on individual statues or monuments to take in the normalisation of a built environment where racism rules unopposed because it is baked into the visual landscape even if declared ideologically moribund.



People gather to protest for the removal of a Confederate statue of John B. Gordon at the Capitol in Atlanta, Georgia, US June 9, 2020. Photo: Reuters/Dustin Chambers

As the US celebrates **July 4** as Independence Day, it is worth reflecting on the fact that the history of the nation is the story of its unfinished battle with slavery. The Declaration of Independence issued on July 4, 1776, was guided by the premise that "all men are created equal." The first Revolution (1775-1783) against the British set into motion socio-economic and political processes that led to the Civil War,

which is also called the Second American Revolution (1861-1865), and that abolished slavery. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s accompanied the dissolution of Jim Crow. The current uprisings are the latest phase in the unfinished struggle against racism. When viewed together, the struggles against slavery and racism reveal the public secret of American exceptionalism: its simultaneous dependence on, and disregard for black life.

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It is well known that the wealth produced by black labour, whether through enslavement and sharecropping, or “free” penal labor, was essential to the success of **American capitalism**. The journalist, Nikole Hannah-Jones notes that at the time of the Civil War, “**the value of enslaved human beings held as property added up to more than [the] nations’ railroads and factories combined.**” The “peculiar institution” was a part of the historical geography of the American South where it was associated with the spectacle of violence, enforced servitude, and the violent intimacies that made enslavers into fathers. The North was no less “racist,” but it operated through muted structures of dispossession such as redlining, racial covenanting, and other practices of spatial segregation that enabled the rise of an entitled, white, urban working class and middle class.

For instance, housing scarcity became a significant issue in the Northern cities in the aftermath of African-Americans' mass migration from the South to the North. About 1.5 million migrated between 1910 and 1930, and another 3 million followed suit between 1940 and 1960. At the time, practices of redlining and racial covenanting were instituted to protect the right to (white) property ownership. These were important financial-cum-juridical instruments that precluded African-Americans from accumulating private property, i.e., the single-family home, by excluding them from credit markets.

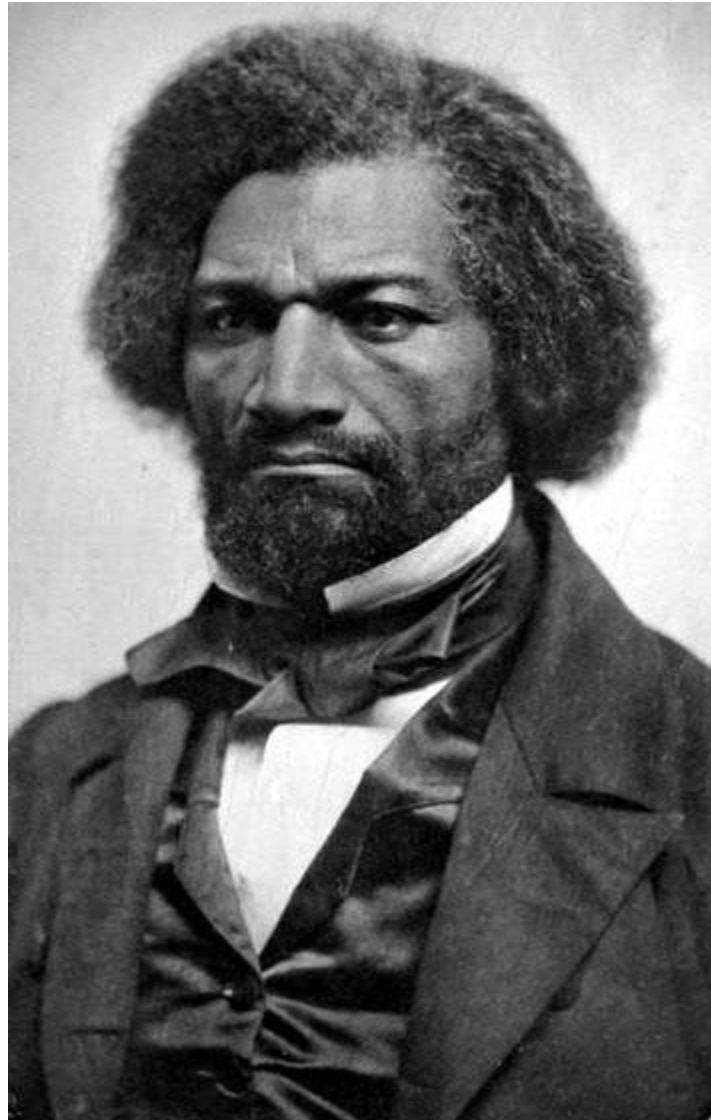
Exclusion from mortgage financing, and the imposition of a cess for black homeowners in the form of an inflated and unsustainable monthly payment that was supposed to lead towards eventual home ownership instead led to home foreclosures. The sociologists Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton termed their classic study of urban segregation (1993) an exploration of "American apartheid." Exclusion from the engine of accumulation works in tandem with the excessive disciplining (including **mass incarceration**) of African-Americans: in fact, the one justifies the other.

Of course, the story is neither so brief nor so simple. Nor is it a narrative of relentless oppression and victimhood. However, the history of slavery, slave emancipation, and struggles against a system of segregation maintained by law, police power and vigilante violence is at the very heart of American modernity.

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The political philosopher **W.E.B. Du Bois** discussed the brief decades of Reconstruction (1863-1877)—that followed the American Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment (which finally abolished slavery and rendered slaves into citizen)—as a utopian moment in American

history. [The 13th Amendment offered a loophole, however, when it noted that neither “slavery nor involuntary servitude” would exist in the US “except as a punishment for crime.”] Du Bois referred to this brief opening as a time when *abolition-democracy* was allowed to govern. The term Du Bois used is significant: it



Frederick Douglass. Photo: Unidentified photographer, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Public Domain

conjugates slave emancipation as the necessary requirement for the fulfilment of American democracy. Or, to put it differently, it predicates democratic freedom (for all) on the freedom of the unfree. If slavery was the original sin of the republic, it was the slave who would undo it.

In Du Bois’s telling, Reconstruction was a moment of utopian possibility when schools were established, black industriousness flourished, and black politicians worked alongside whites at all levels of government. This democratic opening was soon undone by the political compromise that

was struck between North and South in the aftermath of Lincoln's assassination, the assumption of the Presidency by then vice-president Andrew Johnson in the crucial period between 1865-1869, followed by the Presidencies of Ulysses S. Grant (1869-1877) and Rutherford B. Hayes (1877-1881).

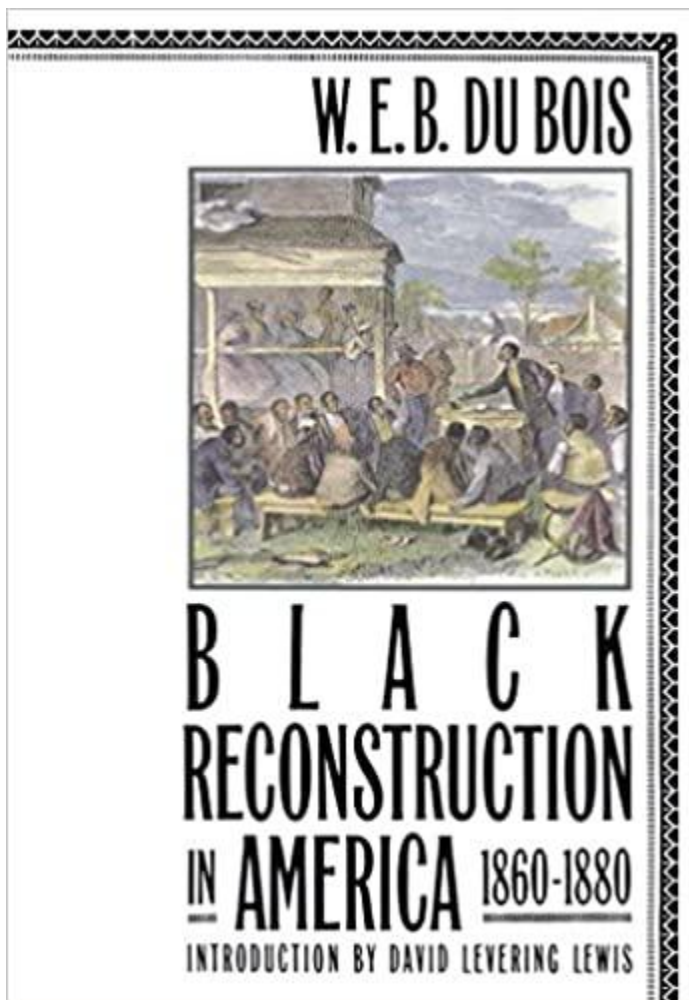
Simply put, the compromise oversaw the Republican Party's retreat from its commitment to equal rights for ex-slaves, which had been enforced through the ongoing presence of the US Army in the Confederate states.

The Supreme Court also curtailed the reach of the Reconstruction Congress's Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments through narrow legal interpretation. The one-time abolitionist, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., declined to intervene to stop the Jim Crow South from denying black men the vote. The court's infamous decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) ruled that state law could mandate separation so long as the state at least purported to offer equal facilities, effectively marking the end of Reconstruction. A program for the redistribution of Confederate lands to ex-slaves in forty-acre tracts announced by passage of Special Field Order 15 by General William Tecumseh in January 1865 was also overturned.

In the years that followed, black businesses across the South became targets of anti-black violence, while public lynching offered whites an occasion to participate in libidinal violence. In fact, *The Crisis*, the journal founded by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP] in 1910, and which Du Bois edited for 25 years, was known for its investigations into anti-black lynchings. Police and political leaders were often key members of the secretive Ku Klux Klan, which produced a reign of terror across the South. The violence was both symbolic and real.

Also Read: **What Lynchings in 19th Century US Can Teach Us About 'New India'**

There is, in fact an inverse relationship between the devaluation of black life and its excessive visual representation. Historically, images of the slave market, advertisements for the sale of slaves and bounty for runaways, lynching postcards, photographs of murdered activists and bombed churches, as well as oversexualised representations of African-American women have been crucial to securing white supremacy.



W.E.B. Du Bois

Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880

Du Bois's text, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1935) offered a radical, revisionist account of the period that challenged the then-dominant **Dunning School** of American history associated with the scholarly legacy of Professor William Archibald Dunning of Columbia University, and a founder and president (1913) of

the American Historical Association. Dunning attributed the failures of Reconstruction to black incapacity and the opportunism of the North rather than to the nation's lukewarm commitment to black equality. The destructive legacy of the Dunning School, which had shaped generations of scholarship as well as lay interpretations of Reconstruction, would only be redressed in the 1980s and beyond with work by Ira Berlin, Steven Hahn, Leslie Rowland and the signal text by Columbia historian Eric Foner entitled *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Business, 1863-1877* (1988).

Instead, Du Bois was among the first to argue that America had come close to its founding goals of creating a genuine social, political and economic *biracial democracy* during Reconstruction. He had published his views on the period even earlier in an essay published in the *American Historical Review* [AHR] the flagship journal of the American Historical Association in 1910. This would be the last time that an African-American scholar was published in the *AHR* until John Hope Franklin, another scholar of Reconstruction as it so happened, published his 1980 essay, "Mirror for Americans: A Century of Reconstruction History." In the meantime *Black Reconstruction*, which was much discussed when it was first published, was ignored by the scholarly community for nearly fifty years.

Divergent interpretations of Reconstruction had everything to do with the terms on which African-Americans were incorporated into the body politic. In turn, this has shaped how scholars understand the role of capitalism in American history, and the centrality of slavery to it. Were African-Americans incapable of self-rule and the capacity for accumulation? Or were they secret sharers in the American drama, prophets of the future and keepers of the past who would save America from herself, as Du Bois argued? What

was the relationship between African-Americans and the work-in-progress that is “America”?

Du Bois focused on two crucial points as he centred slavery and slave agency in his account of the American republic 2.0. First, he argued that the slaves had reclaimed their humanity as they armed themselves and fought in the Union Army and Navy— that freedom was realised through the barrel of a gun. The capacity for righteous violence was also a moment when the freedom to act out of one’s own will and volition became clear.

Next, Du Bois forefronts failed solidarity and the lack of common purpose between the white and black proletariat. He attributes this tragic failure to the investment in white privilege, which he calls a *psychological wage* that allows white workers to assert their racial superiority over black workers, and deny them equal recognition. Thus, white workers transact in, they derive value from the wage of whiteness in materially consequential ways, e.g., higher wages, access to better housing, social entitlements, and so on. In this they were enabled, Du Bois argued, by the determination of men of property and capital, both in the North and the South, to sustain their hegemony over the white as well as the black working classes.

There are intimations in Du Bois's prescient and deeply purposeful work that he understood modern racism to have been inaugurated by slave emancipation, and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. Ironically, formal equality between the races also gave rise to the century-long effort to deny them substantive equality whether through refusing equal pay for equal work, or provisioning decent housing and schooling. African-Americans' inability to accumulate wealth due to their enslavement and later, as a consequence of the ongoing impact of inherited (white) privilege is today at the heart of demands for reparations.

Also Read: [Reviving the Legacy of African-American Intellectual Du Bois](#)

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If racial capitalism is the invisible, organising motor of African-American dispossession, reparations brings those structures into view and provides a way to measure, count and account for historic advantage. Not every wrong can be righted, but it is surely important to acknowledge the inherited privilege of beneficiaries of a society built around a history of violent intimacy and legislated inequality, especially when that society touts "possessive individualism" as a secular religion.

In contrast, those who commemorate the Confederacy do so proudly and publicly through the Confederate statues and monuments that dot the Southern landscape. They, too, recall the fraught history of slavery and racism but they do so from the point of view of a defeated, abhorrent ideology that some seek to revive and replicate. The proliferation of monuments to the Confederacy as a slave-owning republic is a reminder that white supremacy never died.

A minority might articulate the ideology of white supremacy but its effects are extensive, ongoing, and insidious. Today, Trump and his allies have done much to revive the potent symbolism that lives on in the toxic imagery of the Confederacy, converting it from commemoration to crusade. There is something fundamentally theological in the structure of white supremacy and its belief in the spectacular sacrifice of black bodies and genocidal violence. Trump's actions remind us that racism is effective precisely because it functions as political theology, as a mythic structure that is unchanging even as historical time otherwise seems to move forward.



Neo-Nazis stand off with anti-racist protesters in Charlottesville. Credit: Flickr/Evan Nesterak

The American republic's experiment with democracy was a world historical event, but it was marred by the tragic flaw of American racism. Du Bois's observation of the contradictory processes by which freedom was historically achieved, namely the simultaneity of (civil) war with (slave) emancipation reminds us that for African-Americans freedom never arrives without violence. July 4 is an important holiday for Americans, a day of remembering the nation's founding values. It is a good time to ask whether the hypervisibility of black suffering at this time could signal not continuity and tradition, but instead the bursting of a bubble, a global scandal some of whose abettors are thinking about changing.

Anupama Rao is associate professor of History (Barnard College) and MESAAS, Columbia University. She is senior editor of Comparative Studies in South Asia, Africa and the Middle East and associate director of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society. She has most recently edited and introduced Memoirs of A Dalit Communist: The

Many Worlds of R. B. More. *She is working on a study of B.R. Ambedkar's thought worlds.*

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SWARM, DEMOLISH, DESTROY

RAGE AGAINST THE MONUMENTS FROM MALI TO MARTINIQUE

BHAKTI SHRINGARPURE



Destruction of a mausoleum by Ansar Dine in Timbuktu on July 1, 2012. / Screenshot of a video.

In July 2012, Ansar Dine, an extremist Salafist group linked to Al-Qaeda in Mali used axes, shovels and other tools to destroy cultural and religious monuments, bashing in the door of a 15th century mosque in Timbuktu. Out of the seven tombs of Muslim saints that were destroyed, the most defiant act entailed bashing in the door of Sidi Yahya mosque. This door had been closed for centuries in sacred belief that opening it will bring immense misfortune. The outrage against this destruction was widespread and there were several attempts to save the monuments and preserve the ancient manuscripts not just by large organizations like UNESCO but also by smaller, local organizations. The most clandestine one, Mamma Haider Library, smuggled up to 350,000 manuscripts from forty-five different libraries. However, since then, we have become accustomed to news of monuments and artifacts as targets of deliberate destruction. The war in Syria with its complete lack of regard for human life and heritage, and the proliferation of spectacular violent acts by ISIS have not only become commonplace but have found a riveted audience in the global North. Videos of ISIS hacking away at statues from the Assyrian and Akkadian eras in Mosul's

central museum were circulated in 2015. Most recently, militants rampaged across Palmyra in Syria blowing up a tetrapylon, a part of a Roman theatre and the 2000-year old temple of Bel. There is a tendency to view these acts as exceptional, categorically "abnormal" and without precedent but it is worthwhile to explore such rage against monuments and ancient heritage as part of a continuum within the history of our troubled world.

French philosopher George Bataille wrote of the intrinsic violence and fear radiated by monuments that loom above and around us. "Great monuments are raised up like dams," he writes, "pitting the logic of majesty and authority against all the shady elements: it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces that Church and State speak and impose silence on the multitudes" ("Architecture," 1929). For Bataille, the storming of Bastille reflected the animosity people felt toward the monuments that had become their masters. He illustrates that human order is bound up with the architectural order thus giving voice to an existing intuition amongst all mankind, one that has led governing classes to



Storming of the Bastille in Paris on July 14, 1789 at the beginning of the French Revolution. / Unknown painter (circa 1790)

often create structures of apartheid, physical walls that have risen up as wedges enabling a tragic web of inclusion-exclusion politics. He insists, "Such that if you attach architecture, whose monumental productions are now the true masters all across the land, gathering the servile multitudes in their shadow, enforcing admiration and astonishment, order and constraint, you are in some ways attacking man." Thinking about architecture through this lens dramatically alters the easy presumption that monuments are the souls of societies or metaphors of progress or symbols of national pride but show that they also have the ability to command, prohibit, exclude and dominate.

The violent desecration of monuments also has a symbolic place in histories of the postcolonial world. Calling the colony a fundamentally compartmentalized world, Frantz Fanon explained that the colonist's sector is made of stone, steel, lights, paved roads, clean streets, and even the garbage is wonderfully filled with "undreamed-of leftovers." The colonized's sector which consists of the Medina, the reservation or shanty-town is a cramped space filled with piles of people who are famished and "angry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, light" (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961). While these two compartments co-exist, the colonized fantasizes about taking over the colonizers sector. An even more important aspect of this dual universe is the dividing line of the border, which is controlled by an unmitigated violence. The "regime of oppression" is enabled by the figure of the police officer or soldier who manages this border space through the creation of barracks, checkpoints and police stations. In the violent moment of decolonization, Fanon claims that the dreams of the colonized take on a spatial quality.

They wish to "swarm the forbidden cities" and want nothing more than, "demolishing the colonist's sector, burying it deep within the earth or banishing it from the territory."

Postcolonial societies abound with examples of unusual desecrations of their colonial heritage. For example, in Fort-de-France in Martinique — the island of Frantz Fanon's birth — a statue of Empress Josephine was erected in 1856. Josephine had married Napoléon Bonaparte in 1796 and was allegedly responsible for influencing her husband in the re-establishment of slavery in 1802. The statue was preserved as a symbol of French slave history until quite recently. In 1991, a group of activists slammed the head of this statue and splattered red blood on the neck and chest, thus performing a beheading by guillotine, evoking France's brutal methods which was liberally used during the French Revolution, and then went to have quite a vibrant afterlife in the colonies — it was used in South Vietnam until 1959 and in Algeria right until the 1960s. Josephine's marble head was never found.

