



PROJECT MUSE®

The Voice, The Body, and "Letting it all Fly": Neo-Slave
Narratives and the Discursive Framing of Urban America

Leila Kamali

Callaloo, Volume 40, Number 4, Fall 2017, pp. 137-154 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/723042>

THE VOICE, THE BODY, AND “LETTING IT ALL FLY” Neo-Slave Narratives and the Discursive Framing of Urban America

by Leila Kamali

This essay explores the role of voice and embodiment in the claim to citizenship made in contemporary narratives addressing conditions of state surveillance in urban America. I discuss Barack Obama's *Dreams from My Father* (1995), hip hop / spoken word piece “Return to Innocence Lost” (1999) by The Roots featuring Ursula Rucker, and Louis Theroux's television documentary *Law and Disorder in Philadelphia* (2008). I read these texts as contemporary variants upon the neo-slave narrative. Each of these texts makes acute commentary upon conditions of state surveillance and the policing of the black body in ways that bear comparison with the practice of narrative “framing” that historically formed the site of the slave narrative's production. Just as “(Neo)Slave narratives emerge from the combative discourse of the captive as well as the controlling discourse of the ‘master’ state,” what I call “voice” emerges against the dominance of what Toni Morrison identifies as a “statist language” which is “censored and censoring [and] cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, [or] fill baffling silences” (James xxii; Morrison). Voice is defined here, in part, by way of Kamau Brathwaite's “nation language,” as a black nationalist strategy and a liberatory poetics, where “sound explosions” may form part of a distinctive interplay between reported speech, silence, bodily contortion, and inarticulate sound (Brathwaite 13). Voice thus reflects some dysfunction in a surveillance society, as it works within the compromised relationship with speech and the body that is shaped by surveillance and its insidious entry into individual interiority.

Speech, and even self-knowledge or interiority, I suggest in this essay, are made especially difficult for those who lack privilege in the context of the surveillance state, a parallel to the situation of the slave in the slave narrative. In the classic slave narrative form, the narrative account is usually “verified” by the white patron or publisher, so that “These formal attestations present . . . the black narrative voice to the imagined audience, [and] the patron will claim that the narrative voice, if not identical, is a credible approximation of the ex-slave's speaking voice” (Phillips 52). Citizenship exists then, in the context of the slave narrative, as a problem of articulation where “the clash of voices, between the well-intended prefatory or appended attestations of abolitionists about the author's integrity (or indeed his or her intelligence) and the voice of the slave subject, can be . . . clearly overheard” (Davis and Gates xii). Milette Shamir shows that the persona articulated by the slave narrative was constructed wholly according to the desires and definitions of an abolitionist publication framework and readership, and that the slave narrative's very legibility depended upon a virtual erasure of “individual interiority”:

The slave narrative . . . exposed privatized stories and introduced embodied voices into the public sphere, but, in order to authorize and authenticate these stories and voices, it filled the space of individual interiority with performative, conventionalized narratives of socially-defined identity. The black private self constructed by the abolitionist narrative was wholly alienable, an object for public consumption, fully legible and ultimately *safe*. (Shamir 137)

In this process, individual interiority as Shamir describes it becomes subject to a network of contradictory impulses: the “privatized” is at once “exposed,” and the “embodied voice” is at once “authorized.” The site of interiority, where the subaltern subject might speak her own feelings, is rampantly colonized by the abolitionist narrative process. In the texts discussed below, the possibility for the black individual to be represented as “legible” and “safe” exists more than ever in contemporary society as a sly means of policing the black body; the surveillance mechanisms of the state, experienced with a particular intensity in urban contexts, perform the same functions of invasion, dehumanization, and control of the individual’s interiority as do the framing of the slave narrative.

As individual interiority is shown in the chosen texts to be violated by a surveillance culture akin to the governing structure shaping the slave narrative, I identify in this essay a discursive territory that extends beyond the field of language, or even of sound itself, and shows the expressive capacity of the body to attest to the right to alternative forms of citizenship, under conditions of extreme pressure. Voice is also shaped here by a realm of power identified by Paul Gilroy in the context of African diaspora cultures when he argues that,

It is possible . . . to interpret the screams, wails, grunts, scattings and wordless singing that appears in all these black cultures as both indicative of a struggle to extend communication beyond words and as a commentary on the inadequacy of language as a means for expressing certain truths. There are here meanings and feelings so potent, so dread, that they cannot be spoken without diminution and trivialization. (Gilroy 212)

By giving attention to the discursive space indicated by voice, which may be glimpsed in the interstices of speech, in interrupted speech, or in moments when the power of speech is surrendered to the powers of the body, alternative possibilities can be discovered for citizenship, for those otherwise disenfranchised by the surveillance state.

