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# Yes, Pain, But What Else?: Racial Liberalism and Late-Style Morrison

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*God Help the Child* begins with a mother's disavowal: "It's not my fault. So you can't blame me. I didn't do it and I have no idea how it happened."[1] The "it" that Sweetness is so anxious to distance herself from is not, as the reader might at first think, a wrongdoing or event of harm. Rather, "it" is revealed to be the darkness of her daughter Lula Ann's skin.

"It didn't take more than an hour after they pulled her out from between my legs to realize something was wrong," Sweetness recounts. "Really wrong. She was so black she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black." In contrast, Sweetness describes herself, Lula Ann's father, and the rest of their family as "light-skinned, with good hair, what we call high yellow" (3). Disgusted by her dark skin, Sweetness withholds tenderness, love, and even touch from her daughter, becoming Lula Ann's first and most formidable childhood enemy.

In its opening picture of a little girl shamed for her black skin, abused by her family, and bullied by classmates, Toni Morrison's final novel irresistibly recalls the themes of her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. *God Help the Child*, however, offers a starkly different, distinctly contemporary response to these issues. If *The Bluest Eye*, in Morrison's own words, dramatized "the devastation that even casual racial contempt can cause" in the pre-civil rights era, then *God Help the Child*—Morrison's only novel set in the twenty-first century—presents a more optimistic outcome for a neglected Black girl coming into adulthood today.[2] Against the backdrop of the Obama presidency, Lula Ann Bridewell grows up into a Black woman who yearns not for blue eyes or whiteness but to be recognized and celebrated for her dark skin, a process that takes much self-advocacy and grit. In order to overcome her mother's

Abstract This essay argues that the dynamic between flat emotions and transformative flesh in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* engages the strategies and failures of racial liberalism. I define racial liberalism as the US's rights-based approach to racial justice across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that frames racism as a private, psychological drama of emotions. By veering away from strong emotions and the liberal subject and toward affect and materiality, Morrison shifts blame away from individual victims and perpetrators and instead highlights the harm of larger, administratively "neutral" systems like the law and the prison industrial complex. Representations 161. © 2023 The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 20–40. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2023.161.2.20.

toxic colorism, Lula Ann transforms herself into Bride, a millennial striver whose good looks and ambition garner her wild personal and professional success in the cosmetics industry, where she heads an inclusive brand called "You, Girl: Cosmetics for Your Personal Millennium"—a Fenty-like makeup line for all women, from "ebony to lemonade to milk" (10).

*God Help the Child*, however, is no bildungsroman. Bride's journey of self-actualization takes place entirely before the events of the novel; explicitly racialized trauma is recounted only in flashbacks and memories. "I let the name-calling, the bullying travel like poison through my veins, with no antibiotic available," Bride tells us. "Which, actually, was a good thing now that I think of it, because I built up immunity so tough that not being a 'nigger girl' was all I needed to win. I became a deep dark beauty who doesn't need Botox for kissable lips or tanning spas to hide a deathlike pallor. . . . I sold my elegant blackness to all those childhood ghosts and now they pay me for it" (57). Recounting her journey in this brief and almost mechanical way, Bride is an oddly inscrutable character. Morrison's final novel "does little to invite actual intimacy," asserts painter and silhouettist Kara Walker. The abundance of first-person confessionals reminds Walker of "reality TV—thin declarations of trauma followed by triumphant dismissals of enduring hurt. It's too easy for the reader to scratch at the superficial posturing and say, 'That person is hiding something.' Yes, pain, but what else?"[3]

I am drawn to how Walker describes her readerly encounter with *God Help the Child* as a "scratch." A scratch indicates a mode of relation that stalls, dissatisfied, at the surface of the body; actual intimacy, in contrast, signals not a manufactured chumminess with a novel's fictional characters but rather a personal and affective experience of their hurt—the urgency of a flesh wound, not the deferral of a skin scratch. Countering Walker's criticism, scholar Margo Crawford suggests that *God Help the Child* "may be Morrison's intentionally 'off' novel, the novel that may call for a reading that allows surface to remain surface."[4] Without any affective heft sinking the reader into the psychological, *God Help the Child* lingers on the surface of characters, of feelings, of bodies. When Bride's perfect life unravels—and unravel it does—it is fitting that it does so on the surface of her skin, as she finds herself turning mysteriously back into a child.

In this essay, I'd like to suggest that *God Help the Child*'s surface sensibility is evidence that Morrison is doing what she's always done: changing how we ask and answer questions about racial remediation. "Yes, pain, but what else?" could serve as a guiding question for the entire novel, which stages its problems on the impersonal surface in order to address twenty-first-century racism on its own slippery terms. Surveying the recent past from the vantage point of the present, *God Help the Child* is strategically primed to



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engage a contemporary history of liberal racism whose particular violences operate specifically on the level of abstraction, of surface—the violences of the law and the prison industrial complex that are spectacular in scope but hidden in plain sight.

In overcoming Sweetness's abuse by becoming a corporate girlboss, Bride seems, at least at first glance, to actualize the fever dream of neoliberal multiculturalism, in which capitalist inclusion is granted not despite but precisely *because* of the color of her skin.[5] Bride's proud narrative of self-fashioning is an almost model-minoritarian one, in which private experiences of discrimination lead to emotional resilience, self-actualization, and, ultimately, inclusion among the ranks of the American ruling class.[6] As Bride's style coach Jeri remarks, "Black sells." "True or not," Bride says, "it made me, remade me" (36).

"Black sells" seems on the one hand to refer back to a longer history of racial capitalism and chattel slavery in the Americas, to a history where Black people were stolen and sold as property. However, the elision of any personifying element—*black* as noun rather than adjective—effects a different kind of objectification. Here, the thing sold isn't a person turned property but rather, more perplexingly, the color itself. The knowledge that makes and remakes Bride is the *aesthetic* fact of her blackness—the fact, in other words, that her skin might be apprehended and then marketed as pure surface, a color divorced from larger histories of racism. Jeri's only advice to Bride is to wear "white and only white all the time." This deceptively simple makeover profoundly changes Bride's life; now an object of aesthetic fascination and admiration, she gets promoted to regional manager at the legacy cosmetics company that employs her.