Léopold Lambert and I have been discussing rage against the monuments for the past few years and I am particularly drawn to his claim that "ideologies enacted through colonialism — in that case, systematically linked to slavery — or imperialism requires not only architecture to implement themselves, but also material symbol to provide a dominant narrative. When the statue of Joséphine was installed in Fort-de-France, it was not only a way to acknowledge the 'local' origin of the Empress in the island, but also to perpetuate the European domination on both the Afro-Caribbean and Native populations" (*The Funambulist*, 2013).



(left) Beheaded statue of Kwame Nkrumah in Accra. (right) New statue of Kwame Nkrumah in Accra. / Photographs by David Stanley (2015)

Governance and domination requires a reinforcement of the distinct stamp of their identity which manifests itself through the material and symbolic spaces occupied by statues, for example. Yet this dominant narrative expressed through the statue is countered by an equally strong visual performance in an anti-colonial or postcolonial moment. Lambert explains that, "through the absence of the head, as well as the red paint stains that are here to ensure the understanding of this counter-narrative, the statue is wearing the signs of the defeat of the system that was both its essence and its purpose."

Similar performative acts upon works of architecture have taken place during the postcolonial phase of disillusionment with new politics and leaders. They often find expression in angry, disenfranchised groups who enact very specific types of destruction. Ghana, for example, acknowledged its tremendous debt to the intellectually inspired, pan-Africanist leadership of Kwame Nkrumah after gaining independence from England in 1957. However, nine years after Nkrumah was sworn in as President, discontent and bitterness about his leadership became commonplace. His industrialization projects led to unprecedented borrowing and debt and his stance seemed to have become more and more authoritarian. As with many African leaders during the Cold War, Nkrumah was ousted in an armed coup in 1966. Demonstrators marched through the streets of Accra carrying banners against the former President and Ghanaian Armed Forces instigated a coup. Janet Berry Hess describes it thus: "Immediately after Nkrumah's overthrow, thousands of demonstrators in Accra marched in the streets, carrying signs and banners denouncing the former President. The Evening News reported on 2 March 1966, that a "sheep was slaughtered" and libation poured for the successful overthrow of the wicked regime of Nkrumah;" the monumental statue of Nkrumah — which had been damaged in an explosion attributed to the actions of "saboteurs and anti-Socialists" in 1961 — was toppled and beheaded" ("Imagining Architecture: The Structure of Nationalism in Accra, Ghana," *Africa Today*, 2000).

Almost thirty-five years later, in an attempt to ignite nationalist pride and evoke anticolonial sentiment, President Jerry Rawlings reinstated the Nkrumah legacy with the Kwame Nkrumah National Park and Mausoleum and it was no coincidence that this was the year of presidential and legislative elections. Here, not only was the beheaded statue placed upright once again, the severed head was placed alongside. A new statue of Nkrumah was also unveiled, this time in regal, gold African clothing as opposed to the western clothing of the previous. **This dizzying back and forth between architectural symbols points to the ways in which the collective consciousness of people under any government or regime are manipulated to serve various political ends through such artifacts.** Thus, it is no surprise that there is an immediate, urgent and unmitigated political reality expressed by works of architecture, and these structures are instinctively obliterated first in situations where long standing discontentment gives way to collective rage.

In Mali, the destruction of the tombs and cultural artifacts seems to have been motivated by a host of factors. After six decades of the French colonial rule, Mali suffered twenty-three years of military dictatorship, as well as several droughts and rebellions. Since becoming a democracy in 1992, there has been some growth, but a fairly chronic trade deficit has made it impossible for Mali to experience anything like thriving development. People have grown weary of poverty and corruption. There has been a lot of focus on the destruction of the cultural, religious and spiritual fabric of a country considered a model for democracy in the region. In general, the discussion has centered on Islam and its endless misappropriations by Al-Qaeda. On the one hand, analysts, intellectuals and historians depict the rebels as having planned a strategic sabotaging of history and heritage, and on the other hand, they are characterized as religious fanatics and ignorant "hooligans" who misunderstand Islam and have no idea how gravely important these works were. In fact, this is a flagrant continuation of colonial and racist stereotyping, especially given the fact that American soldiers watched nonchalantly when the national museum was looted in Baghdad during the 2003 invasion. Furthermore, it was later revealed that the U.S had also participated in the looting and illegally kept several of these treasures.

Lambert offers some useful terms for understanding our relationship to iconoclasm which is quite simply the heretical destruction of religious symbols.



(left) Postcard showing the statue of Empress Josephine in Fort-de-France. (right) The same statue after it was beheaded in 1991. / Photograph by Brent Ozar (2006)

The iconoclast then is dedicated to destroying those representations of God and an iconodule is a person committed to cherishing and preserving this representation. Bridging the contradiction between the two types, he claims that, "Iconoclasts and iconodules are therefore part of the same 'family.' They both understand the power of the icon — iconoclasts might even understand it more — and simply differ in their reaction to it. While the iconodules worship the artifact for what it implies, the iconoclasts, exasperated by what they fathom, crave its destruction" (The Funambulist, 2012).

In the case of Mali, no viable solutions have been explored regarding the Tuareg's demand for land and cultural autonomy, an issue that has been in the background of Malian politics since the nineties. Tuareg revolts in Mali and Niger are nothing new and have been sporadically happening since 1912. However during the reign of Gadhafi in neighboring Libya, the Tuareg were cast as capable mercenaries and were trained as fighters. For the Tuareg, this was a convenient way of earning money and it also strengthened weapons capacity for their rebellions. In addition, it helped their goal to secede and form the independent nation of Azawad. Gadhafi's death and an influx of arms into the region have fostered confusion within Mali's organizational dynamics and precipitated the birth of Ansar El Dine. A small part of the Tuareg population sees no alternative to joining this organization, which sustains itself on brute force but also gives handouts upon recruitment.

But not all acts of destruction can be valorized as being anti-colonial performance or as expressing opposition to problematic governments. The events in Mali are a deliberate attempt at memocide, an organized effort to erase history and with it the collective cultural memory of a group of people. It is also an attempt rewrite the existing narrative and above all, it is a cry for belonging. It is the desire to be received within a mainstream institutional framework.

The case of ISIS is quite different. Michael Busch and I argued in a 2014 article for Pakistani newspaper Dawn that ISIS are carrying out an ongoing imperial project across Syria and Iraq, and these are unabashed attempts to carve out a fresh narrative of power to demarcate territory and redefine it without remorse. Far from being something new, the violent erasure of historical memory has been a recurring feature of state-making efforts by occupying powers. This is an active attempt to draw attention to themselves and a craving for

inclusion into larger institutional networks across the region and indeed the world. Their constant streaming of videos on social media suggests their need for the whole world's attention and continuous engagement. The shocking subversion of Western power embedded in these acts — which are designed to be as outrageous as possible — has been key to ISIS's recruitment and growth.

It is not an exaggeration to say we live in an age of desecrated monuments. At a time when the legacy of colonialism endures, neoliberal economics penetrates daily life and the degradation of marginalized people and places continues unabated, it is no surprise that rage against monuments becomes a necessary impulse. Though we cannot support ISIS or Salafist groups in Mali, we can certainly explore the instinct to desecrate and destroy without a bourgeois, knee-jerk attachment to values of preservation and curation. The impulse to preserve artifacts certainly deserves some context and the way in which this impulse is manifested today points to the fact that it is deeply connected to power. Doors from the Persepolis in Paris' Louvre, Akkadian treasures in New York's MET, an entire gate from ancient Turkey in Berlin's Pergamon or just pure loot like the Indian Kohinoor diamond in London's Buckingham palace are evidence of who has the power to preserve, restore and narrate the story of cultural artifacts. Meanwhile, the widespread disdain in the West for Egypt's poorly organized and badly funded museum or the anger against India's neglected artworks illustrates how the balance of colonial power has come to be manifested. The impulse to preserve is thus an impulse to assert ownership over a certain history. It is no surprise then that after several hundred years of such a power imbalance, we find its counterpoint in rage against the monuments and in the impulse to swarm, demolish, destroy.

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Modern Kenyan Identity: Crafting a Nation Through Monuments

Abstract: To define the identity of a modern African country, within the Eurocentric interpretive framework, imposes creative limits. Therefore, this is an insider's perspective of Kenyan identity. It begins with a summary of modernism as the underpinning philosophy of various cultural expressions. While pointing out the danger of assigning expressions of cultural identity to a *state* as opposed to a *nation*, the article surveys monuments in Nairobi. And it is with qualified confidence that *modernist*-looking monuments are considered cultural expressions of Kenya; they are simply symbols that try to gather the peoples into a modern collective – with (un)certain success.

The colonial authority assembled various monuments in an effort to imprint British identity; these are not in the style of *modernism*, though they were erected when Europe was experiencing the culture of *modernism*. The epitome is the statue of King George V. Post-colonial monuments, seeking to wipe off colonial identity, are also more *classical* and less *modernist*, bringing to the fore the paradox of a modern culture that does not employ a *modernist* style. Jomo Kenyatta's statue in Nairobi's City Square is the epitome of post-colonial monuments. Its mounting was the gesture *par excellence* of overthrowing British dominion. The only *modernist* monuments are those affiliated to President Daniel Moi. His regime had to fight to unite the citizens. A parallel is drawn between this political effort and the artistic style of choice.

A discussion of the non-prevalence of the *modernist* style in articulating modern identity follows. And, in conclusion, the article points out that though both colonial and post-colonial monuments are fabricated out of modern materials and techniques, they cannot be termed *modernist* works of art. *Modernism*, as a style that bespeaks a culture, is unavoidably underpinned on western cultures (European and American) of the 20th century.

Keywords: modern national identity; modernism; post colonial identity; monuments.

The Modernist philosophy

Modernism, as a philosophy with various cultural manifestations, flowered as a consequence of the social upheavals of the industrial revolution. It took place in Europe and North America beginning at the end of the 19th century and into the

20th. Rebellious against the preceding Romantic movement, rebellious against the realistic expressions of art and ornate baroque architecture, modernism was just that – a revolt. And it was a revolt, not just against traditional forms of art, but also against traditional moral norms. It was an embrace of the overwhelming promise of the new technological advances.

And technological advances were not wanting: the automobile, the airplane, the telephone, radio, television and Hollywood's talking pictures not only reduced distances but packaged cultural mores to be televised far and wide. The early part of the 20th century witnessed manifold technological advances. And it is no wonder that progressive modernists believed in the perfectibility of humankind.

Enlightenment through reason and truth was expected to free individuals from religious and secular authorities. Further, virtually everything could be submitted to human reason: traditions, customs, morals, even art. Moderns feel that the truth revealed through the reasoning process can be applied in the political and social spheres to correct problems and improve the socio-political condition of humankind. Modernism's goal is to create a new and better society.

Modernism, as an approach to life, work, and thought, believes in the seemingly absolute necessity of innovation. It is seen as post-traditional or post-medieval when society was emancipated from the hegemony of Christianity. As an intellectual approach, modernism is hostile to religion. It is, however, difficult to define philosophical modernism because it was never distilled and published. It is instead a pervasive current of thought asserting the non-existence of objective revelation from God. Faith (in God) is just a motion of the heart and all creeds, being mere opinions, are to be tolerated. Modernism introduces a radical division between faith and science; reason is bound to phenomena, faith to sentiment. The latest answer to philosophical modernism was given by Benedict XVI in his Regensburg address.

Modernism's intellectual underpinnings, both as a historical process and cultural phenomenon, emerged during the Renaissance period when the humanists revived the notion that man, rather than God, is the measure of all things. This developed into the modernist confidence in the potential of humans to shape their own individual destinies and the future of the world: not a misplaced belief seemingly, given the industrial revolution and the consequent urbanization and mass culture. Both produced the consumer society, with a shift in values where one is rated according to what one can buy rather than what he can produce.

The background to this shift in values was the 'higher criticism' of the Bible, Einstein's theory of relativity in physics, Freud's subconscious psychology and Darwin's evolutionary biology. Relativity in physics morphed into moral relativism. Freud's psychology shook the age-old understanding of the nature of human beings while evolutionary biology evolved into social Darwinism (the theoretical rationale for European imperialism).

European imperialism, in turn, introduced cultural modernism into Africa. And it would appear that the unstated assumption (or a question) of the present symposium is: has modernism achieved its goal by bettering life on the African continent?

Challenges in analyzing modernism in Africa

A historicist approach to the phenomenon of modernism does little service to Africa. The continent had not lived through European Romanticism, or the Enlightenment, or the Christian hegemony. Africa was governed by different social norms and beliefs. And it was in the midst of these separate world views that European civilization burst onto the African continent. Not having experienced traditional European life, Africa could not rebel against it – the essence of modernism. Instead, African modernism has meant ‘westernization’, embracing European culture, beliefs, institutions and even art forms. It is perceptibly different. A discourse about modernism and the African landscape carries its own challenges.

In order to broaden the context of Euro-American modernism, other studies suggest an approach referred to as alternative modernities. These seek to mitigate the unqualified application of Eurocentric modernism. However, the discourses continue to mediate non-western contexts as secondary locations for the unfolding of the Eurocentric modernist drama. Africa is hardly allowed any agency in its own ‘modern’ history.

I will consider the evolution of national identity under the new modern state that was created by European imperialism. Nairobi, Kenya’s capital, is the case study: the justification being that the African city is an important site and symbol of social change. And because the spatial symbols with which we choose to identify ourselves are important in expressing the values we hold, examining Nairobi’s official symbolic space – its City Square – may help make meaning of this city and perhaps shed light on what influence (if any) modernism has had in its contemporary society.

‘Crafting a modern nation through monuments’ is a more apt title for this work. The nation is Kenya, and it is modern.¹ We can look at its formation either historically or culturally. Here I emphasize the cultural process: what is modern Kenyan identity and how is it expressed through the various arts? What codes have been embedded into the public monuments that line Nairobi’s foremost public space? Indeed, what values or messages are given voice through these works of art? These are the questions that lead to the formulation, ‘crafting a modern identity through monuments.’ Yet collective identity can be disturbingly imprecise!

An insider’s perspective of national identity

The ethnic differentiation that persists in Kenya, 50 years after independence, the perceived lack of nationhood, is surprising to many. Yet the concern with social cohesion and collective identity is not unique to Kenya; it is a major feature of post-colonial discourses following the denigration suffered under the imperial management of divide-and-rule.

¹ Here modern refers to the contemporary and not the cultural phenomenon that was experienced in Europe and North America.

National identity is anything but a precise term; it means different things to different people. To an outsider, grappling with a community he does not form part of, the term may be required to connote a democratic, transparent and clearly enunciated position of the community – fact you know, not fiction!

Perhaps this is because of the continued cultural hegemony of the imperial powers. For whether by design or default, the Eurocentric view continues to act as the universal canon, the touchstone of taste and value, the guarantor of academic worth. This would shift the focus to national identity within the Eurocentric interpretive framework, with all the weight of that continent's documented antiquity brought to bear. I consider this the outsider's perception. And while it would be foolhardy to gainsay its usefulness one must also acknowledge the creative limits imposed by this approach.

The insider's perspective is different; he has his own understanding of himself and of his people albeit couched in dearly held assumptions and prejudices. Whether these make his position false or are just part of who he is, is another problematic aspect of the term. This second sort of identity (the insider's view of himself) is a first-hand and lived experience, an ongoing process that acknowledges the sporadic, heroic and epic action while embracing the monotonous minutiae of day-to-day life. Monuments, in this framework, are sporadic and heroic.

This second view of identity can be careless of crystal clear definitions, of unambiguous historical starts-and-stops that can be so accurate as to verge on the hypothetical. Suffice it to say the insider view lacks careful manicuring; the weeding out of opinions while sifting facts, the aura bestowing exercise that confers terms like 'authenticity', 'corroborated research' and accepted 'historical narrative'. What it does not lack, however, is vibrancy.

In this presentation, I attempt an insider's perspective of Kenyan identity: a spontaneous autobiography as opposed to the more detached and balanced biography. Mine is a story within the realm of popular culture. And I have chosen public monuments, a broad-brush approach notwithstanding, to re-construct the national identity of modern Kenya.

This presentation is one person's partial view, an interpretive reconstruction that is therefore open to contestation and revision. It has no pretensions to being representative or absolute.

National, not state identity

Public monuments showcase people's identity. They are used to reflect 'common-union' or community. And in choosing what to commemorate – in these monuments – the community delineates a collective actual and remembered experience; monuments are part and parcel of any collective's articulation. But do they articulate a national or state identity? Thin, indeed, is the dividing line between a *state* and a *nation*.

In demonstrating the distinction between these two, Pope John Paul II, a Polish national who lived through the annihilation of the Polish state had this to say:

nation designates a community based in a given territory and distinguished from others by its culture [...] the nation cannot be replaced by the state, even though the nation tends to establish itself as a state [...] still less is it possible to identify the nation with so-called democratic society [...] The nation is the ground on which the state is born [...].²

For an entity to qualify as a nation, that which is territorially circumscribed needs to be animated by a collective human experience aimed at a common goal. Only then does it denote a style and substance of life that depicts the heart of that nation. Territorial circumscription, important though it be, cannot comprise the sole defining characteristic; culture is significant. And it is what enables the nurturing of society and its identity. For Kenya to embrace or experience the culture of modernism, it needs to first be a nation; nations have cultures, while states are mere legal and institutional concepts.

The Kenyan state (not nation) was created in the infamous 1884–85 Berlin Conference, where haphazard boundaries were drawn over Africa. By administering a geographical boundary, the authorities loosely bound together 43 different ethnic communities, each with distinct social-linguistic traditions and a variety of material cultural artefacts. Tethering them to a common boundary, legally or otherwise, did not fuse them into one: nation, unlike state, is a more complex and shifting terrain, making it tricky to apply the cultural term *modernism* to Kenya. It is with qualified confidence that we consider modernist-looking monuments as cultural expressions of Kenyans. Perhaps they are better seen as symbols that attempt to gather disparate people into a nation. By equating modernism to *westernization*, this paper explores monuments in Nairobi that first molded a colonial then post-colonial Kenyan identity.

CBD: The heart of national identity

In unraveling the identity of Kenya, monuments located in Nairobi's Central Business District (CBD) are singled out. CBD is the central or official public space in Nairobi – and by extension in Kenya. Why single out CBD? one may wonder. The answer necessitates disentangling the terms *place* and *space*; deciding whether they are identical, and if not, which between them is elemental to a people's identity.

SPACE is envisaged as the ubiquitous context – the *whereness* of reality – while a three-pronged attribute makes up PLACE: unique locale, its physicality, its assigned meaning and value. And it is this assigned meaning that transforms undifferentiated SPACE into PLACE-of-belonging or place of identity. Nairobi CBD forms the spatial context of the monuments. These, in turn, are part of the place-making process, constituting – though not exclusively – the meaning and value assigned to CBD.

Social constructs, like the nation-state of Kenya, are not contrived out of spatial vacuums; a society with its consequent identity and culture, is woven into spatial

² Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (Rizzoli International Publications, 2005).

references. It is anchored on either mediate or immediate space. So to constitute PLACE, to establish association, affiliation, or identity, SPACE is indispensable. Living culture is nurtured and developed with reference to specific *whereness*.³ CBD is the space where national identity i.e., meaning, value, and relation, are worked out. It is the repository of artefacts that enunciate national identity. The discourse of place and displacement is here located; a valid sense of national self is here sought, and recovery of vision and self-image is here hoped for.

