

ANTI-BLACKNESS AND
CHRISTIAN ETHICS

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and that such inhabitation through displacement and appropriative measures does not in the white imagination produce a crisis or concept of failure. That the land was worked by enslaved people, land that was stolen and thus veils the labor of indigenous people, means that the *amethical* force elaborated in the sonic sociality to which I attend is about the ongoing nature of displacement, dispossession, and misrecognition. Forgotten labor.

CHAPTER 7

The Haunting of Lynching Spectacles An Ethics of Response

ELIAS ORTEGA-APONTE

We live in a country where Americans assimilate corpses in their daily comings and goings. Dead blacks are a part of normal life here. Dying in ship hulls, tossed into the Atlantic, hanging from trees, beaten, shot in churches, gunned down by the police, or warehoused in prisons: Historically, there is no quotidian without the enslaved, chained, or dead black body to gaze upon or to hear about or to position a self against.¹

Introduction

Our responses to injustice reveal our commitments and values, as well as the “kind of country” we are willing to live in. To respond is not to be primarily motivated from within our own motivations—though how our motivations align with ends that we deem as ethical and justified is a necessary consideration. To respond is to act out of a sense of accountability in the presence of others and to satisfy the moral demands that their being before us raises in their particular context, because of the circumstances. But how are we moved

1. Claudia Rankine, “The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning,” in *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks about Race*, ed. Jesmyn Ward (New York: Scribner, 2016), 147.

to respond? Is it a matter of physical proximity, when the gaze of another makes demands on us? Are we responsible to communal others? Do strangers also make moral demands on us, as those to whom we are tied by filial bonds? The Christian tradition has put forth a rich banquet from which to nourish the moral imagination that stretches us to think of bonds of ethical responsibility for the sake of a justice-making kingdom to come where the sin of injustice will be no more.

A central feature of American society is the perniciousness of anti-black racism. From its beginning, the routine denigration, often unto death, of black bodies has been a cornerstone shaping the American social landscape. As Claudia Rankine makes mournfully clear, the killing of black bodies is a normal state of affairs. In spite of strides made in the civil arena recognizing the political protection of blacks, the moral worth of black subjects is not guaranteed. Under the hegemony of white supremacy black life can be taken at any moment, without the need to give reason, and without accountability. The black body seems not to demand an ethical response.

One need only be attentive to the news, and there, one will see broken black bodies. For those committed to the Christian faith it is imperative to decry the sinful transubstantiation of black living bodies into dead flesh. A response is demanded from us. Will we respond with concern, care, and a commitment to address ourselves as participants, filled with pathos, moved by the suffering of others? Would we turn our faces away so as to ignore the interrogation of another's face and its demand for justice? Would we ultimately choose to regard one another with disdain?

An ethics of response reveals a commitment, beyond normative claims, to a critical consideration of particular situations, to those surrounding particular agents and their bodies in relation to structures, histories, and others. In this essay, I am concerned with how we think about and respond to the increased practices of "lynching" black bodies in social media platforms. Videos capturing violence against black bodies are shared as witnesses of tragedy as well as arti-

facts of debates, as contested evidence. In such instances, we see how the suffering of black subjects is not often a matter of ethical regard but instead perceived as a justified response to the wrong-headed question mentioned by Rankine: "What kind of savages are they?" In this essay I will first discuss a speech delivered by Huey Newton at Boston College. This speech raises themes I wish to pick up in the second part of this essay, pertaining to how we respond to what I call "neo-lynchings," that is, the making of black suffering the stuff of social media spectacle, and the sinister ways in which black suffering enters as a good to be exchanged in the media economy.