Even Sweetness remarks: "I forgot how black she really was because she was using it to her advantage in beautiful white clothes" (43). Here, the aesthetic pleasure generated by the extreme contrast between white clothes and black skin turns them both into blank, unmarked, and eerily deracinated surfaces. Bride seems to internalize the kind of racial sight that her new styling demands: "At first it was boring shopping for white-only clothes until I learned how many shades of white there were: ivory, oyster, alabaster, paper white, snow, cream, ecru, Champagne, ghost, bone" (33). The history of segregation ghosting the phrase "white-only" is immediately dismissed, diffused into a fabulous panoply of paint swatches—no longer the property of any particular people but rather an endless variety of neutral colors for anyone to buy and wear. In staking inclusion on the ability to transform racial stereotypes into meaningless, marketable color, corporate America indoctrinates Bride into the liberal solution to the structural hierarchies of racism—colorblindness.



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I use "colorblindness" to refer to a post-civil rights era American legal understanding of race and racism that insists that race has no bearing in the functions of state powers and limits the definition of race to formal-race (physical characteristics) rather than status-race (explicit racial hierarchies) or historical-race (longer histories of racial subordination).[7] Critical race theorist Neil Gotanda explains how this juridical mode of understanding race turns Black and white into "neutral, apolitical descriptions, reflecting merely 'skin color' or country of ancestral origin."[8] By circumscribing race to formal-race, colorblindness evacuates race of historical and social meaning, limiting racial discrimination exclusively to acts perpetuated consciously in the private sphere by specific individuals rather than larger government systems. As Gotanda writes:

> Formal-race unconnectedness is linked to a particular conceptualization of racism. Race, as formal-race, is seen as an attribute of individuality unrelated to social relations. Unconnectedness limits the concept of racism and the label "racist" to those individuals who maintain irrational personal prejudices against persons who "happen" to be in the racial category Black. Racism is irrational because race is seen as unconnected from social reality, a concept that describes nothing more than a person's physical appearance. Under this view, racism is thought of only as an individual prejudice.[9]

A colorblind understanding of race as formal-race disconnects race from racism, racism from history, the personal from the political. Furthermore, by imagining race as purely incidental and meaningless physical appearance, colorblindness cleaves the rights-bearing subject from the material substance of its body, an extension of what David L. Eng and Shinhee Han refer to as "racial dissociation": "Under the banner of colorblindness and multiculturalism, discrimination in social life and continuing legacies of whiteness as property are reinvented for everyone as a matter of individual choice and personal preference outside history. From this perspective, everyone in a colorblind and multicultural age is now dissociated."[10] In its refusal to acknowledge the connection between color, race, and ongoing histories of racism, colorblindness is therefore not, as the name might suggest, the inability to see color; rather, it is the inability to see anything *but* color.

Law, in collusion with capitalism, abstracts race into neutral skin color not to alleviate but to obscure the workings of structural racism. The historical ascendency of colorblindness helps explain how Jeri's utterance "black sells" means to indicate a break from, rather than a continuation of, longer histories of racial subordination. Black, through a colorblind lens, is transformed from race to color to brand—and the "Lula Ann who never fought back" is transformed into Bride (32). In this way, Bride is offered the



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giddy promise of neoliberalism—that with individual discipline, self-striving, and attention to the free market, you can transcend problems of race and gender, now locked into a chaotic, abusive, and blissfully receding past. Bride's corporate success, in other words, depends on her adherence to a colorblind contract—one that not only redefines race as ahistorical surface but also results in her seeing only surfaces herself.

"Our affair wasn't all that spectacular—not even the mildly dangerous sex I used to let myself enjoy," Bride confesses to the reader. "Well, anyway it was nothing like those double-page spreads in fashion magazines, you know, couples standing half naked in surface, looking so fierce and downright mean, their sexuality like lightning and the sky going dark to show off the shine of their skin. . . . Why I kept comparing us to magazine spreads and music I can't say" (9). Here, as elsewhere in the novel, emotion deflates, negates. Bride's only reference point for her own feelings is the visual language of advertisements, the shine of skin on shinier paper. From her job as a cosmetics executive to her personal life, image-obsessed Bride reads and emotes only from the surface. Attending to the broader social and historical contexts subtending Bride's millennial success story suggests that feeling on and with the surface is the affective mode demanded by a contemporary regime of colorblindness. That is, it is the affective corollary of a politics that demands a (racial) dissociation of surface and depth, body and mind.

If Bride embodies and internalizes a colorblind racial epistemology, her mother Sweetness's entrenched colorism seems at first to figure its opposite. I would argue, however, that Sweetness's opening monologue helps launch the novel's larger critique of a history of racial liberalism, from the advent of civil rights to our current moment of the colorblind carceral state. The appearance of dark skin in a baby born in the 1990s to light-skinned parents forces Sweetness to reckon with her own family history: "You might think she's a throwback, but a throwback to what?" (3). The family history that Sweetness then recounts is not a history of unsullied or originary Africanness (what "Sudanese" feints toward) but rather a legacy of passing in the age of Jim Crow—a tale of "mulatto types and quadroons" who left their families and blackness behind because they had the "right kind of hair," of a mother who worked as a Black housekeeper but shopped as a white woman in department stores, of a father who avoided "colored only" water fountains even if he was "dying of thirst" (4).

This familiar narrative of passing is itself a literary trope, a throwback of its own. In invoking her family's history of passing, Sweetness implies that her dark-skinned daughter is a throwback to the age of Jim Crow, not because she bears any visual resemblance to her recent ancestors but because her vulnerability to violence and discrimination in the private

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sphere recalls events of prior discrimination that were legally and publicly mandated. Though launched as a phobic attempt to distance her dark-skinned daughter from herself and her light-skinned family, Sweetness's turn backward to institutionalized segregation betrays an awareness of what critical race theorist Cheryl Harris calls the property status of whiteness: the idea that "whiteness—the right to white identity as embraced by the law—is property if by 'property' one means all of a person's legal rights."[11] As Harris argues, racial passing during the Jim Crow era did not fundamentally disturb whiteness's status as property. Tracing the evolution of the law's enshrinement of whiteness as property undercuts the dominant liberal narrative regarding American racism—that the highly visible public protests of the civil rights era led to the full attainment of rights and representation for Black people in a post-'64 world. Sweetness's experiences with housing discrimination in the 1990s and years of witnessing quotidian acts of racism (for example, the bullying of a young Black girl with lighter skin than Bride) prove otherwise.