Just as the slave is excluded from the norms of citizenship and effective political agency by processes of narrative framing occurring in and around the production of the published testimony, voice emerges, I argue, amid the similar conditions which are produced in the context of the late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century US surveillance state and its racial logic. The texts I discuss here help to define the neo-slave narrative not simply as representative of “contemporary fictional works which take slavery as their subject matter and usually feature enslaved protagonists” (Beaulieu xiii); and not only as examples of “postmodern author[s] negotiat[ing] and reconstruct[ing] what is essentially a premodern form” (Rushdy 7). These texts, instead, depict what has followed from the “racial dictatorship” of segregation, “a whole new kind of racial and urban misery [in which]

prisons and their affiliated economies have made some urban communities the frontline of what can only be called genocide" (Lee xv).¹ Obama, Rucker, and Theroux, using different forms and technologies, situate the difficult relationship with citizenship which is represented by voice as occurring within unrelenting circumstances of surveillance by police, by a politics governed by enclosed circles of wealth and influence, by an economy driven by trade in illegal drugs, and by the indomitable power of the mass media. The texts examined here, as examples of political memoir, hip hop/spoken word poetry, and television documentary, begin to model a flexibility of reading and listening skills which I argue is necessary in order to perceive the articulatory power of voice itself, and what it reveals about the nature of the global racial crisis in which, in the twenty-first century, we remain mired.

As well as problematizing, or even erasing, the individual's interiority—her capacity for private, unrecorded thought and feeling unsanctioned by the slave-owning social structure—the slave narrative tradition "enact[s] a transition from orality to textuality," marking the individual's *transition* from that interiority to a written form which is understood *not to belong to her* (Phillips 52). This is rather similar to Hannah Arendt's description, in her discourse on citizenship, of s/he who, in the vein of Greek and Roman theater, adopts a "mask" which signifies a "distinct 'legal personality' as a 'citizen'" (Arendt, *Responsibility* 12-13). Only those in possession of this persona are recognized by the state, which to Arendt is functional in allowing a person to speak and be heard. For Arendt, in Andrew Schaap's words, "loss of legal personhood coincides with the loss of the relevance of speech since she understands personhood in its Roman sense as 'persona': an artificial mask assigned to each member of the polity that establishes equality and enables one's 'voice to soundthrough' and without which one is a politically irrelevant being" (Schaap 27). Arendt uses the term *homo* to indicate someone who is deprived of legal personality and of access to recognized speech, who is "nothing but a man," not a citizen, but instead "a rightless person, therefore, and a slave" (Arendt, *On Revolution* 97). The notion that a person must fulfill certain conditions in the view of the political state in order for their speech to be heard or understood is thinly disguised, and resonates throughout the texts discussed here. It is when such conditions are not fulfilled—when a person's speech is not heard and eventually is produced with the expectation that it will not be heard as "politically relevant"—that it develops the distinctive power which I call "voice."²

The adoption of citizenship, effectively, through the wearing of a "mask" is a very different process from the traditional African diaspora context Kamau Brathwaite describes, where the presence of integrated community creates a "total expression" in which the "oral tradition . . . demands not only the griot but the audience to complete the community: the noise and sounds that the maker makes are responded to by the audience and are returned to him. Hence we have the creation of a continuum where meaning truly resides" (Brathwaite 18-19). Interestingly, Brathwaite situates the production of meaning as being located both *within* the individual and *between* individuals. He continues, "this . . . comes about because people be in the open air, because people . . . had to rely on their very *breath* rather than on paraphernalia like books and museums and machines" (Brathwaite 19). In the context of a functional traditional community, the site of the written as a repository for meaning is circumvented; it is not required at all. But the need for *listeners* and *other speakers* to contribute to the process of producing meaning *cannot* be circumvented. The

transitional space between the interior and the outside world—this space of sound, silence, and movement between bodies—is vital for the coherence of the individual’s identity.