Huey Newton's Speech at Boston College

On November 18, 1970, the minister of defense and co-founder of the Black Panthers Party for Self-Defense (BPP) took the Roberts Center stage at Boston College.² To the three-thousand-plus crowd in attendance that evening Newton explained that the 10-Point Platform was neither a revolutionary nor reformist project. It was a survival platform. He explained: "We feel that we, the people, are threatened with genocide because racism and fascism is [sic] rampant. Not only in this country, but throughout the world." In his analysis repression and blatant disregard for the well-being, health, and flourishing of communities of color at home and abroad were logical outgrowths of Western-style capitalist modes of production and the political systems that support them. The platform in and of itself, Newton warned, was not a revolutionary solution to the problem. Because for Newton "revolutions are made of sterner stuff." To many in attendance, then, this position went against the grain of how the BPP's actions were, and often continue to be, understood. "The people," Newton concluded, "make revolution, and only the

2. Newton's transcript of this speech, "Let Us Hold High the Banner of Intercommunalism and the Invincible Thoughts of Huey P. Newton, Minister of Defense and Supreme Commander of the Black Panther Party," can be accessed at <http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com>.

people.” Anyone, then, can be a revolutionary if they struggle for the people.

For close to two hours that evening, Newton guided the crowd through an ideological tour of the BPP’s mission. He weaved a Marxist-Leninist framework to illuminate the conditions of those living under colonial/imperialist regimes in general and of those black peoples at the margins of society in particular. The sufferings of colonial nations and blacks shared one root cause—racism-infused capitalism with fascist tendencies. He chided the dream of black capitalism as a solution considering it to be as destructive as white capitalism. Capitalist predatory predilections run counter to the aspirations of communal flourishing. The wealth capitalism brought to one community has syphoned life from another. Can black freedom be achieved through a clear-cut, Marxist, progress-infused historical materialism? If ever the oppressed and colonized peoples of the world reach a capitalist production developed enough, and one in which they sufficiently controlled the means of production, perhaps it may be enough to move into a communist utopia. But Newton’s tempered hope propelled him to be satisfied with proposing that the best we can hope for is to

linger with *Revolutionary Intercommunalism* until such time that we can wash away bourgeois thought, until such time that we can wash away racism and reactionary thinking, until such time that people are not attached to their nation as a peasant is attached to the soil. Until such time that people can gain their sanity and develop a culture that is “essentially human,” that will serve the people instead of serving some god.

What I take as key in Newton’s speech is the suspicion that a political agenda embedded within the logic of capitalist exchange, and the political systems arising out of this particular social organization, will necessarily devolve into a system of control in which the “goods” of one group of people will be syphoned for the benefit of another. And more than an extraction of resources, there will be a pillaging of their lives and bodies in the name of a reified “greater

good” and “democracy.” I sense that the media economy in which images, videos, and photographs enter into the process of user consumption may also exhibit the same predatory predilections as the economy of exchange. In this case, however, it is the cheapening of black suffering and the devaluing of claims for justice for black lives, while giving greater credence to the white gaze and white supremacist ways of explaining events of violence against black bodies, that characterize the dynamics of exchange.

Newton’s speech was not passively received but critically engaged by a mostly black audience. Paul Dillon’s reporting in the student newspaper, *The Heights*, on November 30, 1970, made it clear that the responses were varied.³ Long before intellectuals traded “Fuck you’s”⁴ as we saw last summer in social media, “Fuck you Marx, Fuck you Lenin” were heard at Boston College. Members of the audience questioned the tenor of intellectual sophistry presented by Newton. In their minds, their everyday conditions, ironically the conditions Newton sought to speak about, were not clearly, certainly not plainly, addressed by Newton. In a way, it could be argued, their voices were left out of a conversation when their bodies were constantly on the line.

This gave me a moment of pause. Earlier in the article, Dillon had reported that during the waiting time for Newton’s arrival, “a black woman left the anonymity of the benches and shouted to the crowd not to be afraid, to stand up and be proud. Her exhortations were the focus of attention until Newton entered.” This woman is also referred to at a later point in the article as one entering into an exchange with Newton, pushing him to clarify his ideas, to divest from purchase in Western modes of thinking, to strive to communicate with the people in an authentic and comprehensible way—without fancy words. However, apparently, this woman’s mention

3. *The Heights* 51, no. 11.