For Sweetness, then, family history becomes a way to historically track the way the public sphere has been policed across the pre- and post-civil rights era; Bride's dark skin suggests to Sweetness that whiteness is still property, despite the law professing to not discriminate on the basis of color, and that the law is still fundamentally discriminatory, in new ways. As Sweetness laments at the close of the chapter, "Her color is a cross she will always carry. But it's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not" (7). Although the first and final lines of the chapter echo each other, the "it" that Sweetness disavows shifts from the fact of Bride's skin color to the fact that her blackness is mediated through the social and the political—"a cross she will always carry." That is, the crime that Sweetness stands accused of moves fluidly between skin color and racism.

Upon first read, Sweetness's monologue seems like nothing more than a projection of a mother's internalized racism—a mother whose anachronistic obsession with blood quanta and skin color seems to evince a stubborn ignorance of the legal and representational gains attained over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, Sweetness's confusion between race, racism, and crime exactly spotlights the fallout of the state's rights-based legal approach to racial justice. Political theorist Naomi Murakawa defines racial liberalism as the "historically grounded understanding of the American race 'problem' as psychological in nature, with 'solutions' of teaching tolerance and creating colorblind institutions."[12] Murakawa's account of the effects of racial liberal policies since World War II demonstrates how what started out as an attempt to obviate judicial discretion, police brutality, and state-sanctioned lynching turned, over the course of nearly a century, into an "impartial" carceral state that disproportionately



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kills and jails Black and brown people in the name of racial equality. As Murakawa writes, "Crime politics were at once symptomatic and uniquely structuring of postwar racial liberalism, as efforts to govern a racially explosive society ultimately affirmed the sensibility that only the proceduralist, rights-based state could diffuse [*sic*] what racially threatened the nation. In this sense, crime policy and carceral expansion were not reactions against civil rights; they were the very progeny of civil rights as lawmakers defined them."[13]

Viewed within the historical frame of the ascendency of what Murakawa refers to as the "civil rights carceral state," we can see how Sweetness's outwardly racist self-defense against the "crime" of her daughter's blackness is constitutive of, rather than eccentric to, the logic of racial liberalism. Sweetness's conflation of the injustice of segregation with the fault of Bride's skin is, per the logic of racial liberalism, not contradictory at all; by criminalizing and privatizing racism, the state also criminalized and privatized race. The segregated Jim Crow era of Sweetness's parents and the colorblind era of her millennial dark-skinned daughter are not separated by the achievement of civil rights but are instead connected by those same civil rights, as determined and constrained by racial liberal policies. Sweetness's initial appeal of innocence to the reader animates a longer history of how racial liberalism, and, by extension, the American legal apparatus itself, failed to name, address, or redress an ongoing legacy of antiblack racism and material dispossession. Sweetness's final words—"It's not my fault. It's not"—problematize the racial liberal logic it echoes. Here and now, the "it" that Sweetness feels accused of evades articulation, suggesting that the problem of the twenty-first century is not merely finding an answer to the crime of racism but also being able to articulate the name of the crime in the first place.

Bride's otherwise vague question—"What's going on?"—uncannily echoes her mother's confusion. "I'm young; I'm successful and pretty. Really pretty, so there! Sweetness. So why am I so miserable? . . . I'm proud of myself, I really am, but it's the Vicodin and the hangover that make me keep remembering some not-so-proud junk in the past" (53). Here, Sweetness is framed as Bride's greatest villain, an embodiment of the biases that Bride's success, beauty, and pride ultimately defeat in the twenty-first century—the triumph of colorblindness over colorism. Viewed through the prism of racial liberalism, Bride's corporate success appears to prove that her mother's racism is "an irrational belief," a "personal and psychological problem" shared by blessedly few people in the current age, and one, importantly, that can be overcome with self-love and advocacy.

But Bride's lingering misery—a feeling that seems to exist at a different frequency than her pride—disrupts the narrative that racial liberalism



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provides for her life. The "not-so-proud junk in the past" seems at first to refer back to the emotional abuse she experienced as a child. Bride's reflection, however, unfolds into a different scene of abuse: six-year-old Lula Ann witnessing through an upstairs window a young white boy being raped by her landlord. Upon seeing her, the landlord shouts: "Hey, little nigger cunt! Close that window and get the fuck outta there!" Although Mr. Leigh never physically touches Lula Ann, the slur violently initiates her into a longer history of raced and gendered abuse. "I was six years old and had never heard the words 'nigger' or 'cunt' before, but the hate and revulsion in them didn't need definition," Bride reflects later (56). Sweetness, fearing eviction, instructs Lula Ann to keep quiet.

Two years later, however, Lula Ann serves as a star witness in a child abuse case brought against several elementary school teachers accused of molesting multiple students. Coached by "teacher-psychologists" and encouraged for the first time by her mother, Lula Ann identifies a white woman, Sofia Huxley, as the leader of the child rapists. Sofia Huxley gets sentenced to twenty-five years in prison, and Bride wins the approval of other parents, teacher-psychologists, and even Sweetness, who becomes "kind of motherlike" after the trial (32). "I was nervous thinking she would stumble getting up to the stand, or stutter, or forget what the psychologists said and put me to shame," Sweetness tells the reader in a subsequent chapter. "But no, thank God, she put the noose, so to speak, around at least one of those sinful teachers' neck. . . . It's not often you see a little black girl take down some evil whites" (42). By metaphorizing the verdict as a scene of reverse lynching—in which a Black girl puts a noose around a white criminal's neck—Sweetness imagines that justice is not only dealt on behalf of victims of child abuse but also on behalf of victims of antiblack racism.