Voice occurs in these texts, I argue, not in well-functioning traditional communities, but rather amid the pervasive threat of police violence and in the inescapable context of surveillance culture. In the difficult, often unspeakable contexts presented in contemporary settings, there is a desperate yet troubled sweetness to voice that Anna Scott identifies in the work of the soul singer James Brown: “Each grunt, repeated syllable, cry, holler, unh, screech, and scream racked his body with a tension that felt like it would be a painful beauty once it got out. And when the voice wasn’t enough to make all that sweet and sour soul power known to the world, James Brown got down and delivered the message of Black Power through blurs of body parts” (Scott 17). Voice has this particular quality where the power of speech is invoked, the power of the body is also invoked, but neither alone can shape a complete or satisfactory site of citizenship. Instead, it is that interplay between sites of expression, and amidst sites of what cannot be expressed, which is represented here.

Yet voice is a “radical creative space which affirms and sustains . . . subjectivity, . . . a new location from which to articulate [a] sense of the world” (hooks 153). Voice aims, as Gayatri Spivak puts it, to “touch the consciousness of the people,” but crucially, it “cannot [be] put together” in the narrator’s own language (32, 33). It is frequently defensive, and even while being expressive of a profound experiential truth, also presents a resistance to the process of *being read*. So the hip hop artist Tupac Shakur is quoted as commenting in relation to his group, which was named Thug Life: “You know what Thug Life’s new code is: ‘No mothafucking comment.’ . . . Niggas ain’t meant to be understood. . . . So back up off me!” (Hampton 133). Such explicit claims to the individual’s right *not* to be interpretable can be understood as part of the tradition of the violation of the slave’s interiority which is seen in the slave narrative. A radical form of citizenship is thus asserted against the racial structures which would routinely deny the subaltern’s interiority, as part of the process of denying his right to life itself. Tupac is acutely conscious regarding the function of his own refusal of the mask of civility, for to accept it would be to accept its inextricable link to the structures of exploitation: “How we gonna be ‘African Americans’ if we out here dying? We’re Thugs and we’re Niggas until we set this shit straight” (Andrews, Shakur). Tupac’s explosive words gesture to the inarticulable “meanings and feelings” referenced by Gilroy, to designate radical—and of course for the ruling structure, radically uncomfortable—sites for alternative forms of citizenship.

A more recent effort towards claiming full citizenship, Black Lives Matter itself was founded in 2013 by Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza in the wake of George Zimmerman’s acquittal for the murder of Trayvon Martin, and was established in specific response to state violence against black people *in its widest interpretation*. The social media and organizing movement situates its emancipatory impulse in clear confrontation to the range of ways in which state surveillance incapacitates black people: “When we say Black Lives Matter, we are broadening the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state” (“About”). Black Lives Matter began with a “love letter to black folks” posted on Facebook by Alicia Garza, which ended with the words: “Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.” The post “struck a chord with Cullors, who reposted Garza’s thoughts with the hashtag #blacklivesmatter.” Born of a bittersweet song of love and despair, Cul-

lors, Tometi, and Garza nevertheless go on to frame the movement as a smart and knowing refusal of the mask of civility in ways that resist received ideas about citizenship itself: "We've chosen the tactic of disruption. We've chosen the tactic of challenging respectability" ("These Savvy Women").

Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father*

In the 2004 preface to the memoir *Dreams from My Father*, Barack Obama makes quite clear that the nature of his own interiority in the text, originally published in 1995 as a "result of my election as the first African-American president of the *Harvard Law Review*," becomes compromised in ways which are parallel to the framing of the slave narrative, as it is republished in the wake of winning a seat in the United States Senate: "I know, I have seen, the desperation and disorder of the powerless . . . I know that the response of the powerful to this disorder . . . is inadequate to the task. . . . And so what was a more interior, intimate effort on my part, to understand this struggle and to find my place in it, has [now] converged with a broader public debate" (Obama vii, xi). Due to the mixed blessing of circumstance, Obama finds himself re-presenting his memoir, originally intended as a more personal, less strategically political text, and later finds his interiority exposed, as it were, in the broader context of his move to the higher offices in the land (Remnick 230). The distance between the role of slave narrator and the role of President of the United States is clearly not to be missed. Nevertheless, similar to the circumstance where the slave narrative is framed by a highly prescribed abolitionist agenda, Obama's text is situated in a manner where as author he is left with far less control over its interpretation than he might originally have expected.