4. Here I am referring to the blog exchanges between Hamid Dabashi and Slavoj Žižek. For Dabashi’s posts see “Fuck You Žižek,” <https://www.zedbooks.net>. For Žižek, see Slavoj Žižek, “A Reply to My Critics,” <http://thephilosophicalsalon.com>.

of God as site of power was the straw that made her credibility collapse. (Why?) We don't have much information to make an informed judgment. In fact, Dillon did not take the care to pen her name, even as he was clearly focused on her interactions with the crowd and Newton—such a common, and unjustified, failure to recognize the full subjectivity and agency of women while centering a male hero.

It is significant to me that over four decades have passed and a different group of scholars and community members are gathered to carry on “the same conversation.” Why is anti-black racism so pernicious in the white liberal imagination? As Claudia Rankine has so aptly put into words, to live while black is to live in a condition of mourning: “Though the white liberal imagination likes to feel temporarily bad about black suffering, there really is no mode of empathy that can replicate the daily strain of knowing that as a black person you can be killed for simply being black.”⁵ An all-too-common occurrence yesterday and today, part of the everydayness of living while black, the possibility of joy is always threatened. A black body, man, woman, or child, subjected to abuse—far too often, abuse unto death. To add insult to injury, the perpetrators of violence against black bodies will be white bodies who will be deemed to be acting out of personal safety, or justifiably scared to the point that taking a black life was reasonable, at times even celebrated. Unlike times past, in which to witness the lynching of a black body required being *there*, present in close proximity, or at least being the recipient of a gruesome memento, a photograph or a postcard, our current technosocial life brings the act straight to our mobile devices and personal computers. The last breath of a black life captured by digital technology, shared, debated, justice having been denied, and exchanged in an economy grown accustomed to cashing in on black suffering as a spectacle. How can a Christian ethics respond to this?

*Anti-Black Racism and H. Richard Niebuhr's
Christian Ethics of Response*

Even as my commitment to the Christian tradition has undergone transformations over the years, I am bound to Christianity and to the liberationist imagination of the prophetic black and brown tradition that it has nurtured and sustained. I owe a debt of life gratitude to those who responded to my enfleshment, motivated by a deep understanding of living inspired by the Christian message. In a very literal way, as a child of color growing up working class, a step ahead of poverty for most of my life, it was sitting in the church bench's corner, instead of the street corner, that kept me and some of my peers alive—tenuously and fragilely alive—by keeping us focused on the hope of a better tomorrow. It was the push toward holiness in my pentecostal upbringing that drew a circle of protection as friends' figures were drawn with chalk on pavements across the streets of my childhood, every corner a potential site of mourning. But at that time, the holiness language did not provide an explanation of the nature of structural oppression nor of the blatant disregard for black and brown lives. It was personal sin, and not systemic oppression, surveillance, policing, and marginalization of community, that was deemed responsible for our dead ones. I admit that I still struggle to firm up my position regarding the possibility of Christian ethics—would it strive for a personal ethics, or would it seek communal well-being? The conundrum I seek to untangle is this: how can Christian ethics influence habits of mind, habits of seeing, practices of touching that deal death to black bodies? It should be clear from my writing so far that I turn toward an ethics of response akin to that developed by H. Richard Niebuhr.

For Niebuhr, responsibility as a symbol of the moral life aims to help us understand ourselves in action. We act toward a purpose, toward an end, and in a variety of relationships with others, each one with a particular demand upon us. According to Niebuhr, central to our moral acts is that at every moment of decision, we ask ourselves, “what is going on?” In asking this question, we are searching for a fitting action. In *The Responsible Self*, Niebuhr understands

5. Rankine, “The Condition of Black Life,” 145–46.

responsibility as comprised of the following four elements—first, response: we respond to actions upon us; second, interpretation: we search for understanding of what has happened to us and how we are to respond faithfully to the question “What shall I do?”; third, accountability: we respond in anticipation to our actions, to our responses; and, fourth, social solidarity: we are responsible insofar as we are continually participating in a community. In the ethical framework of Niebuhr, community is understood in an expansive sense, including not only those whom we know but the stranger as well. This is made clear in the special place Niebuhr gives to our collective responses to suffering. For Niebuhr, “it is in the response to suffering that many and perhaps all men and women, individually and in their groups, define themselves, take on character, develop an ethos.” Furthermore, how communities and individuals respond to suffering is motivated out “of their interpretation of what is happening to them as well as of the actions upon them.”⁶

Niebuhr’s ethics takes into account the singularity of the ethical encounter and how agents, whether as individuals or communities, respond in each encounter. In this way, Christian ethics is tasked with the accountability to respond to the suffering of others by interpreting the events of the day and in so doing live the content of their character. I find in this model of ethics as responsibility a tool to engage the outright transmutation of living bodies unto dead flesh and the circulation of such events via digital tools in an economy created by participation.⁷

Spectacles of Violence: Democracy’s Disposables

There is a connection between the democratic nature of society and the current state of violence against black bodies. Put more

6. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 60–65.