This satisfying portrait of justice achieved is quickly complicated by the fact that Sofia Huxley is innocent of the crime that she served a jail sentence for. The "not-so-proud junk" that bothers adult Bride is therefore not only the misogynoir perpetuated by Mr. Leigh and her mother; it is also the knowledge of the possibility that she put an innocent woman behind bars. "What if it was the landlord my forefinger was really pointing at in that courtroom?" Bride asks herself. "What that teacher was accused of was sort of like what Mr. Leigh did. Was I pointing at the idea of him? His nastiness or the curse he threw at me?" (56). If Mr. Leigh's slur was meant to strip Lula Ann of humanity, then the trial compensates her with a liberal subjectivity that is not only legally abstract but formally abstracting. In Bride's memory, Lula Ann's body drops out of the trial entirely, except for the finger used to identify Sofia Huxley: "My hand was in a fist until my arm was straight. Then I unfolded my forefinger. *Pow!* Like a cap pistol" (31). The lawyers in turn tell her: "You have to speak, Lula. Say 'yes' or 'no'" (30).



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Lula Ann's finger-turned-cap pistol demonstrates the way her body and voice are abstracted and instrumentalized into a weapon—*yes*, *no*, the snap of a cap pistol—for the state. In this way, the court scene, not the makeover, is the beginning of Lula Ann's initiation into, and exploitation by, the abstracting logic of colorblindness.

Whatever reparative justice the courtroom seemed to offer Lula Ann and Sweetness is thus revealed to be a sham, foundering against the entrenchment of propertied whiteness in the figure of their landlord, who controls their access to space and resources and who ultimately evades accountability. The courtroom spectacle of a Black girl convicting a white woman offers nothing more than the *fantasy* of racial liberalism—one evacuated of a history of whiteness as property, where justice might be reduced to the impersonal binary logics of "yes" and "no," "victim" and "perpetrator." This problematic, ultimately, is what Bride inherits from her mother—a struggle with and against the terms of a system that produced her as its exemplary subject, a system that continuously obfuscates its own culpability in order to control the questions and answers of justice. A closer look at the courtroom scene reveals that liberal inclusion is a fiction used to cover over the misapplication of justice and the continued harm done to actual people.[14] Staged at the fault lines of racial liberal logic, *God Help the Child* dramatizes the difficulty and necessity of imagining beyond the punitive, the carceral, and, ultimately, the subject.

If the courtroom trial serves as a primal scene through which a young Black girl (Lula Ann Bridewell) becomes a colorblind subject of color (Bride), then the mysterious physical transformations that threaten to turn Bride "back into a scared little black girl" mark the breakdown of this dissociative process—the impossible bind of the colorblind contract that promises inclusion at the cost of the body and, more specifically, the flesh (142). The tonal problematic of *God Help the Child*—what Walker calls its "thin declarations of trauma" that juxtapose intense physical experiences with strikingly neutral language—is a crucial part of how Morrison stages her critique of the liberal subject and gestures beyond it. Late-style Morrison turns away from emotion and the subject and toward affect and materiality in order to demonstrate how, in an age of mass incarceration, neutrality isn't merely a cover for harm—it is the primary aesthetic and political mode through which harm is perpetuated. Untangling affect from emotion helps us see how racial liberalism follows, and is justified by, a particular affective logic.

As Murakawa puts it, "for white people, racism was an irrationality, a pollutant to the real self. For black people, racism was an injury, a disfigurement of psychological development and therefore constitutive of the real self. . . . By making political protest an explosive emotion that extended



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to violence, crime, and riots, liberals were guilty of a strategy most associated with conservatives: they blurred together organized civil disobedience, street crime, and riots into one mess of psychological disorder."[15] The racial liberal account of racism thus recasts structural racism as a private psychological drama of strong emotions. In this way, racial liberalism follows the values of traditional liberalism, in which the realm of the political acts on behalf of rights-bearing, sovereign human subjects as defined by the state—now, in the aftermath of the civil rights movement, not just white but also Black. Both liberals and conservatives implicitly agreed that the problem was not racism itself but the outcome of the "explosive emotions" of racism—violence, unrest, the destruction of property—on an innocent public, suturing blackness to criminality. To combat both the personal defects of the white racist and the theorized psychological effects of racism on the "stunted" Black psyche, racial liberals turned toward the impersonal neutrality of the carceral state, fortified administratively and evacuated of the problematic emotions of mere humans that caused the social ills of racism.[16] Examining the rise of racial liberalism using an affect studies approach reveals a political strategy of looping strong emotions into the deadening binary of white animus and Black criminality, all in the service of justifying an impartial, race-neutral, punitive state.

This is not to dismiss the emotions of Black subjects experiencing the everyday onslaught of racism; rather, I seek to spotlight how the efficient hydraulics of racial liberalism have coopted the most justifiable of strong emotions into a smokescreen for the "neutral" cruelties of the state. Morrison's weak feelings, in this historical context, form a literary strategy primed for an age of racial liberalism. *God Help the Child* refuses to give the liberal reader the satisfaction of the strong emotional drama of racism solved—the historical fiction of "a little black girl taking down some evil whites," a defanged repackaging of the civil rights movement as the act of an exceptional Black leader versus evil white individuals, as opposed to sustained collective action aimed at larger systems. Instead, Morrison gives us the workings of affect that slide off the surface of the individual psyche and point us outward, toward larger systems that otherwise frustratingly recede from view. Theorist Mel Chen defines affect as "something not necessarily corporeal in that it potentially engages many bodies at once, rather than (only) being contained as an emotion within a single body. Affect inheres in the capacity to affect and be affected."[17] Affect, in other words, exceeds the emotional and the subjective and is a kind of relational potential for action and reaction across a variety of scales—from the granular and material to the structural and systemic.[18] If emotion seems to inadequately adhere to the fantastical subplot of the book—Bride's transformation back into a child—I want to propose that affect offers a different explanatory logic.



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Attending to affect shows how *God Help the Child* puts the colorblind subject together and breaks it apart again in order to insistently draw our attention to the realm of the material—the very realm from which colorblindness attempts to abstract us away but the realm through which subjection occurs.