As if to prefigure the compromised position his story is eventually placed into, Obama inhabits an uncertainty throughout the text with regard to speech and its role in enabling people to participate in political process. I reflect here on several moments in Obama's text where acts of self-representation through speech, and acts of self-representation through the body, each seem oddly unsatisfactory in terms of offering people access to the "mask of civility" that they would seek in order to act as citizens. Obama describes "a nation in constant conversation: inner-city mothers and corn and bean farmers, immigrant day laborers alongside suburban investment bankers—all jostling to be heard, all ready to tell their stories" (viii). Yet at this point he does not attempt to report speech itself. What is emphasized here instead is a specific bodily contortion—a "jostling to be heard"—which may signify a failed effort, as it were, to don the mask of civility, a striving by individuals to be seen as citizens in a political state where the persona which allows speech to communicate is not readily available to them. Obama's narrative wrestles with the sense that the public terrain where people might express the conditions of their lives, and the needs of their communities, has been breached by a culture of surveillance or control: "if you could just clear away the politicians and media and bureaucrats and give everybody a seat at the table, then ordinary people could find common ground" (152). In Obama's vision of his own role in this society, he is a potential conduit of stories, representative of the underrepresented, and enabler of discursive exchange. He describes himself "notic[ing]

that people had begun to listen to my opinions. It was a discovery that made me hungry for words . . . words that could carry a message, support an idea" (105).

But from the outset, Obama is faced with a straightforward conflict between his own sense that positive political action can begin with speech, and another view that discourse is known to be not only useless, but perhaps even *prohibitive* for improving the lot of the community. Repeatedly, he faces the distinct challenge of people's skepticism regarding the power of talk to represent them or their interests:

"That's good, Barack," but the look in their eyes told me they were secretly disappointed. Only Ike, the gruff black security guard . . . was willing to come right out and tell me I'd be making a mistake . . . "Forget about this organizing business and do something that's gonna make you some money. . . . That's what we need, see. Not more folks running around here, *all rhymes and jive*." (135–36, emphasis added)

A dismissive approach toward the power of speech arises from the wearied state of those whose speech has long gone unheard or misunderstood, in a political constituency where rights are organized around wealth, where only money talks. The "secretly disappointed" looks, and the "That's good, Barack," in this text, signal a closing down of communication which is caused by what Nicholas Royle argues is the uncanny sense, in the contemporary, that "our lives, our experiences, the comings and goings within and all around us are increasingly *programmed*" (Royle 23). Just as in the slave narrative, where the interiority of the slave is not accessed in a meaningful way because it occurs within a broader framework of surveillance, so also in *this* surveillance society, the ever-visible subject is always "the object of information, never a subject in communication" (Foucault 200).

The opportunity for Obama to develop his role as witness and his sensitivity to the communicative capacities of voice arises in a way which, interestingly enough, introduces the significance of the body; in a meeting with community leader Ruby, he comments: "out of the corner of my eye I thought I saw something different about her, but I couldn't quite put my finger on what it was" (191–92). Upon realizing that Ruby is wearing blue-colored contact lenses in her "normally . . . warm, dark brown" eyes, Obama finds himself awkwardly silent in the face of what he interprets as Ruby's attempt to reach toward white ideals of beauty: "I stood there, not knowing what to say" (192). Ruby also plays a part in this exchange where her body appears awkwardly out of place. Within a few lines, Ruby "shook her head and laughed," "look[ed] down," "nodded and put the book inside her purse," and finally "abruptly . . . stood up and straightened her skirt" and "hurried out the door" (192). If Obama finds that people's relationship with speech does not give them meaningful access to any sense of shaping their own role as citizens, his encounter with Ruby reveals a similarly problematic relationship with inhabiting the body, haunted as it is by beauty directives so embedded in the culture of the surveillance society that the racist and sexist nature of their insidious manipulation are only uncertainly discerned. Obama connects this particular moment, in which he stands in awkward silence, in which both his own body and Ruby's appear to find themselves out of place, with an awe-inspiring narrative of systemic racist violence: "The stories that I had been hearing from the leadership, all the records of courage and sacrifice and overcoming of great odds . . . had arisen out of a very particular experience with hate. . . . at the center of which stood . . . a faceless