7. Mary Chayko, in *Superconnected: The Internet, Digital Media, & Techno-Social Life* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2017), says that “a participatory culture is also an economy in which content, goods, time, effort, and money are, to one degree or another, shared, exchanged and spent” (69).

starkly, the preservation of the ethos of democracy in the United States and abroad, as argued by Newton in his Boston College speech, relies on spectacles of violence in which black bodies are routinely mutilated and displayed for the consumption of the white liberal imagination. It may very well be that the aspiration for a full democratic inclusion of blacks will be an impossibility within the bounds of the current existing democracy as long as the political recognition of black lives does not also include moral recognition of their worth. The rise of the digital commons, that fractured enlargement of the public sphere where issues are debated, opinions exchanged, data collected and explained, gifs and memes created, alchemically transforming expression, because an image is a thousand words, has opened yet another dimension in which the debates about the “mattering” of black life continue. How does black life matter? What are the possibilities of black embodiment? Do the increase in broadband and the speed of information open other possibilities for black safety? Or does the digital commons become another site where the lynching of black bodies can be not only exposed, but circulated, re-created, debated, and dismissed, and eventually archived as yet another bit of compressed information in the cloud? And yet, if *the condition of black life is one of mourning* the digital commons is an extension of Emmett’s open casket. Now no longer the remains are exposed, but the “shot-by-shot,” the choke until breathless, cries for empathy ignored, the bodies of children dragged against pavements, slammed against school floors, homeless hogtied and thrown into police cars as officers chat amicably. And yet, these images and videos play not the role of durable witness to injustice but as fodder for debate. To the white gaze, there must have been some wrong committed, or a prior incident to justify the killing, or, well, you never know—for black people, black s(kin) folk, this is another burial ground in which we mourn our dead in the struggle for a justice tardy in coming.

In the age of social media, a moment in history in which events, news, information, and opinions hit us like information bombs, in

constant streams of factoids, parodic skits presenting news items, news outlets masquerading as late night shows through their incongruous messages, instead of a song for a movement, what has captured our collective attention is a hashtag—#BlackLivesMatter/#BLM. These characters express an assertion of a reality that, judging by the states of affairs, is not self-evident, that of the dignity of black lives. Black lives remain excluded from the protection granted to other lives, particularly white lives; black lives may be taken, caged, or snuffed out routinely without consequence and with the expectation of acceptance and acquiescence from communities of color. It is as though it were enough to fear the embodiment of a black life in order to respond to it justifiably with violence. Time and again, over the last few years we have seen events along these lines: a white person kills a person of color and whether the evidence points to unnecessary use of force or not is not the question. In spite of what remains as testimony in digital form, the white liberal imagination is more inclined to believe that there must be reason enough to justify such a death; something must have prompted such a tragic end, even if viewers are not privy to those events, and even if only based on conjectures. The message for people of color is clear: the mattering of our lives is not a given. The waters of our national lives continue to be muddied by displays of violence against colored bodies. And the gap between justice demanded and justice given continues to widen.