Establishing imperial PLACE: Colonial monuments

The colonial authority assembled various monuments together; those with a weightier message were placed closer to the heart of CBD – the city’s square. This square was designed – on paper at least – in the 1948 master plan for a colonial capital.⁴ But it was actually laid out in 1935 when the High Court (now Supreme Court) and City Hall were built. Both buildings are colonial power in its imperial dimension and as the proximate local authority; the court, representing *Law and Order*, that rallying cry of *Pax Britannica*, while City Hall stands for immediate local government.

Kenya-Uganda sprung into being in 1895 with the official declaration of protectorate status. Kenya was later delineated from Uganda, to become a single entity known as Kenya Colony, in 1920. Previously, the country’s 43 ethnicities had not regarded themselves as one. They had no monuments – visual, performative or textual – to speak collectively for them. The new status marked not only the beginning of British rule, but also that of imprinting British identity – a task that was to last more than 50 years (c. 1900–1963). One of the tools for accomplishing imperial identity was the raising of monuments to monarchs and their achievements.

Table 1: Classification of the Colonial Monuments. The artistic style is indicated.

Regime & Date		Monuments in CBD	Year erected	Style (Figurative or Abstract)
Colonial Era	1895–1963	Queen Victoria	1906	figurative
		African War Memorial	1928	figurative
		Lord Delamere	1946	figurative
		King George V	1945	figurative
		King George VI	1956	figurative

³ Lydia Waithira Muthuma, “Political Identity in Nairobi’s CBD A Visual Exploration of Kenya’s capital city,” 2013, <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01206586>.

⁴ Leonard William Thornton White, Leo Silberman, and Peter Ronald Anderson, *Nairobi, Master Plan for a Colonial Capital: A Report Prepared For the Municipal Council of Nairobi* (London: HM Stationery Office, 1948).

According to Table 1 above, Queen Victoria's was the first monument to a British monarch and was succeeded by that of George V. In 1910, George V (1865–1936) became king, gaining public respect during World War One. In 1935 he celebrated his silver jubilee, an occasion of great public rejoicing in the Empire. To mark this jubilee, his statue was installed in front of the Law Courts in Kenya Colony. The building was completed that same year. This statue, however, was pulled down and returned to Oxford, as independence (1963) drew close.

In 1936, George VI (1895–1952) ascended the throne unexpectedly following the abdication of his brother Edward VIII. He was emotionally drained by the political and economic hardships of the post Second World War Empire. WWII marked the beginning of the end of this vast Empire; it signaled the de-colonization of Africa. In 1952, *Mau Mau* activities forced the colonial government in Kenya to declare a state of emergency. The colony had started on the road to political independence.

According to *The Standard* newspaper George VI's fountain, bearing a commemorative plaque, was erected in 1956. The same newspaper suggests that this was in acknowledgment of having raised the municipality of Nairobi to city status. It further alleges that the plaque helped reassure the settler community amid the panic caused by the *Mau Mau*. Fearing possible vandalism, as independence (1963) drew close, the colonial government saw to it that the plaque was pulled down. The fountain was otherwise left intact.

An earlier statue of the African War Memorial or *Carrier Corps* had been put up in 1928. This was to commemorate the First World War from which the Empire emerged victorious. The exercise of raising war memorials was an empire-wide undertaking with no special focus on Kenya; Nairobi was just one more far-flung site for these war *askaris* (soldiers). Considering itself victorious in the First World War, Britain felt the need for an empire-wide celebration: erecting *askari* monuments was one way of acknowledging the colonies' efforts towards this victory. Kenya got its share of *askaris* in the *Carrier Corps* monument. These *carriers* were located in CBD not far from George V's statue.

Lord Delamere, the main colonizer in Kenya, was placed not in the middle of City Square but along its edge. He is a peer, not a monarch. So the hierarchy, in terms of location, is not surprising. Delamere had a lot to do with the day-to-day running of Kenya Colony. His statue was a present from his widow while she was mayor of Nairobi.

Queen Victoria, in Jeevanjee gardens, had been erected much earlier, in 1906, long before City Square was designed. Her memorial statue was a gift from Alibhai Jeevanjee, an Indian settler, who was active in the politics of the Colony. This statue is a little way from City Square, about a kilometer due north (see Figure 3 at the end of the article). And perhaps being a gift from an Indian merchant, or because of its position away from City Square, it was not pulled down at the moment of independence like the other two monarchs. Some attribute its survival to the fact that it resembled a religious representation of Mary the mother of God. Whatever the reason, the statue is still extant but has since been vandalized and removed (August 2015).

Discourse of colonialism

Going by site and size, the epitome of colonial monuments was the statue of George V. It was located right in the middle of City Square. It was the centre-piece thanks to the visual distance and compelling focal point. Spectators from different vantage points found themselves gazing at this statue. George V was the focal point of City Square, just as he was the Empire's focal point. The square was designed to awe, to be a spectacle. The statue of George V was also designed to awe and to be a spectacle. It wouldn't be off the mark to attribute to it words employed in another corner of the Empire (Sydney, Australia) some 28 years earlier, to Queen Victoria, his mother:

[Her statue, like his, was] a celebration in song and spectacle [...] It was not only the Queen's longevity they were celebrating, not only remarkable progress of Western technology and science [...] but also, and most importantly, the spread of the British Empire itself to the point where it now subsumed one-quarter of the world's entire population [...].⁵

Although this statue, like the other four colonial monuments, is not rendered in the style of *modernism*, it was erected when Europe was experiencing the culture of *modernism*. Whether it contributed to fashioning the peoples of Kenya into a modern nation is debatable. What is less in doubt is that it brought imperial power – visibly – into Kenya, serving to assimilate the new territory into a conventional relationship with Britain.

Laragh Larsen⁶ arguing, quite convincingly, that colonial monuments served to link the [minority] British settlers to their homeland, makes no comment about the Africans. For the indigenous African – the vast majority – these monuments expressed, no less eloquently, their colonized state. They signified the ushering in of *westernization* into Kenya.

Colonial monuments are the symbols that declared Kenya a 'modern' adjunct of the British Empire. How deep modern culture seeped into the peoples of Kenya is not a question to be answered in this paper. What is apparent is that they declared the arrival of modern culture into the land of Kenya regardless of their artistic style.

Looking at Figure 4, it is clear that colonial monuments were not crafted in a *modernist* style. They were more figurative than abstract, and from a Eurocentric approach would probably be referred to as *classical*. However, since they referenced another culture (not the majority African population) their stylistic niche becomes insignificant; whether *classical* or *modernist*, is a matter indifferent to the indigenous African – the vast majority. This stylistic nuance is perhaps useful to an 'outsider' perspective of national identity; to an insider, all European styles are simply seen as western or modern. And worn out as the debate may seem, it depicts an actual

⁵ Stephen Slemon, "Monuments of empire: allegory/counter-discourse/post-colonial writing," *Kunapipi* 9, 3 (1987): 1–16.

⁶ Laragh Larsen, "Re-placing imperial landscapes: colonial monuments and the transition to independence in Kenya," *Journal of Historical Geography* 38, 1 (2012): 45–56.

historical era encased in its ideas and expressions. What is of relevance is that subsequent post-colonial monuments were executed in the same style, as if to sustain the political dialogue by using the same artistic shorthand. Perhaps it is no accident that Jomo Kenyatta’s statue, which supplanted George V’s, is just as figurative and as classical. The sculptor of Kenyatta’s statue was British – born, bred, and educated.

Not surprisingly, colonial identity has been wiped off the grounds of Nairobi by removing all colonial monuments. The only exception is the African War Memorial or *Carrier Corps*.⁷ The disappearance of colonial monuments can be likened to the symbolic lowering of the Union Jack; up goes the Kenyan flag and City Square gets a change of monuments, like getting a new suit of clothes.

Table 2: Classification of post-colonial monuments. The artistic style is indicated.

Regime & Date		Monuments in CBD	Year erected	Style (Figurative or Abstract)
Post-colonial 1 Jomo Kenyatta’s Era	1963-1978	Jomo Kenyatta	1964	figurative
		Jomo Kenyatta	1973	figurative
		Kimathi (rejected)	1971	figurative / stylised
Post-colonial 2 Daniel Moi’s Era	1978-2002	Peace, Love, Unity	1983	abstract
		*Uhuru monument (outside CBD)	1983	abstract
		Nyayo monument	1988	abstract
Post-colonial 3 Mwai Kibakis’s Era	2002-2013	Dedan Kimathi	2007	figurative
		Tom Mboya	2011	figurative

According to Figure 8 above, post-colonial monuments, excepting those that belong to Moi’s era, are figurative. This makes them more *classical* and less *modernist*, just like their colonial antecedents. However, these monuments bespeak a modern nation-state regardless of their stylistic classification. And whether this is sufficient to brand them modern, is an open question. Just how deeply embedded a style is, into the peoples it emanates from and therefore purports to speak for, is a question for a different forum: we can have monuments, *modernist* in style, representing a culture that is unaware of and indifferent to *modernist* mores, tastes, and preferences. *Modernist* artefacts can be juxtaposed onto an immediate culture that is far removed from *modernism*. The opposite is also possible. In the case of post-colonial Kenya, the culture is modern, while the monuments are not quite *modernistic*.

⁷ Anne-Marie Deisser, and Mugwima Njuguna, *Conservation of Natural and Cultural Heritage in Kenya* (London: UCL Press, 2016), 272.

The era of Jomo Kenyatta: 1963–1978

Delamere Avenue was renamed Kenyatta Avenue in 1964. A statue of Jomo Kenyatta (c. 1889–1978) was erected outside the parliament in the same year. Later, in 1973, to mark ten years of independence, another statue of this ‘father of the nation’ was erected in City Square. It stands more-or-less on the site of the statue of King George V as Larsen⁸ recounts. But this author understates the replacing of George V with Jomo Kenyatta; the poignant political and cultural overtones go unmentioned, yet this performance was as portent as lowering the Union Jack and replacing it with the Kenyan flag. It was the gesture *par excellence* of overthrowing British dominion.⁹

1978–2002: Moi’s era

Daniel Toroitich arap Moi, Kenya’s second president, assumed power in 1978 and survived an attempted coup d’état in August 1982. Although it was suppressed, disloyalty sunk deep. And what followed was an era of state repression. Not many expected Moi to be president for long; he was seen as a temporary leader – a mistaken assumption in light of his 24-year-long rule. Moi, aware of this perception and ever mindful of the failed coup, hardened his resolve to prove otherwise. He became intolerant of dissent, asserting his power and demanding that all pledge undivided loyalty and commitment to him. Thus was born his philosophy of peace, love and unity – *Nyayoism* – or ‘following in the footsteps’ (*Nyayo* is footstep in Kiswahili).

Shortly after the failed coup, in 1983 the Nyayo fountain of Peace, Love, and Unity was inaugurated in Uhuru Park. Larsen sees this as a central position, and from some perspectives it is. However, if City Square, Nairobi’s showroom, according to Nevanlinna,¹⁰ is taken as the reference point, then the fountain skirts the CBD, making it somewhat periphery in reference to the official public square.

Although Larsen intimates that president Moi was more feared than respected, she falls short of citing this as the reason behind his choice of style. These monuments may be *modernistic* out of choice; political expedience dictated this choice. *Modernism* is not representational or figurative: Moi chose a *modernistic* style, perhaps fearing that mounting a likeness of himself in CBD would surely lead to vandalism from disloyal citizens. He was not the leader to rally the nation behind him; he did not carry sufficient popular support to have his figurative likeness etched either into Kenya’s symbolic space or Kenya’s collective memory.

Written testimony, in support of this opinion, would be mandatory when working within the parameters of an outsider’s approach to national identity. I can,

⁸ Larsen, “Notions of Nation in Nairobi’s Nyayo-Era Monuments.”

⁹ Lydia W. Muthuma, *Nairobi in pictures: political icons 1899–2000* (Nairobi: Focus Publications Ltd, 2013).

¹⁰ Vivian Bickford-Smith, Anja Kervanto Nevanlinna, *Interpreting Nairobi: The Cultural Study of Built Forms* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1996): 129–60.

however, state it confidently as the *vox populi* because not every sentiment of a nation is delivered in text. Cultures that rely on oral tradition, (and Kenya is one of them) employ body language, tone of voice and other performative devices to express their identity, displaying a myriad of nuance that written text can at best gloss over. Larsen, as an outsider, felt obliged to base her interpretation solely on the written word, on what has been published concerning these monuments. This is understandable. But, in Africa what is left unsaid, especially about an incumbent president, far outweighs written documents. Reliance on official text may actually paint an inaccurate picture of the feeling on the ground. It may satisfy outsider perception while misrepresenting insider feelings and leanings.

The era of Mwai Kibaki: 2002–2013

Kenya's third president, Mwai Kibaki, redirected the monumental conversation to the independence narrative by commissioning a statue of Dedan Kimathi (1920–1956). According to Terry Hirst¹¹ the sculpture of Kimathi, the foremost *Mau Mau* leader, was to stand outside the State Law Office in Sheria House. The then-Attorney General did not approve it, and it was never installed. This was in 1971. Another account (Standard newspaper) has it that officials of Nairobi's City Council wanted to re-assign the fountain of King George VI to a memorial of Kimathi. But protests from London, suggesting that the move was illegal, ensured that the statue was never installed.

It was not until September 2003, with the unbanning of the *Mau Mau* movement, that the president could commission a second statue of Kimathi. Annie Coombes¹² complains that it took over 40 years to commemorate this leader, yet he was pivotal in the drama of Kenya's independence. She alleges that despite there being a number of individuals who might merit the honor [of hero worship] the first 'hero'... selected as an icon of national importance was Dedan Kimathi. Valid as this argument may be, Coombes appears unaware of the unstated visceral feeling attached to the *Mau Mau* struggle by many Kenyans, especially the Kikuyu. Putting up a statue of Kimathi is an attempt at closure; closure of the unresolved debate about the 'Land and Freedom Army'. Those who fought for land that was 'stolen' by the colonials never got it back despite the attainment of independence. This statue acknowledges the landless who wander the urban space without any form of employment or livelihood. Kimathi's statue is not too distant from being claimed by the *Mungiki* (seen as a quasi terror group). Again, this is a level of identity that academic research may not easily uncover because it would consider the opinion uncorroborated, biased or mere tribal politics. Kimathi's second statue was installed on Kimathi Street in 2006.

¹¹ George Ogola, *Popular Media in Kenyan History: Fiction and Newspapers as Political Actors* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹² Annie E. Coombes, "Monumental histories: commemorating Mau Mau with the statue of Dedan Kimathi," *African Studies* 70, 2 (2011): 202–23.

The only other statue of significance is Tom Mboya's. He was prominent in the politics of independence and was shot dead in Nairobi in 1969. As a national martyr, he is commemorated, not on Tom Mboya Street but on Moi Avenue, close to the spot where he was shot dead. His statue was installed in 2011.

It is interesting to note that monuments erected in 2002–2013 reverted to the figurative style of the colonial regime and Kenyatta's regime. It would appear that a figurative-representational style is preferred when the populace is engaged in the debate, when the discourse is about specific people and their specific contribution to 'founding Kenya'. In contrast, when the subject matter is ideological, like the case of *Nyayo* monuments, an abstract style comes in handy. Moi clearly articulated the governor's ideology to the governed; the salient feature, in his monuments, is not popular debate or discussion. What also stands out is that these non-figurative (abstract and ideological) monuments are not inside CBD. They have been erected somewhat (out in the cold) while the popular making of modern Kenya is being discussed within the confines of the CBD.

Conclusion: The discourse of post-colonialism

Just as colonial monuments implanted the British Empire into Kenya, post-colonial monuments uprooted this identity. They replaced colonial status with symbols of independence, starting with the two monuments depicting Jomo Kenyatta as 'the father of the nation': one outside Parliament Buildings and the other in City Square.

The arduous task of weaving disparate ethnicities into one nation is captured in the *modernist* monuments of Daniel arap Moi: the Peace, Love and Unity fountain together with the *Nyayo* mountain. These are non-representational, abstract and ideological.

Monuments affiliated to Mwai Kibaki's era, the statues of Dedan Kimathi and Tom Mboya, are as representational as the colonial ones and those of Jomo Kenyatta. They pick out individual heroes of the nation for admiration and perhaps emulation.

Post-colonial monuments are fabricated with modern materials and techniques. Their subject matter articulates the identity of modern Kenya. However – with the exception of Moi's – they cannot be termed *modernist* works of art. *Modernism*, as a cultural expression, is necessarily underpinned on EuroAmerican cultures of the 20th century.



Figure 1: Map of Kenya according to present-day boundaries. Boundaries altered slightly in 1902, 1927 and 1963 cf. Bennett. Nairobi, the capital and scene of our discussion is marked green; source: google maps re-drawn by author (public domain).



Figure 2: Map of Nairobi. The triangle marked orange is the hub of the city and the symbolic central space. It is the Central Business District (CBD); source: google maps re-drawn by author (public domain).



Figure 3: Nairobi Central Business District (CBD) showing the location of colonial monuments. CBD western boundary: pre-1950 rail line. Southern boundary: Haile Selassie Avenue and eastern: Moi Avenue. City Square is shaded purple; source: google maps redrawn by the author (public domain).



Figure 4: Statue of King George V. map in figure 3 above shows its location, right in the middle of City Square; source: Nairobi Railway Museum (public domain).



Figure 5: Empty fountain where a plaque (shown by the red ring) of King George VI had been mounted. Its location, shown in the map (figure 3 above) is at the edge of City Square; source: author (public domain).



Figure 6: Nairobi Central Business District (CBD) showing the location of post-colonial monuments. CBD western boundary: Uhuru Highway. The railway line was re-directed in 1950, expanding CBD towards the west. Southern boundary: Haile Selassie Avenue and eastern: Moi Avenue City Square is shaded purple; source: google maps redrawn by the author (public domain).



Figure 7: Bringing down the statue of George V. 1964; source: *East Africa Standard* newspaper (public domain).

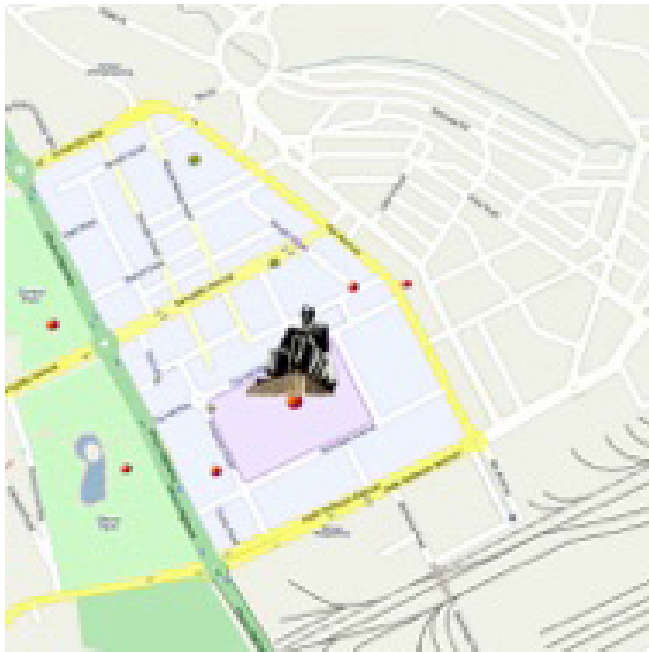


Figure 8: In 1973, the statue above, Jomo Kenyatta's, replaced George V.; source: Google map redrawn by the author (public domain).



Figure 9: Peace, Love, and Unity monument in Uhuru Park; source: author (public domain).



Figure 10: Nyayo monument in Central Park; source: Google (public domain).