image of a system claiming power over our lives" (195). The conditions Obama encounters in his work in the Altgeld Gardens housing project in Chicago reflect the uncanny, "programmed" conditions that Manning Marable refers to as the "internal crisis . . . generated in part by the paradox of desegregation itself" which led to "the geographical as well as cultural separation of the black middle class from the working-class and low-income African American population, which was still largely confined to the ghetto by the lack of educational and income mobility" (Marable 188). While Obama remembers his own family "stories of hardship and migration, the drive for something better," he witnesses the other side of this story in the Chicago ghetto: "For Sale signs cropped up like dandelions under a summer sun. . . . Entire blocks turned over in less than six months; entire neighborhoods in less than five years" (156). In this context, Obama describes "conversations marked by another, more ominous strain . . . all of [the decay] whispered painful truths" (157). This description bears the hallmarks of what Jacques Rancière calls "unconscious discourse," "second-degree dialogue," "the thought of [a] 'third person' who haunts the dialogue, the confrontation with the Unknown, with the anonymous and meaningless forces of life" (Rancière, *The Aesthetic* 39–40).³ As Obama's experience in Chicago progresses, his initial optimism about his role as enabler of "conversation" turns to an alternative kind of consciousness, a witness to the uncanny terrain of a society whose fate is written by unseen political and economic forces controlled by the most powerful.

Reflecting upon the encounter with Ruby, Obama writes, "I had to ask myself whether the bonds of community could be restored without collectively exorcising that ghostly figure that haunted black dreams" (195). While the limits of "conversation" have become apparent to the protagonist in those moments of silence, unease, and embarrassment, the conditions which Ruby's blue eyes draw his attention to are the "familiar . . . lexicon of color consciousness within the black community—good hair, bad hair; thick lips or thin" (193). Such a lexicon forms, even within the black communities Obama describes, an omnipotent scheme of control over the individual body, and is only one symptom of a racist, classist, sexist "program that seems to violate our most intuitive sense of self-determination" (Christopher Johnson qtd. in Royle 23). Beneath Ruby's difficult response, "It's just for fun . . . Something different, you know," an awareness develops of this insidious program of control and manipulation (Obama 192). This exists as a second-degree dialogue akin to what Maurice Maeterlinck describes: "Side by side with the necessary dialogue you will almost always find another dialogue that seems superfluous; but examine it carefully, and it will be borne home to you that this is the only one that the soul can listen to profoundly, for here alone is it the soul that is being addressed. . . . these are words that conform to a deeper truth" (Maeterlinck 111–12). The text is haunted by what cannot be spoken, in a scenario where beauty ideals serve as another way of violating normal codes of citizenship. The double nature of the dialogue, as identified by Maeterlinck, manifests the uncanny violation of interiority by a surveillance program which contains, amongst other silencing techniques, the racist cataloguing of what constitutes a physically beautiful body, and in the same move cuts off the individual's ability to name the surveilling power.

Obama frames Ruby's effected blue eyes as her own distortion of her body in response to the violation of her sense of self by a program of surveillance which is inherently racist, and in which she "becomes the principle of [her] own subjection" (Foucault 203). In this uncanny state, the level of oral articulation which might create the *transition* described by

Brathwaite between interiority and community, thus fostering identity, cannot function well; the effect is a conflicted relationship with processes of inhabiting the body. Such witnessing of the violated self situates an awkward silence which is only punctuated by the “necessary dialogue,” the uncanny indicator of what really needs to be said. Obama goes on to conclude that in black nationalist perspectives, where “the phrase *self-esteem* seemed to be on everyone’s lips,” such a discourse is nevertheless framed through a lapse into a *disembodied* speech (193). In the face of “a market economy and majoritarian rule,” Obama surmises that nationalist ideals remain “Just talk”: “nationalism dissipated into an attitude rather than any concrete program, images and sounds that crowded the airwaves and conversation but without any *corporeal* existence” (202, 203, 200, emphasis added). In the midst of a program which surveys and controls black life through economic, cultural, and capital means, Obama discovers that discourse itself cannot be used in a strictly linear relationship with the practice of representing an embodied individuality. Instead, he concludes, “Our sense of wholeness would have to arise from something more fine than the bloodlines we’d inherited. It would have to find root in Mrs. Crenshaw’s story and Mr. Marshall’s story, in Ruby’s story and Rafiq’s; in all the messy, contradictory details of our experience” (204). In the programmed surveillance society, dialogue alone is an insufficient form of expression for someone who, like Ruby or the slave narrator, finds her interiority simultaneously privatized and exposed, her relationship with her own body subject to the authority of systematic and internalized prejudice. What Obama gestures to with “stories,” “messiness,” “contradiction” here is a form of discourse which can encompass *both* the necessary and unnecessary aspects of individual experience, *both* the specificity of individual cases and the commonality of all who hold a stake in the society. Neither speech nor the representation of the body alone can be adequate in this enterprise; what the narrative turns toward, eventually, is the distinctive interplay between speech, silence, bodily contortion, and inarticulate sound that forms voice.