Charles Cobb Jr., in *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed*, writes that “experience taught then and teaches now that blacks should never underestimate the level of violence that could be brought against them by white authority, and that they should never overestimate the prospects for receiving understanding and support from white people.”⁸ At any given moment, colored folks can expect violence while also assuming that support will not be easily forthcoming or at least not with the necessary impetus to change

8. Charles E. Cobb, Jr., *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 76–77.

social realities. Although not a poem written with Ferguson or New York or New Orleans or Minnesota or Baltimore or countless other recent locations of anti-black violence in mind, Pamela Mordecai's poem “This Is the Way” to my mind aptly captures the sentiment of the moment; at the very least, it captures the ways in which communities of color feel and live with the disposability of their lives. Below, the first stanza:

Monday. This is the way we wash our clothes.
Whites on this side for they need special care.
Put the darks yonder in a separate pile.
Sort coloureds—light, not-so-light, darkish over here,
each shade in its right place as the hymn says.
White in the water first as it behooves,
gentled in Ivory flakes with temperate scrub,
then set on coral stones to profit from the sun's
abundant coin. Now and then, on tougher stains, rub
with brown soap and a tip of Adam's ale
till blemishes erased, garments gleam clean.
Coloureds get shift according as they pale.
Darks last, slapped on the beating stone, hung on the fence.
To coddle drugging clothes don't make no sense.⁹

This stanza encapsulates the devaluing of black lives in a society structured by the sin of anti-black racism. A society that seeks a place for each shade of blackness, of brownness, by separating it from whiteness, and in so doing sets in motion the racial projects of white supremacy.¹⁰ To this we could add the attribution of guilt and disposability attached to black bodies and the heightening of these in

9. Pamela Mordecai, *Subversive Sonnets: Poems* (Toronto: TSAR Publications, 2012).

10. My reading of racial projects is informed by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), in conjunction with Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.

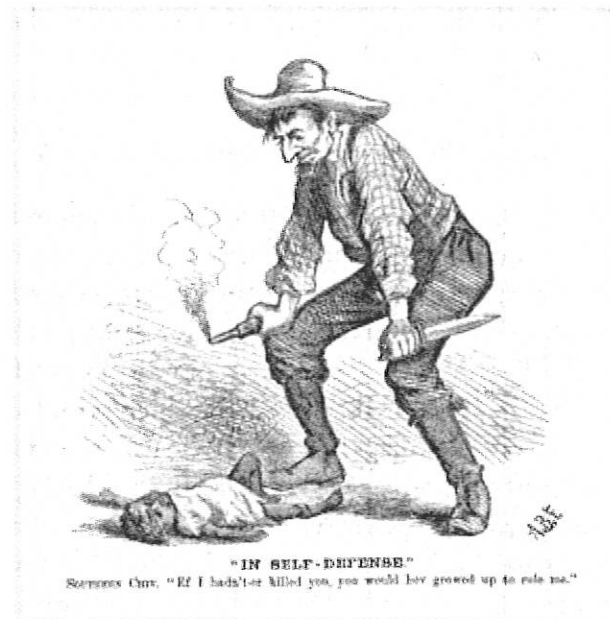
digital environments. Treatment is accorded not by merit of character but by shade. James Baldwin puts it as follows:

If one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected—those, precisely, who need the law's protection most!—and listens to their testimony. Ask any Mexican, any Puerto Rican, any black man, any poor person—ask the wretched how they fare in the halls of justice, and then you will know, not whether or not the country is just, but whether or not it has any love for justice, or any concept of it.¹¹

With mounting evidence that, as it pertains to black lives, our country lacks love for justice, and perhaps even a concept of it—and in spite of the often-heralded progress in terms of race relations—the legacy of slavery, racial segregation, and lynching still bears their pernicious influence in our present. Below, I present a piece of political satire by artist A. B. Frost, published at the time in which the nation was abandoning the failed project of Reconstruction. In this piece, the living out of Southern chivalry is displayed as the fear unto death against black lives. This satirical image powerfully depicts what Danez Smith writes in his poem “Alternate Names for Black Boys”: a black boy is a “monster until proven ghost” and “guilty until proven dead.” Frost’s image displays the racist fear that shapes the white liberal imagination—fear that makes clear white supremacy’s inability to cede power. In the face of this fear, there is no safety, not even for a child.