Figures 11a and 11b: Dedan Kimathi. This second statue was eventually placed on Kimathi Street in 2006. Many (e.g. Hirst) have criticized it because it was erected over 40 years after his death. Besides, the uniform on it is purported to be British military fatigues; Kimathi fought the British. The artist (inadvertently) dressed the hero in the garb of those he was fighting. Others claim that it is too small for the site it was accorded, overshadowed by the surrounding buildings; it leaves the taste of ‘too little, too late’. On the right is a man ‘celebrating’ beside this statue. He could be one of the landless or unemployed people who feel vindicated by the statue; source: *Daily Nation* newspaper (public domain).



Figure 12: Tom Mboya in Nairobi's CBD; source: Google (public domain).

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Dakota people and representatives of the City of Minneapolis talk about the process of creating and producing the Gathering Space, Railing and pathway stamps.

Kate Beane relates the vision for the lake site while her father, Syd Beane talks about the stories that came down from his relatives and his personal experience on being part of the vision and creation of the site and the name restoration. The artists describe their experience working for this project.

Staff people of the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation and Minneapolis Public Art describe the process and their experience of learning the history of the site and of Dakota people in the area, Dakota homeland.

Clicking on photos below will open photo gallery.



(<https://bdemakaska.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Lake-Calhoun-1859.png>)



(<https://bdemakaska.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Pond-cabin.png>)





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([https://bdemakaska.net/wp-](https://bdemakaska.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Sioux_Village_Lake_Calhoun_near_Fort)

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Place (<https://bdemakaska.net/place/>) [content/uploads/2019/05/Sioux_Village_Lake_Calhoun_near_Fort.](https://bdemakaska.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Sioux_Village_Lake_Calhoun_near_Fort)

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Chapter 2: Bde Maka Ska “White Banks Lake”: Dakota at Lake Calhoun and the Cultural Significance of Place

When I introduce myself in my Dakota language I say “wanna Bde Ota ed wati *ake* – I now live *again* in Minneapolis.” To say “ake” or “again” is significant because though I was raised as a Dakota in exile and did not grow up in Mni Sota Makoce,¹⁰⁸ this is the land that my ancestors walked for thousands of years, our people were born out of this soil, and it is this place from which my grandparents fought hard and gave their lives for us to be able to stay. Growing up, I had heard a few of the ancestral stories about Minnesota places of cultural and historical significance to Dakota history, and I had been told that one of my grandfathers had led a village at Lake Calhoun in present day Minneapolis in the 1820’s, but before I moved to this state I had no detailed knowledge or vision of the physical context in which to locate or interpret these histories, and they remained in my imagination as historical tellings of some far off and distant place.

The stories of our ancestors, though seemingly mythical in nature, are not simply ‘legends’ of a long lost past, they are evidence of what Dakota people have left of our oral history traditions; stories, with bits and pieces that became lost as common knowledge with each passing generation. These stories focus on places of importance to community history and they teach us lessons about the ways and times in which our ancestors lived. It was not until I returned home to Minnesota that I began to learn the

¹⁰⁸ As stated in the introduction, the Dakota name for “Minnesota” is Mni Sota, the meaning of which translates into English as the reflection of the sky off of the water. This often gets interpreted as “sky blue water” or “cloudy water.”

Though the Dakota community at Bde Maka Ska has historically been used to represent an early assimilationist society, and has been interpreted as a Dakota village that adhered to the “good” Indian binary (as farmers who practiced the Christian faith), this is not the way that I view the history of this place at all. This location and history reflect a more important story that, though not often taught or well known within the state of Minnesota, is emblematic of

The people that lived at this lake worked hard, incorporating key Dakota values that benefited the community while at the same time adapting the ways of an ever-changing world into their daily lives and world-view.

Mahpiya Wicasta’s grandson Ohiyesa states that, “it was the rule of his life to share the fruits of his skill and success with his less fortunate brothers. Thus he kept his spirit free from the clog of pride, cupidity, or envy, and carried out, as he believed, the divine decree – a matter profoundly important to him.”¹⁰⁹ This idea of sharing what you have with others, a value often termed Wacantohnaka (Generosity), Wowaunsida (Compassion) and Wowaditkta (Bravery), are the all traditional Dakota virtues that those who lived at Bde Maka Ska represented with grace as a society that still valued and upheld itself as a traditional community.

¹⁰⁹ Charles Eastman *Soul of the Indian*, (1911 Reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 10



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The act of removing Indigenous peoples from their ancestral land base is a disconnection from historical and cultural experience, a break in a tribally specific identity, and an erasure of their own existence as Indigenous peoples with strong ties to the earth. Within this framework of erasure there is also a story of reinterpretation, if not total separation, from our Indigenous traditional spiritual relationship to god, or Wakan Tanka¹¹¹ and from the values that nurture and sustain our communities. Thus, the connection that is severed when one generation is removed from an ancestral homeland is much more complex than merely physical separation and has an ongoing psychological effect, presenting an undeniable inheritance of historical trauma passed down perpetually from one generation to the next.

¹¹⁰ Bde Maka Ska, personal photograph taken by Hinhan Loud Hawk

¹¹¹ Dakota word for “god” is referred to as Wakan Tanka or Tunkasida. See Monica Siems *How Do You Say “God” in Dakota? Epistemological Problems in the Christianization of Native Americans*. *Numen*, Vol. 45 No. 2, 1998 p. 163-182

As Keith Basso states in *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscapes and Language*

Among the Western Apache the attachment that people have to places is complex but taken for granted because,

As normally experienced, sense of place quite simply *is*, as natural and straightforward as our fondness for certain colors or culinary tastes, and the thought that it might be complicated, or even interesting, seldom crosses our minds. Until as sometimes happens, we are deprived of these attachments and find ourselves adrift, literally *dislocated*, in unfamiliar surroundings we do not comprehend and care for even less.¹¹²

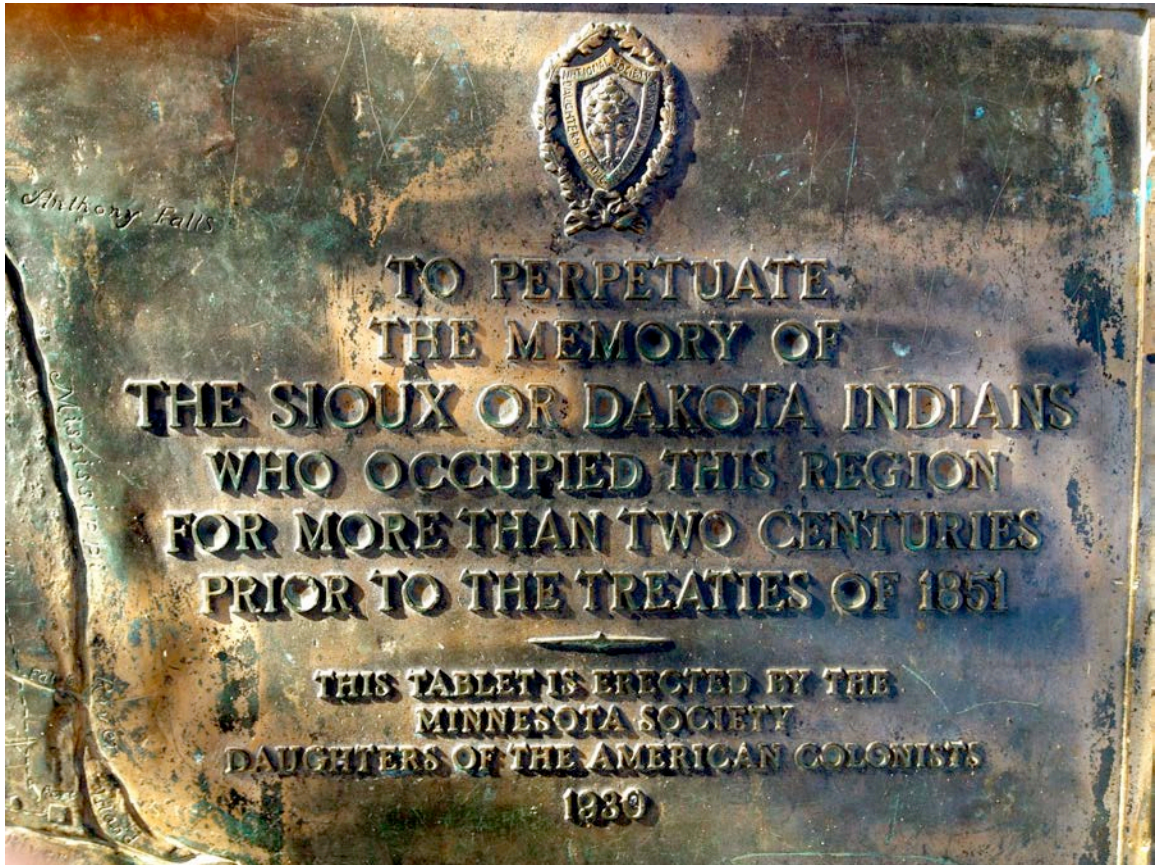
The relationships that Indigenous peoples have with their ancestral homelands are sacred, we believe that we were created by Wakantanka to take of the land that we were created on, and there is an emotional connection as well as a spiritual relationship with these natural spaces that must be nurtured. The notion of “coming back” to our ancestral homeland requires that we first must understand the history of this space, in order to remember these connections and so that we can resituate ourselves, as well as the stories of our ancestors and of the earth itself, back into this landscape.

Bde Maka Ska is Dakota for “White Banks Lake” and this name is descriptive of the sandy white beaches that surround this body of water located in south Minneapolis. Situated as part of the uptown neighborhood, this space is more widely known today by its English, and to the Dakota far less significant, name of Lake Calhoun.¹¹³ This beautiful collection of lakes make up what is called the “chain of lakes” and these waters

¹¹² Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996) xiii

¹¹³ This lake is now known as Lake Calhoun, named in honor of former secretary of war John C. Calhoun, See Warren Upham, *Minnesota Geographic Names: Their Origin and Historic Significance*, Vol. 17, 229

have a story to tell; and they have withstood the test of time, a fixture in this city reminding people of what once was existed here before urban sprawl.



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Resting upon the ground on the east side of Bde Maka Ska, sits a plaque erected in 1930 by the Daughters of the American Colonists which carries an inscription that speaks to a very general historical significance of this place. It states its purpose, “To perpetuate the memory of the Sioux or Dakota who occupied this region for more than

¹¹⁴ Marker at *Bde Maka Ska*, Erected by the Daughters of the American Colonists in 1930, personal photograph.

two centuries prior to the treaties of 1851.” This marker does not speak to the significance of the lake history itself. It sits nestled into the soil below a small boulder, and with age the words have blended into the rock making it difficult to read. Bde Maka Ska, the largest lake in the city, is described by the website of the Minneapolis Parks and recreation board as, “a popular site for fishing, wind surfing, swimming, sailing, canoeing, walking, jogging, biking and roller- and in-line skating” and reportedly it rates as the second most visited destination in the area (Mall of American being the first).¹¹⁵ However, this place was not always simply a place of leisure, there is a working history and an Indigenous presence to this space that is still important to acknowledge.

Mahpiya Wicasta: Progressive Leadership During a Time of Change

Sometime before 1829, surveyors of the Minnesota territory bestowed the name Lake Calhoun onto Bde Maka Ska in honor of John C. Calhoun, a South Carolina senator and former vice president under both John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. Calhoun had also served as both secretary of state and secretary of war. He was a staunch advocate of slavery and fought to expand slavery into the western states. Calhoun had authorized the construction of Fort Snelling, a military fort at the junction of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers, for which he was memorialized in the naming of the lake, but he really had very little presence in the area. What is often left out of the history behind the English name for Bde Maka Ska is the history of indigenous relations and the policy that Calhoun was invested in. By 1824 Calhoun established the Indian Office that he named

¹¹⁵ Minneapolis National Park Service,
<http://www.minneapolisparcs.org/default.asp?PageID=4&parkid=263>

“The Bureau of Indian Affairs,” which was housed within the war department.¹¹⁶ The same year he penned the first draft of a policy which would become the Indian Removal Act, signed into law on May 28, 1830. This act, authorized by President Andrew Jackson, led the way for the creation of removal treaties, policies of tribal ethnic cleansing that were used to pave the way for western Euro-American settlement, wreaking havoc on Indigenous communities and families in its path for centuries to come.

The village of Heyata Otunwe,¹¹⁷ headed by Bdewakantunwan¹¹⁸ Dakota leader Mahpiya Wicasta¹¹⁹ was located at Bde Maka Ska in a marshy area that had previously served as a place to harvest wild rice. Situated roughly six miles from Bdote,¹²⁰ a site of creation for the Dakota people, the lake at that time measured some three or four miles in circumference, and was filled with an abundance of fish.¹²¹ Though known by its Dakota name to its residents, it was labeled “Eatonville” by the United States Indian agent Lawrence Taliaferro in honor of John H. Eaton who was secretary of war under president

¹¹⁶ Donald L. Fixico, *Bureau of Indian Affairs* (Westport: Greenwood, 2012), 12

¹¹⁷ A newspaper account from 1851 relates that this village was so named because, “they formally lived back from the river at Lake Calhoun.” See *Minnesota Democrat*, Tuesday September 9th, 1851. Minnesota Historical Society

¹¹⁸ Bdewakantunwan “Spirit Lake Dwellers” and the other three bands of eastern Dakota will be defined in the introduction.

¹¹⁹ Mahpiya Wicasta’s name is often translated as “Cloud Man” or “Man of the Sky,” Though Cloud Man is a more accurate translation I use his Dakota name in this work out of respect to the Dakota language and Indigenous naming practices.

¹²⁰ Bdote translates as “confluence of the rivers” and describes a larger area that also encompasses the space where the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers meet - present day Fort Snelling National Park.

¹²¹ Measurements and location description provided in letter by Samuel Pond to Herman Hine, January 19th, 1835, Pond Family Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul

Andrew Jackson.¹²² Known to the Dakota as Heyata Otunwe “the village at the side,” this community represented a period of transition for the Dakota from 1829-1839. The Indigenous history of Heyata Otunwe is significant to both Dakota and Minnesota history for two important reasons, the first being that from 1830-1839 (at this location just one mile north of nearby Bde Unma, or “Lake Harriet”¹²³) the first successful adaptation to an agricultural farming lifestyle for the Dakota people occurred at this location¹²⁴ (“successful” according to western standards and ideals). Secondly, during this same time period (1834-1839) the Dakota language was first put into written form by missionary brothers Samuel and Gideon Pond at their mission located at Bde Unma, which makes knowledge of this site essential for anyone trying to understand the history of our language. Missionary brothers Samuel and Gideon Pond, arrived at Fort Snelling in 1834 and Samuel’s son, Samuel Jr., would later recall his father’s impression that until recently life had been well for the Dakota in this region,

No attempt had ever been made either by private enterprise or government authority to civilize or Christianize the Dakotas...The Dakotas were at the time substantially what they had been for generations, depending on their own resources for subsistence, upon their own medicine men for medical advice and aid, and upon the traditions of their fathers for their knowledge of the mysterious and unseen. Each of these they found in its way sufficient for their

¹²² Dietrich, Mark *A Good Man in a Changing World: Cloud Man, the Dakota Leader, and His Life and Times*. Ramsey County History Vol. 36 Spring 2001

¹²³ Lake Harriet is the English term for this body of water, known in Dakota as Bde Unma, “the Other Lake” which is used to distinguish it from Lake Calhoun - located very close to the north.

Paul Durand, *Where the Waters Gather and the Rivers Meet: An Atlas of the Eastern Sioux*. Self-published, Prior Lake, MN, 1994

¹²⁴ The site of present day Lake wood Cemetery is the location where the community was camped, but the community utilized the full space of the lakeshore and surrounding area.

needs. Experience had taught them that the natural resources of their country would supply them with all the necessities of life...¹²⁵

The Ponds, like many missionaries of the time residing in indigenous communities, set to work under the pretense that they were documenting the last years of a dying race of people, the Pond brothers were fiercely committed to the task at hand. In a letter to Samuel, Thomas Williamson writes,

It is a common saying that the race is destined to become extinct. I believe this results chiefly from the want of success where no success ought to have been expected namely where they were not instructed in their own languages...I hope you will mutually stir up each other to do all that you can to do in the way of learning the language and teaching them to read and write it and preaching gospel to the poor Dakotas. There is a vast responsibility resting on the US missionaries to the Sioux. None of the other Indian missions is now looked to with more interest.¹²⁶

The Ponds took the task of learning the language very seriously, and the bulk of their time here (when they were not working the plow) was spent either visiting with Dakota speakers, thinking, or writing in the language as practice for the translations of sermons into Dakota.

As stated in chapter one, the Pond brothers felt strongly that language acquisition was necessary in order to speed up the process of Christian conversion. Samuel would later write of the language, which he deemed far inferior to English, as follows:

The language of the Dakota is not so perfect as one would naturally expect among a people so rude and uncultivated. It is well adapted to their use, and is adequate to the expression of their ideas with force, conciseness, and precision. In its

¹²⁵ Samuel Pond, *Two Volunteer Missionaries Among the Dakotas, or the story of the labors of Samuel W. and Gideon H. Pond* (Congregational Sunday School Publishing Society, 1893), 29-30

¹²⁶ Thomas Williamson to Samuel Pond, February 21st 1839 Pond Family Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, Box 2 file 1

present state it could not be used as the language of a civilized people, for it would require many additions before it could represent all the ideas that are readily expressed in any of the languages of Europe; but it is probably as susceptible of improvement as those languages were when spoken by savages.

From Samuel Pond's point of view, assimilation in part was an overall goal for the community, he felt that the decision of Mahpiya Wicasta and his community was "to turn their attention to agriculture and adopt the customs of civilized people." Thus, his goal, in agreement with Indian agent Lawrence Taliaferro, was for the Dakota, specifically Dakota men, to spend less time hunting and more time farming. Pond defined the change as "abandoning the chase and cultivating the arts of civilized life." He viewed Mahpiya Wicasta as a "man of superior discernment, and of great prudence and foresight," and he noted that the chief was "opposed by many of the other chiefs, and none of them entered heartily into his views."¹²⁷ Though it is well known that some Dakota leaders did not always agree with one another's decisions, as in any society, this statement is simply exaggerated in terms of views on agriculture. Though many leaders were hesitant, and some were certain to be against any changes from the traditional life style, there is plenty of documentation that other leaders did consider at one point or another a shift for their own community towards farming, especially perhaps after witnessing the successful crops at Heyata Otunwe. Prior to Mahpiya Wicasta decision to farm, Wakinyantanka (Big Thunder), also known as Little Crow of Kapoza,¹²⁸ had made

¹²⁷ Samuel Pond, *Dakota Life in the Upper Midwest*, 11

¹²⁸ The village of Kapoza (located in present day south St. Paul), also commonly spelled as Kaposia, translates as "Swift of Foot" and was home village to four generations of leaders who each also went by the hereditary chief name of name of Little Crow. The first and last generations of which also went by the name of

the same choice but had not followed through with the harvest. Another leader, Wambdi Tanka (Big Eagle) from Mahpiya Wicasta's old village of Black Dog had made a request to Taliaferro in 1836 to acquire a plow and harness, and similar requests were also made during this time by other communities including a band of Wahpetunwan¹²⁹ at Lac qui Parle.¹³⁰

Lawrence Taliaferro, a United States army officer had served as Indian agent from 1820-1839, presided over the treaty of 1837 with the Dakota, which resulted in the ceding of all Dakota lands east of the Mississippi River for a sum of money that mostly went to supposed "debt payments" to traders. Taliaferro by this time was supposedly very wary of how exploitative and out of control the fur trade industry had grown in the region due to lack of government regulations, and he felt strongly that Dakota people should rely less on their traditional hunting lifestyle and turn to agriculture fulltime. The harshness of recent winters had added to the difficulties, which when combined with the lack of game, forced the Dakota to move beyond their normal traditional hunting grounds into areas that caused confrontations and increased tensions with neighboring Ojibwe communities. Taliaferro saw farming as a way to keep the peace, and he hoped the Dakota could also "replace their collective worldview with an appreciation for the superiority of economic individualism and private property." As Mary Wingerd writes in *North Country: The Making of Minnesota*, "Neither Taliaferro nor the missionaries who worked to transform

Taoyateduta (His Red Nation). According to Paul Durand, *Where the Waters Gather and the Rivers Meet: An Atlas of the Eastern Sioux*. Self-published, Prior Lake, MN, 1994

¹²⁹ Dwellers Among the Leaves, or Forest.