Bride's physical changes—the disappearance of her pubic hair, ear piercings, breasts, and hips—begin when Booker, her boyfriend, leaves her after discovering her plan to meet up with and give money to Sofia Huxley, the convicted child molester. More specifically, the changes start after Booker makes the performative utterance: "You not the woman I want." "Maybe he is right," Bride muses. "I am not the woman" (32). The woman that Booker wants righteously put a child molester behind bars; the woman he knows would not bring that same convicted child molester "five thousand dollars in cash" and "a three-thousand-dollar Continental Airlines gift certificate" in a "brand-new Louis Vuitton shopping bag" to "comfort her . . . help her forget and take the edge off bad luck, hopelessness and boredom" (12). This gesture is one of benevolence, if not a move toward repair—something incompatible with the carceral logics that frame crime as evil and allow morality to pivot on the state's neutral and all-seeing diagnosis of criminality. If Booker initially speaks through the soapy language of breakups, Bride's reformulation of the statement, which elides Booker's desire altogether, highlights that what is important about the statement is less that Bride is not the woman he wants and more that Bride's identity—and, more provocatively, her subjectivity—is a fiction. "I am not the woman" problematizes the "I" from which she speaks. The "I" to whom the name Bride and the identity "woman" are attached—the "I" that came into being in that courtroom more than a decade prior—is a racially dissociated subject whose entrance into equality and legal representation, per the terms of colorblindness, comes at the price of her flesh.

Here, I extend the work of Black feminist theorist Hortense Spillers, who launched a critical vocabulary of Black materiality in the context of a history of transatlantic slavery. Spillers writes:

> Before the "body" there is the "flesh," that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconograph. . . . These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color. . . . These lacerations, woundings, fissures, tears, scars, openings, ruptures, lesions, rendings, punctures of the flesh create the distance between what I would designate a cultural vestibularity and the culture, whose state apparatus, including judges, attorneys, "owners," "soul drivers," "overseers," and "men of God," apparently colludes with a protocol of "search and destroy." This body whose flesh carries the female and the male to the frontiers of survival bears in person the marks of a cultural text whose inside has been turned outside.[19]



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Many critics have queried the distinction Spillers draws between body and flesh, with some arguing that the distinction marks a "captured" versus a "liberated" subject position.[20] Although Spillers speculates whether the "marking and branding" of enslavement might transfer between generations, I want to avoid collapsing a past history of enslavement into a present moment of Black life and equating contemporary Black people with seventeenth-century captured Africans. As Stephen Best writes, "If we take slavery's dispossessions to live on into the twenty-first century, divesting history of movement and change, then what form can effective political agency take?"[21] In shifting the referent away from a history of enslavement and toward a dynamic, unfolding present with its own technologies of living and dying, I join critics like Best and Aida Levy-Hussen who open up imaginative ways of engaging with twenty-first-century African American literature.[22] I engage Spillers's rich vocabulary of the flesh not to propose that flesh is uncomplicatedly liberatory or to reify Blackness as always already maimed and riven but rather to sharpen our understanding of processes of racial dispossession and state violence that are happening in the present. Flesh, in *God Help the Child*, registers the effects not of slavery but of a contemporary racial liberal contract that promises legal recognition at the cost of the material body and, along with it, any record of material harm.

After all, one of Spillers's main points about flesh is that it is irreducibly indecipherable, a kind of untranslatable "hieroglyphics" that cannot mean or signify beyond its reality as signs of violence undergone in a specific time, in a specific place. Although the marks and brands themselves are not—could not be—the same across generations, flesh as a sensational medium indexes ongoing and ever-shifting processes of antiblack violence (marking and branding as continuous actions). The relationship between the body and flesh is, for Spillers, a dimensional one of surface and depth wherein the flesh is "covered over" and "hidden" by discourse, culture, ideology itself. The body—immaterial, surface, legible—is what the law acts upon, using the shorthand "color" in order to alienate the surfaces of subjects (skin) from themselves (flesh). A dominant history of racial liberalism as a progressive teleology of rights and representation is, in other words, a history of the "cultural seeing by skin color." In the era of separate but equal, the law separated white and Black people by skin color; an era of colorblindness professes skin color to exist without mattering. Both regimes are primarily surface, primarily visual, and do not, as Spillers emphasizes, remediate the material cost of antiblack violence and terror perpetuated on the flesh.

This distinction between the body and the flesh might also be encapsulated by a distinction between discourse and affect; as Michelle Stephens writes, "The flesh represents the body that sits on the very edge, on the



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underside, of the symbolic order, pre-symbolic and pre-linguistic, just before words and meaning. It has yet to be sealed away into an image or bodily ideal."[23] The body as proprietary subject is created out of individuating and privatizing legal discourse, while affect is the zone of the material and, crucially, the relational. Affect allows us to conceive of bodies outside of the subject, at various scales of assemblage, affecting and being affected by other people, things, and systems. This is the potential of flesh—to jam the efficient gears of a legal history that professes only one way of narrating a history of race and racism, by forcing the material back into the cultural. If the legal history of civil rights from segregation to colorblindness is a history of the subjugation of the subject, then renarrating the twentieth and twenty-first centuries from the perspective of the flesh is a history of the subject's remainder, of affect—a history that registers the material harm that the law cannot and that charts the future potentials of cross-racial relationality that might rectify that same harm. Spillers helps us understand that under conditions of colorblindness, the visual—the "cultural seeing by skin color"—is compromised. *God Help the Child* offers us instead an affective laboratory of flesh that defamiliarizes liberal expectations of victim and perpetrator, truth and justice, through the alchemy of touch.