Today this anti-black strain in democracy shapes the spectacle of neo-lynching in digital environments. And it demands a faithful response in the face of ongoing suffering. Digital environments and the violence perpetuated in them should not be taught as separated from en fleshed social interactions but as part of the physical

11. James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (New York: Vintage, 1972), 149.



“In Self-Defense,”
cartoonist: A. B. Frost,
Harper’s Weekly, October 28, 1876

environment. This is not to deny that digital environments have opened new dimensions of how we understand issues of, for example, privacy and bullying, which call for careful consideration of the digital as a very specific sort of environment in which particular kinds of actions are possible. Nevertheless, in spite of their particularity, digital environments, as Mary Chayko writes, “are so fully enmeshed with the physical world that one need not even be online to feel the impact. . . . Technology can be so deeply integrated with so many aspects of life that it is almost as though the tech has seeped inside the person, cyborg-style.”¹² Furthermore, interacting in digital environments also means that the field of actions of the social world will continue into the digital arena and give rise, as Chayko theorizes, to a “participatory culture in which members of the public take active part in the creation and consumption of their cultural

12. Chayko, *Superconnected*, 67.

products,” and in so doing giving rise to an economy where goods are exchanged.¹³

An Ethics of Response to Neo-Lynching Spectacles

An ethics of response informed by H. Richard Niebuhr must understand that the unfolding of responsibility, and our concern for the suffering of others, now takes place in a technosocial environment where the extension of digital technologies is not a separate dimension of the social world but a component of it. In this technosocial world we must pay attention to the ways in which power also circulates through these e-landscapes, as well as the nature and impact of our responses in the face of the challenges that are arising.¹⁴ When we take seriously the task of theorizing the unfolding of agency in digitally mediated environments, and understand that technological developments are “enmeshed with the physical world” in ways that increasingly expand the field of action of humanity, then we should work toward deepening our understandings of how forms of violence enacted in the physical world can be extended into the digital. It is this enmeshment of the physical and the digital that gives raise to the possibility of what I here term “neo-lynching.”

At the center of this task is the need to critically engage the circulation of videos and images that depict violence against black bodies. These images, videos, and bits of data are circulated in digital environments in an orchestration that pits black suffering against the white liberal gaze—that is, the historical and enduring witness of black lives afflicted by the violence of white supremacy and the white liberal gaze that cannot empathize with this witness but seeks ways to explain it away. In the circulation of these images and videos as data to be debated, what would have been private affairs, or events witnessed only by bystanders, now become social (albeit virtual) happenings. Thus, a hyperreal public sphere is created where

13. *Ibid.*, 69.

14. See Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2014), chs. 1 and 3.

some agents have little control over the circulation of materials but bear the burden of not only being victims but also having to relive the painful events over and over again. Compounding this harm is one’s exposure to the voices of acquaintances and strangers in debates gone viral over what “actually” happened. That is to say that due to increasing technological mediation, social reality now is open to dissection, interpretation, and even re-created in ways we could not have fathomed before the rise of digital environments that never sleep and are distributed through a plurality of networks, with and without our knowledge or consent. In this way the terror experienced by black lives in the social world now extends to the digital.

I take neo-lynching spectacles to be comprised of two aspects. First, there are those captured moments in which we, as spectators, are given first row seats at the last breath of a person of color dying at the hands of white supremacy. And, second, more than just witnessing, one also faces the possibility of entering into social media debates with known ones and strangers in which attributions are made, events are reframed, and the visual contested, while deferring, and even ignoring, the incarnate suffering of the victims and victims’ loved ones. Such neo-lynching spectacles are also real death-dealing acts, and, as a result, extend the victim’s suffering, and of their loved ones, to digital environments. Digital spaces increasingly are being shaped by this process in which the dignity of black life and suffering can be contested because of the ways in which their civil existence can be negated and their lives made superfluous.