¹³⁰ Taliaferro journal, March 8, 1836, St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society.

the Indians' way of life questioned their deeply held assumption that the only 'civilized' man must look exactly like themselves.”¹³¹

The idea for the village of Heyata Otunwe first came into fruition in 1829. Mahpiya Wicasta, a member of the Black Dog band of Dakota and was born sometime around 1795.¹³² He had gained much respect amongst his community, proving himself as a great hunter, warrior, and leader he was moved to turn to an agricultural lifestyle. After surviving a (treacherous) near death experience in a snowstorm, the story of his survival is one that our family has told to one another for generations as family lore, and missionary Samuel Pond documented the story as told to him by Mahpiya Wicasta himself. This particular season, Mahpiya Wicasta led a group of men on a winter hunt, and they had been forced to travel a great distance from their summer villages due to the lack of game. The excursion had taken them to the plains near the Missouri River when the party was overtaken by a sudden blizzard. The storm was so violent that the hunters had to lay down, each wrapped in his furs. Mahpiya Wicasta could not communicate with his companions and did not know whether they were dead or alive. The men lay there for three days and nights under the snow. During this time, Mahpiya Wicasta reflected on the request that Indian agent Taliaferro had made urging his community to plant corn crops at Lake Calhoun the year before. When the storm was over, the men found that they were

¹³¹ Mary Wingerd, *North Country: The making of Minnesota*, (Minneapolis: University of Press, 2010), 107

¹³² A second Cloud Man, who was from the Sissitunwan Dakota, is known to have existed during this era, both were signers of the Traverse De Sioux and Mendota 1851 treaties, causing much historical and genealogical confusion among both historians and descendants. It is the Bdewakantunwan Cloud Man, signer of the Mendota Treaty, I reference in this work.

near a “large camp of Indians who came to their assistance.”¹³³ On returning home to Black Dog village, Mahpiya Wicasta persuaded a group of families to accept government assistance to start a new village in which agriculture would be emphasized for subsistence. They were given seed and farm tools, and by August of 1829 they began their new venture at farming.¹³⁴ By the third year the number of Dakota had grown from just 8 to 125 people.¹³⁵ By 1839 that community would grow to a total population of 207, including 72 men, 54 women, and 81 children.¹³⁶ The Spring 1835 crop at Heyate Otunwe consisted of three acres of corn and one acre each of potatoes and cabbage, onions, and beets.¹³⁷ By September they had also acquired a cow and a yoke of oxen, purchased from a British colony residing north of the village site.¹³⁸

Describing an average day in 1834 Samuel writes his mother Sarah,

It is now a sabbath morning but a sabbath morning here is not like a sabbath In Washington. One Indian has been here to borrow my axe another to have me help him split a stick – (another now interrupts me he wants to borrow a hatchet) another has been after a trap which he left me another is now before my window at work with his axe while the women and children are screaming to keep the blackbirds out of their corn. Again I am interrupted by one who tells me that the Indian are going to play ball near our house today hundreds assemble on such occasions. What a congregation for a minister of Christ to preach to! But alas! As far as I know the “glad tidings” of salvation never sounded in the ears of the Dah-

¹³³ 100th Anniversary of the Pond Period of Minneapolis History, Pond Family Scrapbooks, Minnesota Historical Society M187 Box 1 file 5

¹³⁴ Pond, *Dakota or Sioux in Minnesota*, 10–11. According to Taliaferro, the village was founded on August 15, 1829: Taliaferro journal, Sept. 4, 1830.

¹³⁵ Taliaferro journal, August 14, 1833. Minnesota Historical Society.

¹³⁶ Population data from Dakota Land History research files compiled by Bruce White from annuity roles 1839-1852.

¹³⁷ Samuel Pond to mother Sarah Pond, May 31st, 1835, Minnesota Historical Society

¹³⁸ Samuel Pond to Sara Pond, September 2, 1835, Pond Family Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

co-tah; yet I cannot but hope that some will be gathered into the fold of Christ even from among this wild and savage nation.¹³⁹

As Pond observes, a day at the mission site consisted of much activity, and it is apparent that the Dakota were enjoying their life as a community during this era, and they were hard at work learning how to work the plow and harvest crops. That they were expected by these newcomer missionaries to soon convert their spiritual ways, changing the fabric of their cultural selves and Indigenous ways in the process, was not likely something that they necessarily foresaw as important or forthcoming at this point. The significance that these types of observations, where daily living is documented, speak to the ways in which the Pond brothers' personal accounts are most beneficial to the Dakota historical record. While as problematic as the overall missionary agenda may seem to us today, or as hurtful as some of the cultural assumptions expressed may seem, they do leave a legacy in the archives that we can use to help us piece together what life was like for our ancestors at this time.

In January of 1835 Samuel described the mission site and village in a letter home, giving a very detailed description of how this area looked at the time, and how to locate it on foot from Fort Snelling, in the hopes of someday receiving visitors. He writes of crossing a stream of water that the Dakota had named "the little river" and a waterfall,¹⁴⁰ and passing burial mounds before reaching the Bde Maka Ska village, "through the corn fields in your way to the village here you would see the women and girls dressed in

¹³⁹ Samuel W. Pond to Sarah Pond, August 24, 1834, Pond Family Papers, Box 1 File 8 Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.

¹⁴⁰ Referencing Minnehaha Falls (Mni Haha) and Creek (Mni Cistinna). *Mni* is the words for "water," *Haha* is descriptive of the rolling water of a waterfall, and *cistinna* means "small."

something like a petticoat and short gown taking care of their corn, if the corn was ripe enough to eat the men & boys would be there too, if not some of the men & boys would be after deer & fish and some of them would be doing nothing.” In describing Dakota camp,

A narrow lane which the women have fenced by setting up posts about as large as a person’s wrist & tying slender poles to them with bark leads through the cornfields to the village. The village, which stands on the on the southeast side of the lake consists of 14 dwelling houses beside other small ones. The houses are large & two or three families live in some of them. You would not see our house from the village but turning to the right along the east bank of the lake and ascending a hill after walking nearly as far as your house to fathers you would find our house on the high ground which I mentioned before as covered with timber, between the woods and the lake.¹⁴¹

These descriptions offer very visual interpretations of what the land looked like at this time, and the locations, such as the waterfall and burial mounds, continue to be considered sacred sites for Dakota people today.

There is documentation that Dakota were planting corn as early as 1775, but never in large amounts. When they did undertake corn crops, they did so in the month of June. Women often planted in conical mounds where wild artichokes tended to grow, because here the soil was “richer and more mellow.” Samuel Pond recalls, “They never planted until they found ripe strawberries, and then soaked their seed corn until it sprouted, planting it with their hands quite deep. As soon as it showed three or four leaves, they loosened the earth around it with their fingers, and when it was large enough hilled it up thoroughly with hoes. They usually planted a small kind of corn that ripened early, but

¹⁴¹ Samuel Pond to Herman Hine, January 19th, 1835. Pond Family Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

they had larger kinds and often raised good crops.” However, so little was sometimes harvested that the Dakota would eat the bulk of the crop before it ripened.¹⁴²

Dakota people, seen in western anthropological terms were labeled, “hunters and gatherers” and were not traditionally viewed as farmers, though they historically cultivated smaller scale gardens at village sites. Nonetheless, their way of life did not fit so neatly under the western definition of *agriculture* because they traveled at different times of year in accordance with the seasons and harvested their food mostly from wild and native plants, rather than subsisting mostly off of plants that were not indigenous to the area. The Dakota traditionally harvested vegetation, which consisted of foods such as wild rice (psin), wild artichokes (pangi), wild turnips (tipsina), potatoes (bdo), and various berries to supplement their diet.¹⁴³ They also fished and made use of sugar bushes and wild flowers and other plants for both nutritional and medicinal use. Smaller scale ‘garden’ farming and natural vegetation had been sufficient in keeping people fed when game was in abundance, but the decline of the game due to overhunting by the fur trade industry meant that the traditional ways of food cultivation were simply no longer enough to meet their nutritional needs and when faced with starvation they would consume acorns and extract the sap of hickory chips by boiling it.¹⁴⁴

Rather than being a case study for how the Dakota were transformed to fit into V. Gordon Childe’s “Neolithic Revolution,” transitioning from hunting and gathering to

¹⁴² Samuel Pond, *Dakota Life in the Upper Midwest*, 27

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 27-28

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 29

food production through the domestication of plants and animals,¹⁴⁵ the experience of Heyata Otunwe gives us an example of how some Dakota Indigenous communities were not stagnant to making changes within traditional life ways, especially when the survival of the community depended on it. Throughout this era the Dakota continued to hunt when and wherever they could. Contrary to what historians have written about Dakota society using the binary model of farmer Dakota versus traditionalists. Dakota adjustments in their day-to-day adaptations did not mean that these communities were in any way forsaking their indigeneity and/or traditions. Community members were simply open to making changes in how they harvested food during times of need. However, this shift, which occurred during the most unjust of colonizing influences and circumstances, led to the first major change in Dakota dietary traditions; the people were now consuming larger quantities of corn (when crops were successful that is, in some seasons they were not) and started to include other non-indigenous foods into their diet.

Traditionally, in Dakota society it was the women who harvested and tended to crops. It was also women who performed much of the heavy labor in the camp. Women were the ones in charge of moving camp, which included putting up the tipi. Ohiyesa wrote, “The Dakota women were wont to cut and bring their fuel from the woods and, in fact, to perform most of the drudgery of the camp.” Even though camp life was very laborious, the women who were strong and able bodied did not complain about this work.

¹⁴⁵ Gordon Childe’s term was not coined until 1923 but he attributes the domestication of plants and animals (vs. hunting and gathering) as a matter of survival due to climatic shift that occurred 15,000 to 5,000 years ago. This is one theory that explains the shift towards agriculture but it does not explain why others have waited, and some have not made this shift at all.

Ohiyesa goes on to remark, “This of necessity fell to their lot, because the men must follow the game during the day.”¹⁴⁶ The hope of the government agents and missionaries was that these gender roles would be changed with the introduction of the plow into a new way of full-scale farming, and that the men would take on the bulk of the labor in these efforts. In 1839 Stephen Riggs, who had spent a summer visiting Heyata Otunwe in 1837 before being assigned to the nearby Lac qui Parle mission remarked, “The progress made in these branches of female labor has been, to one who sees the situation of that sex in this country, quite encouraging. To induce the men to cut wood and “make corn,” and the women to sew, knit, spin, and weave – duties so essential to civilization – will not be the work of a day, nor a year, but of long and patient exertion.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, the missionary agenda of “civilizing the Sioux” also required changes in the social structure of Dakota family life.

Though the men did join in on planting and harvest work at Bde Maka Ska, a job that both genders considered their role in the community, it was still considered to be more in line with “women’s work” - likely much to the dismay of white “supervisors” such as Gideon Pond. In an 1837 letter penned by Gideon Pond to his sister Ruth he writes,

The Indians at this village plant about 80 acres (I plowed only 15 acres for them this spring) as it has all been planted before it is comparatively easy for them to cultivate it with the hoe. This the women do mostly some of the men however help their wives through the whole of it (the corn belongs to the women). This

¹⁴⁶ Charles Eastman, *Indian Boyhood*, 7

¹⁴⁷ Stephen R. Riggs *The Missionary Herald*, Vol. 35, 1839 pp.312-314. Minnesota Historical Society

year they have harvested about 2300 bush. Of corn and will probably have about 200 bush. of potatoes. Each woman has her little field to take care of.¹⁴⁸

The role of the women in the fields was also to watch out for blackbirds, of which there were two threatening varieties that wreaked havoc on the crops. A well - known painting by military officer and artist Seth Eastman titled “Guarding the Cornfields” documents this act in a visual representation of every day life - a Dakota woman standing on a scaffold platform scaring away the birds. Elders and children also often enjoyed taking part in this all day activity as well. There are a few other paintings documenting life at Bde Maka Ska in existence. On July 4th 1836 George Catlin attended a Dakota lacrosse game and he painted portraits of Taliaferro and Black Dog, but never was able to get a sitting with Mahpiya Wicasta, and there are no paintings or photographs that capture his likeness in existence¹⁴⁹.



¹⁴⁸ Gideon Pond to Ruth Pond, 1837. Pond Family papers, Minnesota Historical Society

¹⁴⁹ Mark Dietrich, *A Good Man in a Changing World: Cloud Man, the Dakota Leader, and His Life and Times*. (Ramsey County History Vol. 36 Spring 2001), 13

Seth Eastman, "Guarding the Corn Fields" 1853¹⁵⁰

As chapter one illustrates, the relationship between the Pond brothers and the Dakota was an interesting combination of both need and considerable lack of trust or respect. Though some of the Dakota valued their friendship with the brothers enough to give them the Dakota names Wambdi Duta (Red Eagle) and Mato Hota (Grey Bear)¹⁵¹ the two men had very little patience for Dakota who did not want to convert to Christianity or who did not take to the agricultural life style in the manner and to the degree they found acceptable. It was likely that there were many Dakota who did not value their close proximity as neighbors and both cultural conflict and miscommunication were common issues, this was not an utopic society by any means, but for the most part the Dakota were able to survive and able to sustain themselves.

In illustrating the significance of this site to Dakota history, and to my family story in particular, I can ascertain that part of its draw as a place for research and study is that it was such a well documented village, due to the abundance of materials that are available to uncover its story. By reading between the lines of this historical record it becomes apparent that Bde Maka Ska presented an interesting dynamic during the pre-war era in that it showed cooperation and being adaptable to a changing environment. Though not perfect solutions by any means they were attainable while keeping true to the

¹⁵⁰ Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁵¹ Letter dated December 28th 1839 from S Riggs to the Pond brothers (addressed to their Dakota names Wanmndiduta and Matorota)

Dakota virtue of Wowacina (Dependability) because they worked to give back to their own. As stated previously, the leader and tribal members of this tiospaye expressed great Wowaditika (Bravery) as well. It is not ever an easy decision to venture off on a new path for anyone, and those at this site had great faith in their creator when they decided to test the waters at Bde Maka Ska.

The reality of this community is not that they were farmers who gave up their Dakota spiritual ways. The decision by Mahpiya Wicasta and his community to take up agriculture can be viewed as acculturation rather than assimilation to western values and culture. Though complete assimilation was Indian agent Taliaferro's ultimate goal -- calling "his" Eatonville "my little Colony of Sioux agriculturists," he would declare responsibility and even ownership over the village. The Dakota community had no intention of changing their culture, language, or traditions at this time. It would be another thirty years before a large scale conversion would really take place, and this story is best told with a fuller picture of the war of 1862 being told, but even then there is no reason to believe that adopting the religious ways of another culture, or attempting to learn to speak English, meant that the old ways were gone.

Regardless, Heyata Otunwe, or "Eatonville," as Taliaferro and other whites preferred to call it, was viewed as an experiment to see if the Dakota could live up western standards, which implied that a combination of Christianity and agriculture equaled a truly civilized body of peoples.¹⁵² This perspective sees Mahpiya Wicasta and his fellow band members as pawns of civilization, on a "progressive" path to assimilation

¹⁵² Taliaferro journal, Sept. 4, 1830, Minnesota Historical Society

towards European ways, and this is how this story often gets told, as if the Dakota had no choice in the matter of whether to participate in this community. From Mahpiya Wicasta's perspective, however, he had a decision to make for the future of his people, and this chance that he took towards a life based on western agricultural standards was supported economically by the local Indian agent and missionaries. These men had had a strong influence to be sure, but the decision was not made against Mahpiya Wicasta's will. It was a time of transformation for the Dakota. Mahpiya Wicasta's decision was not merely economic or cultural but also political, a move toward self-sufficiency. In a time of great unrest and economic and political instability, the Dakota at Bde Maka Ska, with a dependable source of food, were achieving food stability, which they were hoping might bring independence from full government control.

Mahpiya Wicasta was attempting to assert his autonomy as a Dakota by using the benefits of what was offered so that his people would not have to rely entirely on annuities from treaties, which during this time were often late or of poor quality. If his community had relied entirely on what was offered by traders, who often raised their prices to exorbitant amounts with no regulations by the United States government, they would have starved. This leader had a difficult choice to make at this juncture, and he opted to try another way of life for a time, to ensure the future survival of the community. Certain traditional ways of the Dakota were becoming less and less viable, especially with the decline of buffalo from the western regions of the Dakota homelands. The requirement to fend for themselves and feed their families was ever present, and in this sense Mahpiya Wicasta's goals were in tune with that of Taliaferro and the Ponds. He

was a true leader, surviving and weighing future options for his community, but this was not where his vision ended.

Mahpiya Wicasta was not seeking to become something other than a Dakota person. He did not intend to forsake his identity as a Dakota man; he was simply making an honest attempt to adapt to his surroundings, changing with the times as any human being, as well as any community, must in order to live. The change in subsistence patterns did not make the people of this village any less Dakota. Its members not only tried to feed themselves more efficiently but shared their wealth in a typically Dakota way, with neighboring bands, thus ensuring the survival of even more Dakota people. In September 1835, Taliaferro felt the need to lecture the people of Mahpiya Wicasta's village "to explain fully to the Indians -- not to give their corn away to others of their relations -- with other matter of importance to their interests." Despite the fact that the people in this village embraced agriculture, Taliaferro was never able to convince them to stop being Dakota and crop contributions were continuously made to Dakota relatives from other villages.¹⁵³ This was why the community was seen as a "failed experiment" in the eyes of those who promoted it, because they could never seem to convince the Dakota to dry and store food for the winter and to only take care of themselves; on the contrary the Dakota saw this as hoarding and it went against the Dakota wicohan¹⁵⁴ of sharing what you have with the whole.

Contemporary scholars claiming to be sensitive to Dakota perspectives often perpetuate the binary reading of Heyata Otunwe as a "failed experiment" without

¹⁵³ Taliaferro journal, Sept. 7, 1835. Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁵⁴ Dakota Wicohan can be translated as the Dakota "way of life"

questioning the limited gaze of this observation. We see this in the work of Mark Dietrich, Gary Clayton Anderson, and countless others, and at this point it has become an always expected phrase when speaking about Mahpiya Wicasta and his community. However, Mahpiya Wicasta's village was not a failure because it guaranteed the survival of not only his people, but of neighboring Dakota communities, thus ensuring the future lives of their descendants. This was a man that could not predict the future, but who had agency and he made a choice – to take on attributes of a new lifestyle that incorporated pieces of the old along with the new. He saw his people hungry, watched his children and grandchildren struggle, and did what he needed to do -- and for a period of time it worked and the profits from this site nourished many Dakota people from various villages.