When Bride arrives at Sofia Huxley's motel, she describes herself this way: "I'm black as midnight and dressed in all white so maybe she thinks it's a uniform and I'm an authority of some sort" (19). Bride thus begins the encounter as pure, unmarked surface; black and white, denuded of racial meaning, signify instead the administrative neutrality and objectivity of the carceral state. Although they are physically outside of the confines of the women's prison, the context of the prison—the threat of discipline and punishment—structures their meeting, which is marked by Sofia's palpable fear. In this way, the positions that define Bride and Sofia Huxley at the start of their encounter are not so much Black and white, or woman and woman, but rather civilian and criminal—in other words, the state of having and not having rights, which, through the lens of liberalism, is nothing less than the distinction between the state of being or not being a person.[24] Legal theorist Colin Dayan describes how convicted persons undergo the legal fiction of "civil death." Dayan writes:

> The "person of a convict," once emptied by law, no longer needs to vote or do any of the things that other persons civilly alive need to do. The logic would go something like this: The convict, though actually a living being, is not only dead but buried by the law. The body is there, but restrained in prison. The external physical conditions are clear. The internal spiritual state is not. The physical person (solely body and appetite) has no personhood (the social and civic components of personal identity). What kind of spectral form remains?[25]



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“Thin as a rope,” with eyes “like a rabbit’s” and skin like “whey,” “gobbling like a refugee, like someone who’s been floating at sea without food or water for weeks and just about to wonder what harm it would do to his dying boat mate to taste his flesh before it shrank,” Huxley embodies the spectral form of the civil dead (16, 18). The self that remains after her time in prison is all appetite, no personhood, her white womanhood queered by monstrous hunger into a male cannibalistic refugee on the one hand and plant/animal life on the other. The body that remains, in other words, is less a human body and more a roving assemblage of things. This scene exposes what Bride’s memory of the court scene keeps hidden: that the legal system that produced Bride as a subject necessarily produces Huxley as an object, and that what subtends the new colorblind subject is the criminalization of others, mostly Black. As Huxley herself observes of Bride, “In another world her black skin would have been remarkable, but living all those years in Decagon [prison] it wasn’t” (69). Bride’s encounter with Huxley makes plain that liberalism’s idea of freedom is relentlessly tethered to unfreedom, insofar as one’s very personhood might be adjudicated by one’s criminality.

In their violent encounter, Huxley and Bride rewrite the script that racial liberalism gave them years before. After realizing that Bride is one of the child witnesses who testified at her trial, Huxley hits and maims Bride rather than talking with her: “My mouth looks as though it’s stuffed with raw liver; the whole side of my face is scraped of skin; my right eye is a mushroom” (21). The attack transforms Bride from an abstracted authority figure into vegetation, into meat, into the raw substance of life beside the human subject. If racial liberalism seeks to produce Bride as a gleaming example of the end of race and racism, then Huxley’s attack on her turns the stuff of that surface, to quote Spillers, inside out. After all, the colorblind subject has skin but not flesh—has color but not materiality. Here, the colorblind subject’s encounter with its criminalized other literally scrapes that subject of skin, exposing the flesh beneath. In this way, the contact enacted through violent touch shatters the rigid boundaries that structure the colorblind subject—the boundary between the subject and its flesh, the subject and its context, the subject and its history. The “severe disjunctures” of the flesh that emerge in the rubble of violent touch intimately register what colorblindness refuses to make visible—the material harm of the “state apparatus,” which Spillers specifies as including “judges, attorneys, “owners,” “soul drivers,” “overseers,” and “men of God.”[26] The resurgence of Bride’s flesh not only marks the breakdown of this liberal subject—it also marks the breakdown of the irreducibly carceral logic of racial liberalism. Although Bride is the victim of Huxley’s attack, the attack is spurred by the recognition that Bride’s testimony sentenced Huxley to “fifteen years of life as death,” while Bride was able to achieve considerable financial and



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personal security in the wake of the trial (70). In this way, what initially seems to be an isolated instance of injury (white criminal attacks Black woman) becomes embedded in a larger web of harm that implicates both Huxley and Bride as objects, as material exploited by an efficient apparatus of racial capitalism. We are left not with a static image of race as skin color but with an affective account of racism in action on the systemic level—a record of racialized injury where the perpetrator is not a single person or body but rather the prison industrial complex, a system of various scales.

Put another way, *God Help the Child* redirects our attention to the flesh in order to highlight the shifting relations between people, objects, and systems that racial liberalism, in its myopic adherence to an individualistic victim and perpetrator model of harm, cannot and will not account for.[27] As prison abolitionist Mariame Kaba writes: "It didn't really matter whether it was the person who caused harm or the person who has experienced harm—it's the harm that I'm interested in transforming."[28] In veering away from the territory of strong emotions and the subject and choosing to highlight the harm itself, which implicates not an individual victim or perpetrator but rather the structure that produces that harm, Morrison critiques the punitive mindset that undergirds the carceral state, instead bringing us closer to an abolitionist frame. Kaba writes: "For me, transformative justice is about trying to figure out how we respond to violence and harm in a way that doesn't cause more violence and harm. . . . Transformative justice is militantly against the dichotomies between victims and perpetrators, because the world is more complex than that: in a particular situation we're victimized, and in other situations we're the people that perpetrate harm. We have to be able to hold all those things together."[29] Bride's flesh materializes the untenability of keeping separate and stable the identities of "victim" and "perpetrator." After she is attacked, Bride experiences a mysteriously accelerated healing time: "Only my rib area is still tender and, to my surprise, the scraped skin on my face has healed the quickest" (34). Calling this process "healing," however, is a slight misdescription, as it is soon revealed to be part of the larger set of physical changes that threaten to turn her back into a child: "virgin earlobes, untouched by a needle, smooth as a baby's thumb," where she once had piercings, a newly flat chest, the cessation of her period, and missing pubic hair (51). The reversal of her secondary sex characteristics effects a kind of ungendering back into vulnerable flesh—crucially, the same vulnerable position that she occupied when she witnessed Mr. Leigh abuse a child, experienced racist and sexist abuse herself, and helped convict Huxley. By colliding her childhood with her adulthood, Bride's flesh surfaces a longer history of injury and healing that encompasses not only her own life but also Huxley's life, as they are both implicated in a system of gendered and racist harm. Most



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importantly, Bride's magical flesh serves as an urgent reminder that the antiblackness she experiences and survives could never be redressed by the carceral state.