Later in the narrative, Obama describes how he takes Ruby to a theatrical performance of Ntozake Shange’s 1975 choreopoem *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*. The text of Shange’s poem makes a virtue of vocal disjuncture, and encompasses a compromised, *uncomfortable* relationship with the body, which signals the difficulty of the condition of alienation from community:

. . . half-notes scattered
without rhythm / no tune
distraught laughter fallin’
over a black girl’s shoulder
it’s funny / it’s hysterical
the melody-less-ness of her dance.

(qtd. in Obama 205)

In Shange’s verse, as well as Obama’s description of its performance, there is a reaching toward a form of discourse which encompasses both embodiment and disembodiment, individuality and the communal, expressive voice and speechless silence, and which gives voice to the necessary and unnecessary dialogue felt throughout Obama’s previous attempts at representation:

All through their songs, violent, angry, sweet, unflinching, the women danced, each of them, double-dutch and rhumba and bump and solitary waltz; sweat-breaking, heart-breaking dances. They danced until they all seemed one spirit. . . .

I found god in myself

and I loved her / I loved her fiercely.

(Obama 206)

Obama puts into place a remarkable turn toward an exultant form of expressive voice epitomized by engagement with the text, performance, and embodied movement of Shange's work. It is all of these elements *together* which begin to articulate something of the experience of how Ruby's relationship with her own body has been violated by a systemic program. Where the articulatory power of the mask of citizenship has repeatedly been found to be unavailable on terms which do not compromise the individual's selfhood, here are found alternative terms in which citizenship might be couched. This alternative claim, instead of finding its way into speech, resolves into the relationship between sound, body movement, and the space between words: "Nothing more was said; for the entire ride back to the South Side . . . we never broke that precious silence" (206).

The Roots & Ursula Rucker, "The Return to Innocence Lost"

If the surveillance society, like the historical framing of the slave narrative by white patronage, so disrupts the individual's relationship with her own interiority, as seen in Obama's text in the approach to both the power of speech and the power of the body, it appears in slightly different form in Ursula Rucker's 1999 collaborative recording with hip hop artists The Roots. This spoken word piece tells a harrowing story of domestic violence, and Rucker comments that this poem is "to date, my most personal piece," that writing this work "definitely opened up the channels for me to not [c]ensor myself ever again. . . . it was a really important moment for me to know that I could be free with what I said . . . and not be afraid to let it all fly" (Rucker). The sheer difficulty of exposing a story of abuse, and the possibilities of entrapment presented by the process of storytelling, resonates with the tradition of the slave narrative, in which the slave may take risks in navigating the governing structure in order to write herself free. The subject's interiority—her relationship with and articulation of her own feelings—is violated in Rucker's case by not one but at least three externally imposed programs: the social control exerted by the state and its policing apparatus in the ghetto landscape depicted in this piece; the inhibition exerted by the abuser over the child-victim's right to speak; and the hegemonic image of "the ghetto" as it is shaped by mass media as a formidable force against which to position a personal story. The difficulty which Rucker refers to in writing this piece, then, is not only in situating a voice of resistance against the abuser who controlled the domestic sphere, but additionally in addressing the layered contexts of violence occurring within and beyond the home, informing every level of the ghettoized society this poem addresses.