It is unknown how long Mahpiya Wicasta intended to remain at the village site; the Dakota had traditionally not stayed at one location throughout the year for this long, though they did still leave the site to hunt on occasion as they always had, and never gave up on the hunt as an important resource for food, hides, and trade. Mahpiya Wicasta's band abandoned the site due to fear of retaliation from the Ojibwe following a war between the two nations in 1839. This community continued to emphasize agriculture in the years following, when they relocated to a new site on the Minnesota River near Bloomington. The Pond brothers formed the Oak Grove Mission site here, near the settlement of Mahpiya Wicasta and his band in 1843. After loss of lands from the Traverse Des Sioux and Mendota treaties of 1851, Mahpiya Wicasta's band was removed to a site along the Minnesota River near what is Yellow Medicine county near Granite

Falls, where government agents built him a house made of brick.¹⁵⁵ He resided here until war broke out in 1862. At this time Mahpiya Wicasta was among those placed in the concentration camp at Fort Snelling over the winter of 1863. He died there and was buried “within sight of the valley he loved so well and not far from where he was born.”¹⁵⁶

The legacy of Mahpiya Wicasta lived on after his death and has served as a source of inspiration to his descendants. His grandson Ohiyesa (Charles Eastman) would survive the exile of his Oyate¹⁵⁷ from the ancestral Minnesota homeland, fleeing his home village up into Canada near Manitoba at the age of four with his uncle and paternal grandmother. In later years would write this recollection of his maternal grandfather before the war,

As I remember him, small as I was. Chief Cloud Man was very fine looking old. His hair was pure white, silky and wavy, altho he must have close to hundred years in 1862, he was active. He comes to my paternal grand mother’s sugar camp, “to see little Hak a dah” that was my childhood name. He had three daughters and two sons. Anpetu inajinwin (“The Day Sets” or “The Day Finishes”), Hanye tu kihn ayewin (Hushes-still-the-night) and Wakan inajin win (Stands Sacred, or Stands Holy, or Stands Mysteriously) but it was meant the first translation. The last is my grand mother. They were all unusually beautiful and spirited one all of them married officers.¹⁵⁸

It’s clear from Ohiyesa’s interpretation that great pride was taken in being the grandson of Mahpiya Wicasta (Cloud Man), and the family retained strong kinship ties even after marriage took them to separate camps.

¹⁵⁵ The 100th Anniversary of the Pond Period of Minneapolis History 1834-1934. Minnesota History Center Pond Family Scrapbooks M187

¹⁵⁶ The 100th Anniversary of the Pond Period of Minneapolis History 1834-1934. Minnesota History Center Pond Family Scrapbooks M187

¹⁵⁷ Dakota word for a group of people that constitute a nation or tribe.

¹⁵⁸ Ohiyesa to H.M. Hitchcock of Minneapolis, MN on September 8 1927. Ayer Collection Newberry Library Chicago, IL

Scholars do not always recognize these interracial unions as valid marriages, however, nor do they acknowledge the existence of mixed race children and grandchildren of Dakota leaders as being authentically Dakota. In fact Gary Clayton Anderson, in his work often describes the marriages between Dakota women and with white or mixed blood men involved in the fur trade as being “purchases.” As if Dakota women were goods to be bought and sold.¹⁵⁹ The Dakota had always intermarried with neighboring communities of people, but the reasoning behind the unions between Dakota women and white men was unique. These men, usually soldiers or agents in the fur trade, had taken Dakota wives in order to infiltrate Dakota communities as a strategy to build relationships for purposes of social acceptance. Catherine J. Denial argues in her recent book *Making Marriage: Husbands and Wives & the American State in Dakota & Ojibwe Country* that the Dakota and incoming white populations had their own views and investment in the connections made from these unions.

...marriage, an economic almost always sexual partnership sealed by the exchange of goods, homes, vows, and sometimes names – encapsulated central truths about each cultural group that met in the upper Midwest. Each community maintained a specific sense of what marriage meant, how it should be celebrated, and what responsibilities were inherent in it’s practice: marriage provided a blueprint for social cohesion.¹⁶⁰

Though social networking was actually akin to Dakota views on marriage, which rested on the function and survival of community life rather than just personal pleasure (though this is not to say people did not marry for love), the difference here lied in the overall

¹⁵⁹ Gary Clayton Anderson, *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota White Relations In the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1997), 67-68

¹⁶⁰ Catherine J. Denial, *Making Marriage: Husbands and Wives & the American State in Dakota & Ojibwe Country* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2013) 56

long term agenda of these relationships. Often these men had no intention of staying with their Dakota wives and would leave them, children included, once they felt that had achieved whatever goal they were seeking.¹⁶¹ To the Dakota, however, these relationships were like sacred ceremonial smoking of the pipe, they were meant to bring people together and create relationships of trust.

Anderson's critique on the village of Heyate Otunwe specifically makes far reaching assumptions about Mahpiya Wicasta's role in Dakota society, belittles the work that Dakota villages put into their crops, and worse yet makes judgmental interpretations on the racial make up of Mahpiya Wicasta's grandchildren. He relates, "Eatonville residents were not agricultural entrepreneurs. If anything, they represented a Dakota subculture. The founders, Cloud Man and Keiyah,¹⁶² had strong kinship alliances with whites, relations that actually subverted their formal tribal roles as warriors. Three of Cloud Man's daughters took white husbands and raised mixed blood families, making his extended family more an appendage of white than of Dakota society."¹⁶³ To describe an entire family as an "appendage" of whites and to determine that these relatives were not a part of Dakota society, thereby stripping them of their identity as Dakota people is not only unfair it is racially insensitive and culturally presumptuous.

¹⁶¹ Mary Wingerd, *North Country; The Making of Minnesota*, 148

¹⁶² Likely an incorrect spelling of the name "Keya," a relative of Mahpiya Wicasta at Bde Maka Ska whose daughter married Philander Prescott, a former interpreter who ran a trading post and was killed in the 1862 war.

¹⁶³ Gary Clayton Anderson. *Kinsmen of Another Kind: Dakota White Relations in the Upper Mississippi Valley, 1650-1962* (St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1997), 144

That Mahpiya Wicasta created relationships with the men that married his daughters did not in any way take away from his status as a warrior, which was a separate role that he played in Dakota society as a young man before becoming a much respected elder and leader in Dakota society. There was no great shame brought upon him, and he was not ousted from the *tiospaye* (which would have been the appropriate action had he lost any kind of status with his community).

Ella Deloria writes that, “Kinship ties being that important blood connections were assiduously traced and remembered, no matter how far back, if only they could be definitely established. That was no easy feat either, since there were no records. However distant a relative might seem according to the white man’s method of reckoning, he would be claimed by Dakotas.”¹⁶⁴ As Deloria describes Dakota society it is apparent that issues with Dakota of mixed race, and debates over who can authentically be declared Dakota had become based on outside interpretations.

Mahpiya Wicasta and his wife Canpadutawin (Choke Cherry Woman) had three daughters that entered unions with white men, but the children born out of these unions were not considered any less Indian in Dakota society simply because they were mixed race. Lawrence Taliaferro married Anpetuinazinwin (Day Rises Woman) the daughter of Mahpiya Wicasta in this fashion. Captain Seth Eastman, who had been stationed at Fort Snelling, married Wakaninazinwin (Stands Sacred), which produced a daughter, Wakantankawin, also known as Winona¹⁶⁵ (English name Mary Nancy Eastman). Out of

¹⁶⁴ Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians*, 102

¹⁶⁵ Kinship term for “first born daughter” Mary Nancy was also known by her Dakota name of Wakantankawin.

mixed blood unions Mahpiya Wicasta had four granddaughters total.¹⁶⁶ One of these granddaughters was placed with the Pond family as they were leaving their mission site by Bde Maka Ska and moving to another site in Bloomington. The father of the child (father by the name of Lamont) had passed away and the reasoning behind this placement by the Dakota mother is not well known.¹⁶⁷

The unions between both Lawrence Taliaferro and Anpetuinazinwin, and Seth Eastman and Wakaninazinwin did not last - as both men left their Dakota wives and children to pursue their careers in other territories and went on to marry white women. Seth Eastman returned with his white wife, Mary Eastman to Fort Snelling in 1840 for a duration of seven years, and though there is no documentation of him having any further contact with Wakaninazinwin he did arrange for Henry Sibley to accommodate supplies for his daughter as needed, just as Taliaferro arranged for his Dakota daughter, Mary, to receive a claim of land under the treaty of 1837.¹⁶⁸

Oral history within the family of Wakaninazinwin and Wakantankawin tells that Eastman's daughter did care for her fathers wife in their home when she was unwell, but it is unclear what the details of their relationship was. Even though Mary Eastman wrote extensively about her time at Fort Snelling she failed to mention the existence of her husbands Dakota child. Sadly, Wakantankawin developed acute tonsillitis shortly after the birth of her youngest son Ohiyesa (Charles Eastman) in 1858 and was cared for at the home of her grandfather Mahpiya Wicasta until she died of her illness. Her son Ohiyesa

¹⁶⁶ Elizabeth Williams, Mary Taliaferro, Jane Lamont, and Mary Nancy Eastman

¹⁶⁷ Jane Lamm Carroll, *'Who Was Jane Lamont?' Anglo-Dakota Daughters in Early Minnesota* (Minnesota History Magazine, Spring 2005), 186

¹⁶⁸ Mark Dietrich, 13

would later recount that, “She was buried about 20 rods southwest from the farmhouse situated about a mile or so east the old agency stone house, on a knoll where or near the brick building of her grandfather Chief Cloud Man [Mahpiya Wicasta] had stood.”¹⁶⁹



Wakantankawin (Mary Nancy Eastman)¹⁷⁰

Sadly, Seth Eastman’s desertion of his Dakota descendants leaves an impression that he was not as compassionate towards the fate of his grandchildren as she could have been. Wakaninazinwin’s son’s Hinhan Duta (Red Owl, later known as John) and Hepidan (David) continued to reside in Minnesota with their father Tawakanhdiota (Many

¹⁶⁹ Ohiyesa to Hitchcock of Minneapolis, MN on September 8 1927. Ayer Collection Newberry Library Chicago, IL

¹⁷⁰ Sketch by Frank Blackwell Mayer. Ayer Collection Newberry Library Chicago, IL.

Lightenings¹⁷¹) and three other siblings after the death of their mother but were caught up in the Dakota United States War of 1862. It is during this time period when these families became separated, a division that is still in existence today. When our ancestors were scattered by war and exile, only small tiospaye groups were able to reconvene. Some Dakota who fled as far as Canada never returned home to the region where their relatives found themselves in South Dakota, Nebraska, Montana, North Dakota (and eventually even back in Minnesota). Today these descendants are residing all over the world, in great numbers, survivors of a strong community of people who outlived all outsider expectations of their demise.

Bde Maka Ska has survived as well, though today this place looks very different then it did in its original state. Indigenous plant life is now gone, covered by concrete. With a major metropolis skyline as a backdrop it is easy to forget that this place to has a story and a name that precedes common knowledge of this city. Nearby street names such as Hennepin and Nicollet idolize white men who visited this territory and created their own stories about this place, without paying respect to a much longer history, a story that deserves to be told and honored in more adequate ways. The Twin Cities area is a place haunted by a past that was, for the most part, strategically forgotten by its own residents for many years. But within these spaces the spirits of ancestors still buried here remain, as does the love of these places by their descendants who still have every intention of protecting the body and legacy of this place. Today many in the local American Indian community have begun to use the name Bde Maka ska in place of Lake Calhoun when

¹⁷¹ Later after converting to Christianity Tawakanhdiota (Many Lightenings) would take the Jacob Eastman, taking the English surname of his deceased wife.

referencing this space within the local Native community, an act of decolonization that reflects the strong ties that indigenous people still maintain with this space.

David Martinez writes “when Eastman [Ohiyesa] recalls that his elders, be it his mother or his grandfather, Cloud Man, not to mention ancestors such as Jingling Thunder, lived along the Minnesota River, where St. Paul and Minneapolis stand today, he is doing more than expressing his nostalgia. Instead, he is making an ethical and political assertion that American Indians, such as the Dakota, possess an inalienable right to claim an ongoing and sovereign place in modern American society.”¹⁷² The need to tell our stories speaks to this act of reclamation, which is an assertion to reclaim not only our role in this society from which we were exiled, but is interpretive of a movement towards self-empowerment with the ultimate goal of asserting the right to care for the regional lands that we honor as our birthplace into this world.

There is always hope that our history at Bde Maka Ska will someday be adequately recognized, and uncovering this history is the first step in this process. As Gwen Westerman and Bruce White state in *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota*, this is “the land where the waters are so clear they reflect the clouds. This land is where our grandmothers’ grandmothers played as children. Carried in our collective memories are stories of this place that reach beyond recorded history.”¹⁷³ It is within the hearts of the descendants of the Dakota people who lived along the shores of Bde Maka Ska that these stories remain living today, and this space will always be home.

¹⁷² Martinez, David *Dakota Philosopher: Charles Eastman and American Indian Thought*, 152

¹⁷³ *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota*. Gwen Westerman and Bruce White, 13

Saidiya Hartman

The Anarchy of Colored Girls
Assembled in a Riotous Manner

Esther Brown did not write a political tract on the refusal to be governed, or draft a plan for mutual aid or outline a memoir of her sexual adventures. A manifesto of the wayward: Own Nothing. Refuse the Given. Live on What You Need and No More. Get Ready to Be Free—was not found among the items contained in her case file. She didn't pen any song lines: *My mama says I'm reckless, My daddy says I'm wild, I ain't good looking, but I'm somebody's angel child.* She didn't commit to paper her ruminations on freedom: *With human nature caged in a narrow space, whipped daily into submission, how can we speak of potentialities?* The cardboard placards for the tumult and upheaval she incited might have said: Don't mess with me. I am not afraid to smash things up. But hers was a struggle without formal declarations of policy, slogan, or credos. It required no party platform or ten-point program. Walking through the streets of New York City, she and Emma Goldman crossed paths, but failed to recognize one another. When Hubert Harrison encountered her in the lobby of the Renaissance Casino after he delivered his lectures on "Marriage versus Free Love" for the Socialist Club, he noticed only that she had a pretty face and a big ass. Esther Brown never pulled a

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soapbox onto the corner of 135th Street and Lenox Avenue to make a speech about autonomy, the global reach of the color line, involuntary servitude, free motherhood, or the promise of a future world, but she well understood that the desire to move as she wanted was nothing short of treason. She knew firsthand that the offense most punished by the state was trying to live free. To wander through the streets of Harlem, to want better than what she had, and to be propelled by her whims and desires was to be ungovernable. Her way of living was nothing short of anarchy.

Had anyone ever found the rough notes for reconstruction jotted in the marginalia of her grocery list or correlated the numbers circled most often in her dog-eared dream book with routes of escape not to be found in Rand McNally's atlas or seen the love letters written to her girlfriend about how they would live at the end of the world, the master philosophers and cardholding radicals, in all likelihood, would have said that her analysis was insufficient, dismissed her for failing to understand those key passages in the *Grundrisse* about the ex-slave's refusal to work—*they have ceased to be slaves, but not in order to become wage labourers*—she nodded in enthusiastic agreement at all the wrong places—*content with producing only what is strictly necessary for their own consumption*—and embraced *indulgence and idleness as the real luxury good*; all of which emphasized the limits of black feminist politics. What did they know of Truth and Tubman? Or the contours of black women's war against the state and capital? Could they ever understand the dreams of another world which didn't trouble the distinction between man, settler, and master? Or recounted the struggle against servitude, captivity, property, and enclosure that began in the barracoon and continued on the ship, where some fought, some jumped, some refused to eat. Others set the plantation and the fields on fire, poisoned the master. They had never listened to Lucy Parsons; they had never read Ida B. Wells. Or envisioned the riot as a rally cry and refusal of fungible life? Only a misreading of the key texts of anarchism could ever imagine a place for wayward colored girls. No, Kropotkin never described black women's mutual aid societies or the chorus in *Mutual Aid*, although he imagined animal sociality in its rich varieties and the forms of cooperation and mutuality found among ants, monkeys, and ruminants. Impossible, recalcitrant domestics weren't yet in his radar or anyone else's. (It would be a decade and a half before Marvel Cooke and Ella Baker wrote their essay "The Bronx Slave Market" and two decades before Claudia Jones's "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman.")

It is not surprising that a *negress* would be guilty of conflating idleness with resistance or exalt the struggle for mere survival or confuse petty acts

for insurrection or imagine a minor figure might be capable of some significant shit or mistake laziness and inefficiency for a general strike or recast theft as a kind of cheap socialism for too fast girls and questionable women or esteem wild ideas as radical thought. At best, the case of Esther Brown provides another example of the tendency to exaggeration and excess that is common to the race. A revolution in a minor key was hardly noticeable before the spirit of Bolshevism or the nationalist vision of a Black Empire or the glamour of wealthy libertines, fashionable socialists, and self-declared New Negroes. Nobody remembers the evening she and her friends raised hell on 132nd Street or turned out Edmund's Cellar or made such a beautiful noise during the riot that their screams and shouts were improvised music, so that even the tone-deaf journalists from the *New York Times* described the black noise of disorderly women as a jazz chorus.

Wayward Experiments

Esther Brown hated to work, the conditions of work as much as the very idea of work. Her reasons for quitting said as much. Housework: *Wages too small*. Laundry work: *Too hard*. Ran away. General Housework: *Tired of work*. Laundress: *Too hard*. Sewing buttons on shirts: *Tired of work*. Dishwasher: *Tired of work*. Housework: *Man too cross*. Live-in-service: I might as well be a slave. At age fifteen, when she left school, she experienced the violence endemic to domestic work and tired quickly of the demand to care for others who didn't care for you. She ran the streets because nowhere else in the world was there anything for her. She stayed in the streets to escape the suffocation of her mother's small apartment, which was packed with lodgers, men who took up too much space and who were too easy with their hands. She had been going around and mixing it up for a few years, but only because she liked doing it. She never went with men *only* for money. She was no prostitute. After the disappointment of a short-lived marriage to a man who wasn't her baby's father (he had offered to marry her but she rejected him), she went to live with her sister and grandmother and they helped her raise her son. She had several lovers to whom she was bound by need and want, not by the law.

Esther's only luxury was idleness and she was fond of saying to her friends, "If you get up in the morning and feel tired, go back to sleep and then go to the theatre at night." With the support of her sister and grandmother and help from gentlemen friends, she didn't need to work on a regular basis. She picked up day work when she was in a pinch and endured a six-week stretch of "Yes, Mrs. I'll get to it" when coerced by need. So really,

she was doing fine and had nearly perfected the art of surviving without having to scrape and bow. She hated being a servant, as did every general houseworker. Service carried the stigma of slavery; white girls sought to avoid it for the same reason—it was *nigger work*. Had her employers suspected that the better the servant, the more severe the hatred of the mistress, Esther would not have been “entrusted to care for their precious darlings.”

Why should she toil in a kitchen or factory in order to survive? Why should she work herself to the bone for white people? She preferred strolling along Harlem’s wide avenues and losing herself in cabarets and movie houses. In the streets, young women and men displayed their talents and ambitions. It was better than staying home and staring at four walls. In Harlem, strolling was a fine art, *an everyday choreography of the possible*; it was the collective movement of the streets, headless and spilling out in all directions, yet moving and drifting en masse, like a swarm or the swell of an ocean; it was a long poem of black hunger and striving. The bodies rushing through the block and idling on corners and hanging out on front steps were an assembly of the damned, the venturesome, and the dangerous. “All modalities sang a part in this chorus” and the refrains were of infinite variety. On the avenues, the possibilities were glimmering and evanescent, even if fleeting and most often unrealized. The map of the *might could* or *what might be* was not restricted to the literal trail of Esther’s footsteps or anyone else’s. Hers was an errant path cut through the heart of Harlem in search of the open city, *l’ouverture*, inside the ghetto. Wandering and drifting was how she engaged the world and how she perceived it. The thought of what might be possible was indistinguishable from moving bodies and the transient rush and flight of black folks in this city-within-the-city. Streetwalking in the black capital emboldened the wayward, shored up the weary, stoked the dreams of the wretched, and encouraged wanderlust.