Instead, Bride's flesh presents a fantastical opportunity to repair harm in a different way. After all, Morrisonian flesh is not permanently scarred or riven; it is mutable, changeable, suggesting the possibility of transformation. As Bride laments, "Every bit of my pubic hair was gone. Not as in shaved or waxed, but gone as in erased, as in never having been there in the first place" (13). This description of her bodily transformation underscores that the transformation is happening *in the flesh*, not merely superficially: "So what kind of illness was she suffering? One that was both visible and invisible" (95). If racial dissociation as a structure depends on the policing of a surface/depth binary, then Bride's transformative flesh operates on a different dimension, where surface isn't necessarily always opposed to depth but is instead queerly sensational. As Crawford writes,

> Morrison makes the friction between people and surfaces matter as the tension between surface and depth becomes the prime theme of the novel. *God Help the Child*'s non-binary rethinking of the interplay between surface and depth takes us back to Morrison's description, in her essay "The Site of Memory," of her work as a writer. She writes, "It is emotional memory—what the nerves and skin remember" (99). Could it be that the entire novel is an attempt to make readers slide around on the surface that the novel becomes, with the characters who are intentionally "less developed" than characters in her other novels?[30]

Bride's transforming flesh—"nerves and skin" that remember, even as her memory falters—opens up a terrain of transformative justice, not only by surfacing the relations between people and systems that comprise harm but also, and most suggestively, by catalyzing relations of care and attention that might ameliorate that harm.

On a quest to track down Booker and figure out the source of her mysterious condition, Bride crashes her car in a remote town and sustains major injuries. She is taken in by a working-class white couple and their adopted daughter, a victim of child sexual abuse, and stays in their home for several weeks to heal. "They hadn't asked her where she was from or where she was going. They simply tended her, fed her, arranged for her car to be towed for repair. It was too hard, too strange for her to understand the kind of care they offered—free, without judgment or even a passing interest in who she was or where she was going" (90). In a eulogy of Toni Morrison, Elias Rodriques highlights the omnipresence of care in Morrison's works as "something related to but not quite the same as love," an "ethical system that transforms the violence that creates Blackness."[31] If care in a novel like *Home*, as Rodriques and Yumi Lee argue, emerges from the relationships in



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and among Black people in a Black community, *God Help the Child* seems to suggest the necessity to think of care in a cross-racial frame as well.[32] Care without interest might be, on the small scale, what the novel proposes—that we might prize apart those relationships sutured together by structural racism and the prison industrial complex using quotidian practices of mutual aid.

As scholar-activist Dean Spade defines it, mutual aid is "a form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions . . . by actually building new social relations that are more survivable."[33] Unlike charity, in which wealthy benefactors or institutions give aid only to those subjects who can prove their moral worth, mutual aid requires no disclosure of transparency. If charity is care *with* interest that reifies capitalism's individualist frame, then care *without* interest—a practice that might be scaled from the local to the collective—builds solidarity out of political ruins. Perhaps "interest," for Morrison, might refer to the kind of strong, subjective, personal investment that Kaba cautions against when she writes: "Mistaking emotional satisfaction for justice is also not abolitionist. Abolitionism is not a politics mediated by emotional responses."[34] As an alternative to punishment, care without interest is an abolitionist affect that skirts the requirement of a bounded subject, emerging as a set of relational practices of and on the flesh—what Christina Sharpe, thinking with Saidiya Hartman, calls the "ordinary note of care" that counters "what is offered and enforced by the state."[35] Care, within an abolitionist and Black feminist framework, encodes the potential for social and structural transformation.

In the magical realist world of *God Help the Child*, care as an alternative to punishment literally transforms the flesh itself. Bride's healing process after the attack by Huxley is spurred by her daily practice of touching her face with Booker's shaving brush:

> On impulse I open the medicine cabinet and take out his shaving brush. I finger it. The silky hair is both tickly and soothing. I bring the brush to my chin, stroke it the way he used to. I move it to the underside of my jaw, then up to my earlobes. . . . This is crazy I'm sure but I stare at my face. My eyes look wide and starry. My nose is not only healed, it's perfect, and my lips between the white foam look so downright kissable I touch them with the tip of my little finger. . . . When I feel depressed the cure is tucked away in a little kit where his shaving equipment is. Lathering warm soapy water, I can hardly wait for the brushing and then the razor, the combination that both excites and soothes me. Lets me imagine without grief times I was made fun of and hurt. (34–35)

The feelings generated by this scene never cohere into a legible emotion; the brush and the razor suggest excitement only to "soothe" it away, conjure painful memories only to evacuate them of grief. Instead of a portrait of



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a Black subject reliving, over and over again, the shock of her own trauma, we have the gentle friction of brush against chin, hands against water—the "affective exchange" of body parts and objects assembled not in the service of marking or branding but in the service, this time, of healing.[36] The fragmentation of body and self enacted by antiblack racism and extended by colorblindness is thus repurposed as a haptic enactment of care without interest, directed this time not outward but inward. Care without interest becomes an everyday method of reckoning with a racialized history of subjects turned objects—a method of attending to atomized flesh without the imposition of a subject.

*God Help the Child* is a wry fairy tale that skirts the surface of strong feeling, highlighting and historicizing affective methods of dispossession alongside affective modes of repair. Thorny, problematic, and difficult to love, the novel forces its reader to consider the transformative questions that racial liberalism refuses to ask: how do you care for those who can harm, who have harmed? How do you imagine justice beyond the innocence of a perfect victim or the punishment of a single perpetrator? As Morrison writes, "What kind of love is it that requires an angel and only an angel for its commitment?" (160). *God Help the Child* contains no romance of community but is, I would argue, an exercise of the abolitionist imagination. Through this novel, Morrison offers us a way out of the binary of strong emotion and carceral neutrality, thereby giving us a much-needed alternative to the historical manipulation of racial liberalism. "Memory is the worst thing about healing," Bride says, and who living today in the United States would disagree (29)? *God Help the Child* suggests practices of relation that might persist in the midst of exhaustion and disappointment—that might survive us, despite us.