Central to my conceptualization of neo-lynchings is the work of Koritha Mitchell. Mitchell says that lynching “as an anti-black form of political terrorism was a distinctly post emancipation phenomenon.” This form of political terrorism became possible, Mitchell explains, because whereas during slavery the death of a slave would constitute a financial loss for white slave holders “once blacks were no longer chattel, there was no incentive to avoid killing them.” Furthermore, Mitchell, commenting on the racism explicit in the American theater, says that, as an extension of social drama “the

American stage would prove as suitable for killing African Americans as for portraying them in dehumanizing ways.” She points out the contrast created by black-authored lynching plays. These plays presented mob violence more as a crime against households than against bodies, and in them the audience is given glimpses of home spaces. The audience sees the suffering of widows and children, but physical violence may not be depicted. In this way, the black-authored lynching plays suggest that “the brutality continues long after a corpse would have deteriorated.”¹⁵ Colin Dayan also follows this line of thought. For her the enduring of brutality even after the corpse’s return to the dust from whence it came is possible because of the rendering of black lives as superfluous and the ease with which they may be stripped of civic worth to perpetuate the white national imaginary of belonging and citizenship, and ultimately be deemed not worthy of empathy.¹⁶

To Mitchell and Dayan, I would add that the history of punishable bodies, real and virtual, also requires that we trace the mobilization of “moral panic” as a trigger for securitization.¹⁷ In order to activate moral panic, a discourse of “insecurities” has to rise to the fore—this is also behind notions of the disposability of black lives after the emancipation period. It is the fear that a society will become unsafe that leads to attempts to punish and control other bodies that do not present the understanding of the polis of the hegemonic segments of society. The activation of moral panic gave rise to racialized forms of punishment starting from the periods of slavery and

15. Koritha Mitchell, “Black-Authored Lynching Drama’s Challenge to Theater History,” in *Black Performance Theory*, ed. Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 87 and 89.

16. Colin Dayan has shown how racialized bodies can be denied civil and biological existence and can remain suspect even in death. Dayan argues that “the negation of civil existence requires that a person be made ‘superfluous.’ To be made superfluous is to be outside the pale of human empathy.” See Colin Dayan, *The Law Is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 72.

17. For my use of moral panic and insecurities, see Sean P. Hier, *Moral Panic and the Politics of Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

Western expansion. In the technosocial world, moral panics also extend to digital environments. Just as A. B. Frost depicted in his political cartoon, in digital environments white fears can also spell black deaths through the activation of moral panics. Calls for justice for lives lost are responded to with force and brutality.

What Marx said of capitalism, that it continually transforms its existence and shape in order to continue its rule over economic life and the lives of workers, is also true about racist dynamics of domination. They morph, take new shapes, more creative practices, novel institutional forms, more procedural forms of justice that give impressions of heightened professionalization and thus, of being more just, all along leaving a trail of victims. In digital environments, neo-lynching practices are but one more evolution of our nation’s chattel-slavery past embedded in geopolitics of the subjection and terror of black bodies.

I wonder how an ethics of response in our time can make us ready to respond to those who are putting their lives on the line. In fact, what kind of resources does it provide, not only to those reaching for comfort, but also to those who are having the kinds of conversation that make it possible to offer an explicit “yes” to the question: “So are you telling me that you are ready to put your life on the line . . . ?” In order to be effective in the face of the extension of the political terrorism experienced by black lives into digital environments, an ethics of response needs to see itself, to echo Huey Newton, as a survival program. After all, survival is necessary and essential to any revolution. But in the meantime, how are we to act in ways that contribute to laying the groundwork for a revolution?

The paradigm of an ethics of response as described above requires that we give an answer to the question: “What is going on?” As we respond to actions upon us, we need to offer an interpretation of the states of affairs and be accountable for our responses in acts of social solidarity. In this light, what is happening in the extension of the political terror of lynching to neo-lynching in the digital environments? More importantly, how do we respond to the compounding of suffering in communities of color as the white liberal gaze has no

love for justice and no capacity for empathy? To respond faithfully and to strive for social solidarity with the hopes of alleviating suffering demands critical attention to the extensions of political terrorism of lynching into digital environments. It requires the questioning of how we engage in the economics created by the participatory culture in social media. Because in this economy not all transactions are monetized but may instead take the shape of content creation, how we contribute to the “goods” in the process of exchange can either compound suffering or be real acts of solidarity.

I am hopeful that the liberation of black (s)kin folk will be a reality one day. But my hope is tempered by the reality of grief, the knowledge that between my utopian hope that my children’s children will be singing the songs of black and brown liberation and the present moment lies a road of grief and mourning that might be recorded, shared, and debated, but seldom believed.

Black Loves