As she drifted through the city, a thousand ideas about who she might be and what she might do rushed into her head, but she was uncertain what to make of them. Her thoughts were inchoate, fragmentary, wild. How they might become a blueprint for something better was unclear. Esther was fiercely intelligent. She had a bright, alert face and piercing eyes that announced her interest in the world. This combined with a noticeable pride made the seventeen-year-old appear substantial, a force in her own right. Even the white teachers at the training school, who disliked her and were reluctant to give a colored girl any undue praise, conceded she was very smart, although quick to anger because of too much pride. She insisted on being treated no differently than the white girls, so they said she was

trouble. The problem was not her capacity; it was her attitude. The brutality she experienced at the Hudson Training School for Girls taught her to fight back, to strike out. The teachers told the authorities that she had enjoyed too much freedom. It had ruined her and made her into the kind of young woman who would not hesitate to smash things up. Freedom in her hands, if not a crime, was a threat to public order and moral decency. *Excessive liberty had ruined her.* The social worker concurred, “With no social considerations to constrain her, she was ungovernable.”



Esther Brown was wild and wayward. She longed for another way of living in the world. She was hungry for enough, for otherwise, for better. She was hungry for beauty. In her case, the aesthetic wasn't a realm separate and distinct from the daily challenges of survival, rather the aim was to make an art of subsistence, a lyric of being young, poor, gifted, and black. Yet, she did not try to create a poem or song or painting. What she created was Esther Brown. *That was the offering, the bit of art, that could not come from any other. She would polish and hone that. She would celebrate that everyday something had tried to kill her and failed.* She would make a beautiful life. What was beauty if not “the intense sensation of being pulled toward the animating force of life?” Or the yearning “to bring things into relation . . . and with as much urgency as though one's life depended upon it.” To the eyes of the world, her wild thoughts, dreams of another world, and longing to escape from drudgery were likely to lead to tumult and upheaval, to open rebellion. Esther Brown didn't need a husband or a daddy or a boss telling her what to do. But a young woman who flitted from job to job and lover to lover was considered immoral and destined to become a threat to the social order, a menace to society. Detective Brady said as much when he arrested Esther and her friends.



What the law designated as crime were the forms of life created by young black women in the city. The modes of intimacy and affiliation being fashioned in the ghetto, the refusal to labor, the forms of gathering and assembly, the practices of subsistence and getting over were under surveillance and targeted by the police as well as the sociologists and the reformers who gathered the information and made the case against them, forging their lives into tragic biographies of poverty, crime, and pathology. The activity required to reproduce and sustain life is, as Marx noted, a definite form of expressing life, it is an art of survival, social poesis. Subsistence—scraping

by, getting over, making ends meet—entailed an ongoing struggle to produce a way to live in a context in which poverty was taken for granted and domestic work or general housework defined the only opportunity available to black girls and women. The acts of the wayward—the wild thoughts, reckless dreams, interminable protests, spontaneous strikes, nonparticipation, willfulness, and bold-faced refusal redistributed the balance of need and want and sought a line of escape from debt and duty in the attempt to create a path elsewhere.

Mere survival was an achievement in a context so brutal. How could one enhance life or speak of its potentialities when confined in the ghetto, when daily subjected to racist assault and insult, and conscripted to servitude? *How can I live?*—It was a question Esther reckoned with every day. Survival required acts of collaboration and genius. Esther’s imagination was geared toward the clarification of life—“what would sustain material life and enhance it, something that entailed more than the reproduction of physical existence.” The mutuality and creativity necessary to sustain life in the context of intermittent wages, controlled deprivation, economic exclusion, coercion, and antiblack violence often bordered on the extralegal and the criminal. Beautiful, wayward experiments entailed what W. E. B. DuBois described as an “open rebellion” against society.

This speculative history of the wayward is an effort to narrate the open rebellion and beautiful experiment produced by young women in the emergent ghetto, a form of racial enclosure that succeeded the plantation. The narrative utilizes the reports and case files of the reformatory, private investigators, psychologists, and social workers to challenge the primary tenets of these accounts, the most basic of these assumptions being that the lives represented required intervention and rehabilitation and that the question—who are you?—is indistinguishable from one’s status as a social problem. The method is critical fabulation. State violence, surveillance, and detention produce the archival traces and institutional records that inform the reconstruction of these lives; but desire and the want of something better decide the contours of the telling. The narrative emulates the errant path of the wayward and moves from one story to another by way of encounter, chance meeting, proximity, and the sociality created by enclosure. It strives to convey the aspiration and longing of the wayward and the tumult and upheaval incited by the chorus.

For the most part, the history of Esther and her friends and the potentiality of their lives has remained unthought because no one could imagine young black women as social visionaries, radical thinkers, and innovators in

the world in which these acts took place. This latent history has yet to emerge: A *revolution in a minor key* unfolded in the city and young black women were its vehicle. It was driven not by uplift or the struggle for recognition or citizenship, but by the vision of a world *that would guarantee to every human being free access to earth and full enjoyment of the necessities of life, according to individual desires, tastes, and inclinations*. In this world, free love and free motherhood would not be criminalized and punished. To appreciate the beautiful experiments of Esther Brown and her friends, one needs first to conceive something as unimaginable and unprecedented as *too fast girls and surplus women* and *whores* producing “thought of the outside,” that is, thought directed toward the outer bound of what is possible. Such far-reaching notions of *what could be* were the fruit of centuries of mutual aid, which was organized in stealth and paraded in public view.

Collaboration, reciprocity, and shared creation defined the practice of mutual aid. It was and remains a collective practice of survival for those bereft of the notion that life and land, human and earth could be owned, traded, and made the private property of anyone, those who would never be self-possessed, or envision themselves as acquisitive self-interested proprietors, or measure their life and worth by the ledger or the rent book, or long to be the settler or the master. Mutual aid did not traffic in the belief that the self existed distinct and apart from others or revere the ideas of individuality and sovereignty, as much as it did singularity and freedom. The mutual aid society survived the Middle Passage and its origins might be traced to traditions of collectivity, which flourished in the stateless societies that preceded the breach of the Atlantic and perdured in its wake. This form of mutual assistance was remade in the hold of the slave ship, the plantation, and the ghetto. It made good the ideals of the commons, the collective, the ensemble, the always-more-than-one of existing in the world. The mutual aid society was a resource of black survival. The ongoing and open-ended creation of new conditions of existence and the improvisation of life-enhancing and free association was a practice crafted in social clubs, tenements, taverns, dance halls, disorderly houses, and the streets.



Esther had been working for two days as a live-in domestic on Long Island when she decided to return to Harlem to see her baby and have some fun. It was summer and Harlem was alive. She visited her son and grandmother, but stayed at her friend Josephine’s place because she always had a house full

of folks dancing, drinking, carousing, and vamping. Esther had planned to return to her job the next day, but one day stretched into several. People tended to lose track of time at Josephine's place. Five West 134th street had a reputation as a building for lover's secret assignations, house parties, and gambling. The apartment was in the thick of it, right off Fifth Avenue in the blocks of Harlem tightly packed with crowded tenements and subject to frequent police raids. Esther was playing cards when Rebecca arrived with Krause, who said he had a friend he wanted her to meet. She didn't feel like going out, but they kept pestering her and Josephine encouraged her to give it a try. Why not have some fun?



Do you want to have a good time? Brady asked. Rebecca gave him the once-over. A smile and the promise of some fun was all the encouragement Rebecca needed. Esther didn't care one way or the other. She suggested they go back to Josephine's, but Brady didn't want to, so they decided to hang out in the hallway of a nearby building. A tenement hallway was as good as any lounge. In the dark passage, Brady snuggled up with Rebecca, while his friend tried to pair up with Esther. Krause asked Brady for fifty cents to go buy some liquor. That was when Brady said he was a detective. Krause took off quick, as if he knew what was coming as soon as the man opened his mouth. He would have gotten away if Brady hadn't shot him in the foot.

At the precinct, Detective Brady charged Krause with White Slavery, and Esther and Rebecca with Violation of the Tenement House Law. They were taken from the precinct to the Jefferson Market Court for an arraignment. Since they were seventeen years old and didn't have any previous offenses they were sent to the Empire Friendly Shelter while they awaited trial, rather than confined in the Tombs, which was what everyone called the prison cells above the Jefferson courthouse. A day later the charges were dismissed against Krause because the other detective failed to appear in court. They were waiting to appear before the judge when Krause sent word that he was free. Esther and Rebecca wouldn't be so lucky. It was hard to call the cursory proceedings and routine indifference at the Women's Court a hearing, since the magistrate court had no jury, produced no written record of the events, required no evidence but the police officer's word, failed to consider the intentions of the accused, or even to require the commitment of a criminal act. *The likelihood of future criminality* decided their sentence rather than any violation of the law. The magistrate judge barely looked at the two colored girls before sentencing them to three years at the reformatory. The

social worker recommended they be sent to Bedford Hills to rescue them from a life in the streets.



Harlem was swarming with vice-investigators and undercover detectives and do-gooders who were all intent on keeping young black women off the streets, even if it meant arresting every last one of them. Street strollers, exhausted domestics, nocturnal creatures, wannabe chorus girls, and too loud colored women were arrested on a whim or suspicion or likelihood. In custody, the reasons for arrest were offered: Loitering. Riotous and Disorderly. Solicitation. Violation of the Tenement House Law. Who knew that being too loud, or loitering in the hallway of your building or on the front stoop was a violation of the law; or making a date with someone you met at the club, or arranging a casual hookup, or running the streets was prostitution? Or sharing a flat with ten friends was criminal anarchy? Or the place where you stayed was a disorderly house, and could be raided at any moment? The real offense was blackness. Your status made you a criminal. The tell-tale sign of future criminality was a dark face.

Until the night of July 17, 1917, Esther Brown had been lucky and eluded the police, although she had been under their gaze all the while. The willingness to have a good time with a stranger or the likelihood of engaging in an immoral act—sexual intimacy outside of marriage—was sufficient evidence of wrongdoing. To be willing or *willful* was the offense to be punished. The only way to counter the presumption of wrongdoing and establish innocence was to give a good account of one's self. Esther failed to do this as did many young women who passed through the court. It didn't matter that Esther had not solicited Krause or asked for or accepted any money. She assumed she was innocent, but the Women's Court found otherwise. Esther's inability to give an account of herself, capable of justifying and explaining how she lived or, at least, willing to atone for her failures and deviations, were among the offenses levied against her. She readily admitted that she hated to work, not bothering to distinguish between the conditions of work available to her and some ideal of work that she and none she knew had ever experienced. She was convicted because she was unemployed and "leading the life of a prostitute." One could lead the life of a prostitute without actually being one.

With no proof of employment, Esther was indicted for vagrancy under the Tenement House Law. Vagrancy was an expansive and virtually all-encompassing category, like *the manner of walking* in Ferguson, it was a ubiquitous

charge that made it easy for the police to arrest and prosecute young women with no evidence of crime or act of lawbreaking. In the 1910s and 1920s, vagrancy statutes were used primarily to target young women for prostitution. To be charged was to be sentenced since the Women's Court had the highest rate of conviction of all the New York City courts. Nearly 80 percent of those who appeared before the magistrate judge were sentenced to serve time. It didn't matter if it was your first encounter with the law. Vagrancy statutes and tenement house laws made young black women vulnerable to arrest and transformed sexual acts, even consensual ones with no cash exchanging hands, into criminal offenses. What mattered was not what you had done, but the prophetic power of the police to predict future crime, to anticipate the mug shot in the bright eyes and intelligent face of Esther Brown.

The Future of Involuntary Servitude

In 1349, the first vagrancy statute was passed in England. The law was a response to the shortage of labor in the aftermath of the Black Plague and it was designed to conscript those who refused to labor. The vagrancy laws of England were adopted in the North American colonies and invigorated with a new force and scope after Emancipation and the demise of Reconstruction. They replaced the Black Codes, which had been deemed unconstitutional, but resurrected involuntary servitude in guises amenable to the terms liberty and equality.

In the South, vagrancy laws became a surrogate for slavery, forcing ex-slaves to remain on the plantation and radically restricting their movement, recreating slavery in all but name. In northern cities, vagrancy statutes too were intended to compel the labor of the idle, and, more importantly, to control the propertyless. Those without proof of employment were considered *likely to commit* or be involved in vice and crime. Vagrancy statutes provided the legal means to master the newly masterless. The origins of the workhouse and the house of correction can be traced to these efforts to force the idle to labor, to manage and regulate the ex-serf and ex-slave when lordship and bondage assumed a more indirect form. The statutes restricted and regulated black movement and punished the forms of intimacy that could not be categorized or settled by the question: *Is this man your husband?* Those without proof of employment and refusing to labor were in all likelihood guilty of crime—vagrancy or prostitution.

Vagrancy was a status, not a crime. It was *not* doing, withholding, non-participation, the refusal to be settled or bound by contract to husband or

employer. This refusal of a social order based on monogamous marriage or wage labor was penalized. Common law defined the vagrant as “someone who wandered about without visible means of support.” William Blackstone in his 1765 *Commentaries on the Law of England* defined vagrants as those who “wake on the night and sleep in the day and haunt taverns and ale-houses and roust about; and no man knows from where they came or whither they go.” The statutes targeted those who maintained excessive notions of freedom and imagined that liberty included the right *not* to work. In short, vagrants were the deracinated—migrants, wanderers, displaced persons, and strangers.

Status offenses were critical to the remaking of a racist order in the aftermath of slavery and accelerated the growing disparity between black and white rates of incarceration in northern cities at the beginning of the twentieth century. While the legal transformation from slavery to freedom is most often narrated as the shift from status to contract, from property to subject, from slave to Negro, vagrancy statutes make apparent the continuities and entanglements between a diverse range of unfree states—from slave to servant, from servant to vagrant, from domestic to prisoner, from idler to convict and felon. Involuntary servitude wasn’t one condition—chattel slavery—nor was it fixed in time and place; rather it was an ever-changing mode of exploitation, domination, accumulation (the severing of will, the theft of capacity, the appropriation of life), and confinement. Antblack racism fundamentally shaped the development of “status criminality.” In turn, status criminality was tethered ineradicably to blackness.

Not quite two centuries after the conspiracy to burn down New York was hatched at a black-and-tan dive called Hughson’s Tavern, black assembly and the threat of tumult still made New York’s ruling elite quake in fear. The state was as intent on preventing the dangers and consequences posed by *Negroes assembled in a riotous manner*. Gatherings that were too loud or too unruly or too queer; hotels and cabarets that welcomed black and white patrons; black-and-tan dives frequented by Chinese men and white girls or black women with Italian paramours; or house parties and buffet flats offering refuge to pansies, lady lovers, and inverts—were deemed disorderly, promiscuous, and morally depraved. These forms of intimate association and unregulated assembly threatened the public good by transgressing the color line and eschewing the dominant mores. The lives of the wayward were riotous, queer, disposed to extravagance and wanton living. This promiscuous sociality fueled a moral panic identified and mobilized by the city’s ruling elite to justify the extravagant use of police power.

Penal laws against disorderly conduct, disorderly houses, disorderly persons, unlawful assembly, criminal anarchy, and vagrancy were intended to regulate intimacy and association, police styles of comportment, dictate how one assumed a gender and who one loved, and thwart free movement and errant paths through the city.

Esther Brown was confronted with a choice that was no choice at all: volunteer for servitude or be commanded by the law. Vagrancy statutes were implemented and expanded to conscript young colored women to domestic work and regulate them in proper households, that is, male-headed households, with a proper *he*, not merely someone pretending to be a husband or merely outfitted like a man, not lovers passing for sisters or a pretend *Mrs.* shacking up with a boarder, not households comprising three women and a child. For state authorities, black homes were disorderly houses as they were marked by the taint of promiscuity, pathology, and illegality, sheltering nameless children and strangers, nurturing intimacy outside the bounds of the law, not organized by the sexual dyad, and not ruled by the father; and producing criminals not citizens. The domestic was the locus of danger; it threatened social reproduction rather than ensured it. *Is this man your husband? Where is the father of your child?* Such questions, if not answered properly, might land you in the workhouse or reformatory. With incredible ferocity, state surveillance and police power acted to shape the black household and regulate intimate life. Affiliation and kinship organized along alternate lines, *an open mesh of possibilities*, was suspect and likely to yield crime. The discretionary power granted the police in discerning *future crime* would have an enormous impact on black social life and the making of the ghetto.

The plantation, the ghetto, and the prison were coeval; one mode of confinement and enclosure did not supersede the other, but extended the state of servitude, violence, and death in a new guise. The afterlife of slavery unfolded in a tenement hallway and held Esther Brown in its grasp. Plainly put, the Negro problem in the North was the arrival of the ex-slave in the city, and the moral panic and the race riots that erupted across the country document the reach of the plantation and the enduring status of the black as fungible life, eternal alien, and noncitizen.

The plantation was not abolished, but transformed. The problem of crime was the threat posed by the black presence in the city; the problem of crime was the wild experiment in black freedom; and the efforts to manage and regulate this crisis provided a means of solidifying and extending the color line that defined urban space, reproducing the disavowed apartheid of everyday life.

State violence, incarceration, and controlled depletion defined the world that Esther Brown wanted to destroy. It made her the sort of girl who would not hesitate to smash things up.

Contraband Love

The letter her ex-husband sent didn't say if the article appeared in the metro column of *The Amsterdam News* or the New York City Briefs in *The Chicago Defender* or the City News section of the *New York Herald*, in which case only a few lines dedicated to the when, where, and how would have appeared, just the cold hard facts, perhaps accompanied by statistics that documented the rising rate of prostitution, or the increasing numbers of young colored women arrested for solicitation and violation of the Tenement House Law. It would not have been a showy or sensationalist headline like *Silk and Lights Blamed for Harlem's Girl Demise* or a lead story of moral crisis and sexual panic manufactured by vice commissions and urban reformers. If the details were especially sordid, a column or two might be devoted to a young woman's demise.

All her ex-husband said was that "a rush of sadness and disbelief had washed over him" as he tried to figure out how *his Esther, his baby*, had come to be involved in such trouble. He encouraged her to be a good girl and he promised to take care of her when she was released, something he had failed to do in the few months they lived together as husband and wife in her mother's home. Now that it was too late, he was trying to be steady. The letter was posted on army stationery and it was filled with assurances about his love, promises about trying to be a better man and pleading that she try to do better. *You will not live happy*, he cautioned, *until [your] wild world end(s)*. He hoped she had learned a *long lost lesson in the wild world of fun and pleasure*.

Esther's grandmother and sister didn't know that she had been arrested until they saw her name in the daily newspaper. They were in disbelief. It wasn't true. It couldn't be. Anyone in Harlem could tell you that stool pigeons were paid to lie. Everyone knew Krause was working for the cops. He would sell his own mama for a dollar. Besides, if anyone was to blame for Esther's trouble, her grandmother thought, it was her mother, Rose. She was jealous of the girl, mostly because of the attention paid to Esther by the men boarding in the rented rooms of her flat. Rose was living with one of them as her husband, although the relation, properly speaking, was outside the bounds of the law.