## Notes

1. Toni Morrison, *God Help the Child* (New York, 2015), 3. Subsequent citations will be parenthetical in text.
2. Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York, 1993), 216.
3. Kara Walker, "Toni Morrison's 'God Help the Child,'" *New York Times*, April 13, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/19/books/review/toni-morrisons-god-help-the-child.html.
4. Margo Natalie Crawford, *What Is African American Literature?* (Hoboken, 2020), 37.
5. Habiba Ibrahim refers to Bride's subjectivity as a form of "neoliberal girlhood," an "artificial infantilism that is constituted through a knowing or unknowing refusal to accept modes of responsibility that exist outside of the purview of neoliberal governmentality." As Ibrahim argues, "Bride is black, but her



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historicity reveals how neoliberal feminism and white liberal innocence converge in the making of a subject who is individualist and wholly responsible for her own success, while, paradoxically, innocent and wholly devoid of responsibility, despite her own participation in a rationality that deepens social inequities"; *Black Age: Oceanic Lifespans and the Time of Black Life* (New York, 2021), 195–96.

6. In their critical account of the effects of colorblind racism, David Eng and Shinhee Han write: "Under the tenets of neoliberal multiculturalism, everyone must become an Asian American model minority. Everyone must work incessantly, buy into the system, not rock the boat, embody economic efficiency, display technocratic expertise, and enroll in a major that will immediately translate instrumental knowledge into economic capital and power"; David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans* (Durham, NC, 2018), 172.
7. As Naomi Murakawa writes, "If the problem of the twentieth century was . . . 'the problem of the color line,' then the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of colorblindness, the refusal to acknowledge the causes and consequences of racial stratification"; *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (Oxford, 2014), 7.
8. Neil Gotanda, "A Critique of 'Our Constitution Is Color-Blind,'" *Stanford Law Review* 44, no. 1 (November 1991): 6.
9. Ibid., 43.
10. Eng and Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation,* 159.
11. Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1713.
12. Murakawa, *The First Civil Right,* 212n8.
13. Ibid., 4.
14. See Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford, 1997) for a longer history of punitive subjectivity, in which "the recognition of humanity and individuality acted to tether, bind, and oppress" both enslaved and recently manumitted Black people (15). Hartman writes: "It is a tricky matter to detail the civil existence of a subject who is socially dead and legally recognized as human only to the degree that he is criminally culpable" (24).
15. Murakawa, *The First Civil Right,* 13–14.
16. Murakawa explains how postwar racial liberalism conceived of racism as "an anachronistic prejudice and a personal and psychological problem, rather than as a systemic problem rooted in specific social practices and pervading relations of political economy and culture. In the construction of liberal law-and-order, then, *racist* violence became *arbitrary* violence. Racism was an irrational belief, erratic and baseless, and therefore, correcting racial violence meant criminalizing 'private' acts, and, more significantly, modernizing carceral machinery to increase procedural protections, decrease discretionary decisions, and insulate the system from arbitrary bias"; ibid., 11.
17. Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC, 2012), 11.
18. In contrast, according to theorist Brian Massumi, emotion is "a subjective content . . . the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning"; "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique,* no. 31 (Autumn 1995): 88. Emotion is affect captured, made personal,



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legible, psychological—affect put to work in the service of narrative and meaning. Emotion, to summarize, proceeds from an individual subject and relates to the personal and psychological and is thus less suited than affect to address the workings of systems composed of both objects and people in shifting, imbricated relations with one other.

19. Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 64.
20. Sharon Patricia Holland argues that “Spillers makes a dramatic distinction between body and flesh, using these terms as metaphors for captive and liberated positions, respectively. . . . Disallowed access to all culture but representative of it, black bodies become the literal containers of the power of state ideology and simultaneously live in a constant state of existential torment”; *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Durham, NC, 2000), 46. Similarly, Michelle Stephens writes that “the discursive order of modernity created by New World discovery, conquest, colonization, and enslavement, the ‘American grammar’ of race fixes the black subject’s skin as merely the covering of a body already trapped in the symbolic order, a body marked and named by so many multiple investments and discourses that ‘there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean.’ This body-with-skin is an organic ‘resource for metaphor’ but also a ‘defenseless target’ for the aims of a racializing discursive order. In contrast, those who are liberated have another bodily entitlement. They can imagine themselves as a body outside of the symbolic order, as the more universal body of the human covered by flesh. For those in this subject position, ‘before the “body” there is the “flesh,”’ that is, another sense of the body that is a remainder of the body concealed and covered over in discourse”; Michelle Ann Stephens, *Skin Acts: Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Black Male Performer* (Durham, NC, 2014), 3.
21. Stephen Best, “On Failing to Make the Past Present,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (September 2012): 454.
22. Aida Levy-Hussen excavates a “shadow archive of post-Civil Rights black literary production that imagines narrative frames other than the slave past for thinking about racialized experience, feeling, identification, and desire”; *How to Read African American Literature: Post-Civil Rights Fiction and the Task of Interpretation* (New York, 2016), 7.
23. Stephens, *Skin Acts*, 3.
24. For the historical imbrication of the rise of the penitentiary with liberalism and Enlightenment philosophy, see Angela Davis’s *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York, 2003) and Caleb Smith’s *The Prison and the American Imagination* (New Haven, 2011), among other texts.
25. Colin Dayan, *The Law Is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton, 2013), 11–12.
26. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 64.
27. For an account of the “perpetrator” perspective of antidiscrimination law, see Alan David Freeman’s “Legitimizing Racial Discrimination Through Antidiscrimination Law: A Critical Review of Supreme Court Doctrine,” *Minnesota Law Review* 62, no. 6 (July 1978): 1053–54.
28. Mariame Kaba, *We Do This ’til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*, ed. Tamara K. Nopper (Chicago, 2021), 144.
29. Ibid., 152.
30. Crawford, *What Is African American Literature?*, 42.



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31. Elias Rodriques and Omari Weekes, “We Had a Shakespeare,” *n+1* 36 (Winter 2020): 68–69.
32. A. J. Yumi Lee, “Repairing Police Action after the Korean War in Toni Morrison’s *Home*,” *Radical History Review* 137 (May 2020): 119–40.
33. Dean Spade, “Solidarity Not Charity,” *Social Text* 38, no. 1 (March 2020): 131–51.
34. Kaba, *We Do This ’til We Free Us*, 21.
35. Christina Sharpe, “‘And to Survive,’” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 22, no. 3 (November 2018): 174.
36. Crawford, *What Is African American Literature?*, 42.

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