When Rose heard the news of her daughter's arrest it confirmed what she believed: the girl was headed for trouble. Some time in the country and not running the streets might steady her, she confided to the social worker,

tipping the hand that would decide her daughter's fate. What passed for maternal concern was a long list of complaints about Esther's manner of living. Rose told the colored probation officer, Miss Campbell, that her daughter had "never worked more than six weeks at a time and usually stayed in a place only a couple of weeks." She just wouldn't stay put or keep a job. She had a good husband and she left him. She was young and flighty and did not want to be tied down to one husband. What more was there to say?

The neighbors told a different story. *The mother is the one who needs to be sent away.* Everyone knew Rose Saunders consorted with one of the men who lodged in her apartment. "What kind of example is that for a girl? That's no straight road."

The letter from Esther's girlfriend was nothing like her husband's. It didn't plead for her to be a good girl or beg her to leave the wild world behind or caution her to take the straight road, but instead reminded her of all the pleasures awaiting her when she received her *free papers*, not the least of these being Alice's love:

Dear Little Girl, Just a few lines to let you know that everything is o.k. I suppose you think I was foolish to leave Peekskill but I could not stand the work. I have not been used to working so hard when I leave Bedford and why should I do so when I don't have to, you stay where you are as you expect to live in New York when you are free. . . . It will surprise you, I am going to be married next month, not that I care much but for protection. I went to New York Sunday and seen quite a number of old friends and heard all the scandal and then some . . . New York is wide open, plenty of white stuff & everything you want so cheer up there are plenty of good times in store for you. So I must close with the same old love wishing you well.

It is not clear if Esther had the chance to read Alice's letter. This missive of contraband love was seized by prison authorities and included with the disciplinary reports and the notes from the staff meetings, augmenting the folio of documents that formed the case file and invited greater punishment.

Attitude: She is inclined to be sullen and defiant. Came to Bedford with the impression that this was a very bad place and decided that she would not let any of the matrons run over her." She said "If they keep yelling at her they'll find that isn't the way to treat Esther Brown." And "Esther Brown isn't going to stand for that."

Note: Patient is a colored girl with good mentality who has had her own way and enjoyed much freedom. The influence of her family and her environment have both been bad. She is the hyperkinetic type which craves continually activity and amusement.

Riot and Refrain

The reporters were most interested in what happened to the white girls. Ruth Carter, Stella Kramer, and Maizie Rice were the names that appeared in the newspapers. Ruth was the first one to tell the State Prison Commission about the terrible things done to them at Bedford Hills: they were handcuffed in the cells of Rebecca Halls, they were stripped and their mouths gagged with dirty rags and harsh soap, they were beaten with rubber hoses and handcuffed to their cots, they were hung from the doors of their cells with their feet barely reaching the ground, they were given the “water treatment” and their faces immersed in water until they could hardly breathe, and they were isolated for weeks and months behind the double doors of the cells in the Disciplinary Building. The double door prevented any light from entering and the lack of air made the dank smell of the dark chamber and their waste and rank unwashed bodies unbearable. The stench, the sensory deprivation, and the isolation were intended to break them.

There were two hundred and sixty-five inmates and twenty-one babies. The young women ranged in age from fourteen to thirty and the majority were city girls exiled to the country for moral reform. They came from crowded tenements. Eighty percent of the young women at Bedford had been subjected to some form of punishment—confined in their rooms for a week, confined in the cells of Rebecca Hall, confined in the Disciplinary Building. Even the State Prison Commission was forced to concede it was cruel and unusual punishment. It was a reformatory in name only and there was nothing modern or therapeutic about its disciplinary measures. When asked if hanging girls up, handcuffing them, and beating them with hoses was abusive, one matron replied: “If you don’t quell them or rule them with an iron hand you cannot live with these people.” When questioned as to why she failed to mention such punishments, the prison superintendent, Miss Helen Cobb, responded that she hadn’t mentioned such practices because she considered them “treatment,” not punishment.

The smallest infractions invited harsh punishment: a complaint about dinner, a sheet of stationery found tucked under a mattress, or dancing in a lewd manner might be punished with a week locked in your room or confined in Rebecca Hall or stripped and tied to a cell door in the Disciplinary building. Black girls were more likely to be punished and to be punished more harshly.

Loretta Michie was the only colored girl quoted in the newspaper article. The prison authorities resented that the inmates had been named at all. It fueled the public hysteria about the abuses and endowed the atrocities

with a face and a story. Loretta and several other black women testified before the State Prison Commission about how Miss Cobb and Miss Minogue treated them. Perhaps it was because the sixteen-year-old had curly hair, dark brown eyes, and a pretty face that she caught the attention of the reporters and prompted them to record her name. Perhaps it was the graphic account of brutality that made her words more noteworthy than the others. Did she describe more vividly the utter aloneness of the dungeon, how it felt to be cut off from the world and cast out again, and that in the darkness shouting out and hearing the voices of others was your lifeline; or how your heart raced because you were afraid you might drown, even when you knew it was just a pail of water, but hell it might as well have been the Atlantic. The fight to breathe waged again. How long could one live under water? The world went black and when your eyes opened you were beached on the dark floor of an isolation cell. Was the body suspended from the door of a neighboring cell yours too? The pain moving and cutting across the body shared by all those confined in the ten cells of the D.B.? The newspaper offered a pared-down description: Loretta Michie testified that she had been “handcuffed to the bars of her cell, with the tips of her toes touching the floor, for so long that she fell when she was released.” She also noted that the colored girls were assigned to the worst jobs in the kitchen, the laundry, and the psychiatric unit.

Other women reported being stripped and tied naked to their cots, they were fed bread and water for a week, they were strung up and suspended in their cells, denied even the small relief of toes touching the ground. Esther too could have told them about Rebecca Hall; like Loretta Michie she had been confined in the Disciplinary Building several times; she could have told them about Peter Quinn and the others slapping and kicking the girls had she been asked to appear. But Peter Quinn didn’t need anybody to testify against him. He was one of the few guards who owned up to some of the terrible things he had done, mostly to make Miss Cobb look bad. By his own admission, he helped string up girls about one hundred times. He was the one who “showed Miss Minogue how to first handcuff a girl to the cell partition with her hands back of her, and that he knows that at that time the feet were always wholly on the floor.” Under the direction of Miss Minogue the practice “just grew” to lift them a little higher.

In December 1919, the women in Lowell Cottage made their voices heard even if no one wanted to listen. Lowell, Flowers, Gibbons, Sanford, and Harriman were the cottages reserved for black prisoners. After a scandal about interracial sex and “harmful intimacy” erupted in 1914, segregation had been imposed and cottages sorted by race as well as age, status, addiction,

and capacity. A special provision of the Charities Law permitted the state to practice racial segregation while safeguarding it from legal claims that such practices were unconstitutional and a violation of the state's civil rights laws.

The newspaper described the upheaval and resistance of Lowell Cottage as a sonic revolt, a "noise strike," the "din of an infernal chorus." Collectively the prisoners had grown weary of gratuitous violence and being punished for trifles, so they sought retribution in noise and destruction. They tossed their mattresses, they broke windows, they set fires. Nearly everyone in the cottage was shouting and screaming and crying out to whoever would listen. They pounded the walls with their fists, finding a shared and steady rhythm that they hoped might topple the cottage, make the walls crumble, smash the cots, destroy the reformatory so that it would never be capable of holding another "innocent girl in the jailhouse." The "wailing shrieking chorus" protested the conditions of the prison, insisted they had done nothing to justify confinement; they refused to be treated as if they were not human, as if they were waste. The *New York Times* reported: "The noise was deafening. Almost every window of the cottage was crowded with Negro women who were shouting, angry and laughing hysterically. The uproarious din emanating from the cottage smote the ears of the investigators before they got within sight of the building." Songs and shouts were the vehicle of struggle.

The chorus spoke with one voice. All of them screamed and cried about the unfairness of being sentenced to Bedford, arrested in a frame-up, the three years of life stolen. Were they nothing or nobody? Could they be seized and cast away and no one in the world would care or even give a damn? Were Harriman and Gibbons and Sanford and Flowers also up in arms? A month after Miss Minogue put her in a chokehold, beat her head with a set of keys, pummeled her with a rubber hose, Mattie Jackson joined the chorus. Thinking about her son and how he was growing up without her made her wail and shout louder. It is not that she or any of the others imagined that their pleas and complaints would gain a hearing outside the cottage or that the findings of the New York State Commission of Prisons would make any difference for them. This riot, like the ones that preceded it and the ones that would follow in its wake, was not unusual. What was unusual was that the riot had been reported at all. The state investigation of abuse and torture at the reformatory made rioting colored women a newsworthy topic.

Loretta, or Mickey as some of her friends called her, beat the walls, bellowed, cursed, and screamed. At fourteen years old, before she had her first period, before she had a lover, before she penned lines like "sweetheart

in my dreams I'm calling you," Mickey waged a small battle against the prison and the damned police and the matrons and the parole officers and the social workers. She was unwilling to pretend that her keepers were anything else. The cottages were not homes. Miss Cobb didn't give a damn about her and Miss Minogue was a thug in a skirt. The matrons were brutes and not there to guide or provide counsel or assist them in making better lives, but to manage and control, punish and inflict harm. They let you know what they thought: you were being treated too well and each cruel punishment was deserved and the only way to communicate with the inmates, especially the colored girls. Miss Dawley, the sociologist, interviewed them. She asked questions and wrote down everything they said, but her recommendation was always the same: prison is the only place for her.

Mickey rebelled without knowing the awful things the prison staff said about her in their meetings—she was simple-minded and a liar, she thought too much of herself, “she had been with a good many men.” The psychologist, Dr. Spaulding, said she was trying to appear young and innocent, but clearly wasn't. Was it possible that she was just fourteen years old? Miss Cobb decided the matter: “let's just assume she is eighteen.” Everyone believed prison was the best place for a young black woman on an errant path.

Staying out all night at a dance with her friends or stealing \$2.00 to buy a new dress so she could perform on stage was sufficient cause to commit her. Mickey cursed and pummeled the wall with her fist and refused to stop no matter how tired. She didn't care if they threw her in the Disciplinary Building every single day, she would never stop fighting them, she would never submit.

Disciplinary Report: Very troublesome. She has been in Rebecca Hall and the Disciplinary Building. Punished continually. Friendship with the white girls.

She had been in the D.B. more times than her disciplinary sheet revealed. In Rebecca Hall, she schemed and plotted and incited the other girls to rioting and disorder. She was proud to have been the cause of considerable trouble her entire time at Bedford. When confined in the prison buildings, she managed to send a few letters to her girlfriend. The love letter seized by the matron was written in pencil on toilet paper because she was not allowed pen and paper in confinement. The missive to her girlfriend Catherine referred to the earlier riots of 1917 and 1918 and expressed the spirit of rage and resistance that fueled the December action in Lowell:

I get so utterly disgusted with these g-d—cops I could kill them. They may run Bedford and they may run some of the pussies in Bedford but they are never going to run Loretta Michie. . . . It doesn't pay to be a good fellow in a joint of this kind, but I don't regret anything I ever done I have been to prison (Rebecca Hall) three times and D.B. once and may go again soon and a few others and myself always got the Dirty End. Everytime prison would cut up in 1918 or 1917 when police came up whether we were cutting up or not we were [there]. . . . They would always string us up or put us in the Stairway sheets but we would cut up all the more. Those were the days when J.M. [Julia Minogue] was kept up all night and all day we would wait until she go to bed about 1 o'clock at night and then we would start and then we would quiet down about 4 o'clock and start again about 8 in the morning. . . . Then there was a good gang here then we could have those days back again 'if' we only had the women but we haven't so why bother. . . . I have only one more day but when you've had as much punishment as I have you don't mind it. Well the Lights are being extinguished so Good Night and Sweet pleasant dreams. Loyally yours, Black Eyes or Mickey

Lowell Cottage roared with the sounds of upheaval and revolt. They smashed the windows of the cottage. Broken windows linked the disorder of the prison to the ghetto, explained the sociologist in a lecture on the culture of poverty. Glints and shards of shattered glass were the language of the riot. Furniture was destroyed. Walls were defaced. Fires started. Like Esther Brown, Mickey didn't hesitate to smash things up. The cottage mates yelled and shouted and cursed for hours. Each voice blended with the others in a common tongue. Every utterance and shout made plain the truth: riot was the only remedy within reach.



It was the dangerous music of upheaval. En masse they announced what had been endured, what they wanted, what they intended to destroy. Bawling and screaming and cursing made the cottage tremble and corralled them together into one large pulsing formation, an ensemble reveling in the beauty of the strike. Young women hanging out of the windows, crowding at the doors, and huddling on shared beds sounded a complete revolution, an upheaval of the given, an undoing and remaking of values, which called property and law and social order into crisis. They sought redress among themselves. The call and the appeal transformed them from prisoners into rioters, from inmates to fugitives, even if only for thirteen hours. In the discordant assembly, they found a hearing in one another.

The *black noise* emanating from Lowell Cottage expressed their rage and their longing. It made manifest the latent rebellion simmering beneath the surface of things. It provided the language in which “they lamented their lot and what they called the injustice of their keepers at the top of their voices.” To those outside the circle it was a din without melody or center. The *New York Times* had trouble deciding which among the sensational headlines it should use for the article, so it went with three: “Devil’s Chorus Sung by Girl Rioters.” “Bedford Hears Mingled Shrieks and Squeals, Suggesting Inferno Set to Jaz[z].” “Outbreak Purely Vocal.” What exactly did Dante’s Inferno sound like when transposed into a jazz suite? For the white world, jazz was a synonym for primal sound and savage modernism. It was raw energy and excitement, nonsense and jargon, empty talk, excess, carnal desire: it was slang for copulation and conjured social disorder and free love rather than composition or improvisation.

You can take my tie
 You can take my collar
 But I’ll jazz you
 Till you holler

Sonic tumult and upheaval—resistance as music had to be construed as jazz. It was the only frame to make legible their utterances. In the most basic sense, the sounds emanating from Lowell were the free music of those in captivity, the abolition philosophy expressed within the circle. If freedom and mutual creation defined the music, so too did it define the strike and riot waged by the prisoners of Lowell. “The Reformatory Blues,” a facile label coined by the daily newspapers to describe the collective refusal of prison conditions, was Dante filtered through Ma Rainey and Buddy Bolden. Their utterances were marked by the long history of black radical sound—whoops and hollers, shrieks and squawks, sorrow songs and blues. It was the sound track to a history that hurt.

The chants and cries escaped the confines of the prison, even if their bodies did not: “Almost every window [of the cottage] was crowded with negro women who were shouting, crying, and laughing hysterically.” Few outside the circle understood the deep resources of this hue and cry. The aesthetic inheritance of “jargon and nonsense” was nothing if not a philosophy of freedom that reached back to slave songs and circle dances—struggle and flight, death and refusal became music or moaning or joyful noise or discordant sound.

For those within this circle, every groan and cry, curse and shout insisted slavery time was over. They were tired of being abused and confined, and they wanted to be free. Those exact words could be found in the letters written by their mothers and husbands and girlfriends: "I tell you Miss Cobb, it is no slave time with colored people now." All of them might well have shouted, *No slave time now. Abolition now. In the surreal, utopian nonsense of it all*, and at the heart of riot, was the anarchy of colored girls: treason en masse, tumult, gathering together, the mutual collaboration required to confront the prison authorities and the police, the willingness to lose oneself and become something greater—a chorus, a swarm, an ensemble, a mutual aid society. In lieu of an explanation or an appeal, they shouted and stomped and screamed. How else were they to express the longing to be free? How else were they to make plain their refusal to be governed?

Outsiders described the din as a swan song, to signal that their defeat was certain and they would return to their former state as prisoners without a voice in the world and to whom anything might be done. There was little that was mournful in the chants and curses, the hollers and squawks. This collective utterance was not a dirge. As they crowded in the windows of the cottage, some hanging out and others peeking from the corners, the dangerous music of black life was unleashed from within the space of captivity, a raucous polyphonic utterance that sounded beautiful and terrible. Before the riot was quashed, its force touched everyone on the grounds of the prison and as far away as the tenements, rented rooms, and ramshackle lodging houses of Harlem, Brooklyn, and Staten Island.

The noise conveyed the defeat and the aspiration, the beauty and the wretchedness that was otherwise inaudible to the ears of the world; it revealed a sensibility at odds with the institution's brutal realism. What to make of the utopian impulse that enabled them to believe that anyone cared about what they had to say? What convinced them that the force of their collective utterance was capable of turning anything around? What urged them to create a reservoir of living within the prison's mandated death? What made them tireless? The next month, the prisoners confined in Rebecca Hall waged another noise strike. "Prisoners began to jangle their cell doors, throw furniture against the walls, scream, sing, and use profanity. In the opinion of one of the noisemakers, "the medley of sounds, 'the Reformatory Blues,' may yet make a hit on Broadway, even if the officials appear to disdain jazz." They carried on all night in the prison building. They rioted again in July, August, and November.

The chants and cries insisted: We want to be free. The strike begged the question: Why are we locked up here? Why have you stolen our lives? Why do you beat us like dogs? Starve us? Pull our hair from our heads? Gag us? Club us over the head? It isn't right to take our lives. No one deserved to be treated like this.

All those listening on the outside could discern were: "gales of catcalls, hurricanes of screams, cyclones of rage, tornadoes of squalls." The sounds yielded to "one hair-raising, ear-testing Devil's chorus." Those inside the circle listened for the love and disappointment, the longing and the outrage that fueled this collective utterance. They channeled the fears and the hopes of the ones who loved them, the bad dreams and the nightmares about children stolen away by white men and lost at sea. The refrains were redolent with all the lovely plans about what they would do once they were free. These sounds traveled through the night air.

Voices in the Chorus

This speculative history of Esther Brown is based on the "Statement of the Girl," the interviews with her family members, the verified history, personal and institutional correspondence, notes of staff meetings found in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, 14610-77B Inmate Case Files, Records of the Department of Correctional Services, New York State Archives. The New York State Archives required that the names of the prisoners be changed to maintain the privacy of the records. See Inmate File #s 2507, 2503, 2466, and 4092. The Bedford prison files are very detailed, particularly until the year 1920, when the Laboratory of Social Hygiene conducted extensive intake interviews of the girls and women upon their arrival. The intake process included personal interviews, family histories, interviews with neighbors, employers, and teachers, psychological tests, physical examinations, intelligence tests, social investigators' reports, as well as the reports of probation officers, school report cards, letters from former employers, and other state records (from training schools and orphanages). Following a two-week evaluation of the compiled materials, physicians, psychologists, social workers, sociologists, and prison superintendents met to discuss each individual case. The idea of indeterminate sentencing was based on the notion that punishment must be tailored to the requirements of the individual prisoners. In practice, this resulted in sentences as long as three years for status offenses and the likelihood of future crime. The files contain personal correspondence, discussions of sexual history, life experiences, family background, hobbies, as well as poems and plays written by the prisoners. The case file intended to produce deep knowledge of the individual in a genre that combined sociological investigation with literary fiction creating a statistical portrait of the young women. The importance of the case file was critical to prison reform and the idea that probation, punishment, and parole must be individually suited to each offender; this approach favored indeterminate sentencing. In practice, this meant that for status offenses and the likelihood of future criminality or the likelihood to become morally depraved a young woman might spend three years confined at Bedford and be entangled with the criminal justice system and under state surveillance for a decade of her life. The case was grounded in a hermeneutics of suspicion and a horizon of reform. It was an exemplary product of the therapeutic state.

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