The right of people to speak of their own experience, unmediated, unenclosed by the almost all-encompassing narrative of 24-hour news and media, raises a contemporary variant upon the constraints familiar to the slave narrative. Tricia Rose emphasizes how hip hop “has brought the ghetto back into the public consciousness. . . . These are the street corners and neighborhoods that usually serve as lurid backdrops for street crimes on the nightly news. Few local people are given an opportunity to speak, and their points of view are always contained by expert testimony” (Rose 11). Like the slave narrator whose capacity to articulate her interiority is compromised by the enclosing structure of white patronage and its claim to represent the slave personality in “legible” form, the role of ubiquitous media representation of sites of urban poverty in reading the identities of black individuals serves just as important a context for Rucker’s story as might any autobiography of domestic abuse. Media obsession with the “gangsta” archetype forms an important dynamic in mainstream critical reception to hip hop; The Roots are often noted as distinctive in hip hop culture for “play[ing] ‘traditional’ musical instruments and sampl[ing] only minimally” (Marshall 869).⁴ The group’s lynchpin, Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson, has commented how

[Our album] *Illadelph Halflife* came out in September 1996, just two weeks after Tupac Shakur was shot and killed in Las Vegas. Our hometown paper, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, noted this like it was some kind of passing of the torch: they called the record “The first major release of the post-Tupac Shakur era in rap,” and said that we “reaffirm just how far-reaching (and how far removed from the gangsta stereotype) hip-hop can be.” That’s what we were trying to establish, though it was a little strange to see it linked to Tupac’s killing. (Thompson 144)

Such media narratives serve to enclose the artistic or vocal expressions of black people in a way that attaches values of black respectability to one kind of expression, represented here ostensibly by The Roots, and pits it against another kind of expression, the “gangsta stereotype” of Tupac, as an undesirable face of black culture. Reflecting upon the above comments on the figure of Tupac, and the fate he met, could not demonstrate more clearly that the desire imposed by a framing narrative to restrict a particular kind of discourse can translate very easily into the sense that it is simply inconvenient to have certain kinds of people around, as Tupac himself observed directly when he asked, not without ire, “How we gonna be ‘African Americans’ if we out here dying?” Rucker’s poem, in this context, does the radical work of speaking into stereotypes about the ghetto and articulating in the distinctly disharmonious spaces between those media stories and another more private story that needs to be told. It is in this uncomfortable space that the expressive difficulty and potential of voice is eventually accessed.

The opening bars of “The Return to Innocence Lost” are composed of textured sonic effects which begin to foreground the troubled relationship between the program that tells one very well-known version of the African American ghetto, and another register of speech that attempts to articulate something much more personal against that omnipotent framework. Reading “The Return to Innocence Lost,” a text of lyric and sound, as a potential revision of the slave narrative, it becomes clear that the terrain of “noise” has

much to offer in terms of creating alternative forms of citizenship. Brathwaite notes that, "Noise is that decorative energy that invests the nation performance. Unnecessary but without which not enough" (Brathwaite 46). His words echo Maeterlinck's allusion to the "unnecessary" and "necessary" nature, respectively of "first-degree" and "second-degree dialogue." While Brathwaite goes on to describe musical, percussive noise, both accounts point toward a register of expression which occurs alongside speech, which may have a sound all of its own, but which may not be articulated in straightforward discursive ways. The recording begins with a musical effect which is achieved instrumentally, the poet explains, with what she calls "the empty Rhodes [electric piano] because it wasn't really on. [The player] was just hitting the keys" (Rucker). This sound, described as "a haunting beginning . . . that eerie ice cream truck sound, like in a horror movie," also evokes the mechanical sounds similar to those made by a toy on a baby's cot; the sonic landscape reveals, then, at once the most intimate corner of the homestead, and, in "unhomely," uncanny fashion, the transient life of the street outside (Rucker).

In addition to exposing a story of domestic abuse, "The Return to Innocence Lost" also foregrounds the violent intrusion of the ghettoized and surveilled urban landscape into the intimate home space, and the embattled state in which this places access to expressive speech by both the victim of abuse and the abuser. Interleaved with the piano sound which opens the poem is the just-discernible sound of an impact, which suggests a range of oddly conflicting possibilities. The first possibility is that of doors slamming along an open corridor, while another possibility is that the sound prefigures the "Muffled sound of fist on flesh" which constitutes the first line of the lyric spoken by Rucker (The Roots). Within this interaction between noise and speech, then, is already evoked a clash between spaces which conventionally belong apart from each other: the inner life of the home and the outer life of the street (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*). Through these sound effects, the domestic space is represented as poorly enclosed and not fully protected from the life of the building, the street, and the "corner spot" where "Daddy . . . spent hours . . . / With some bar pop named Cookie," while in the intimate home space, "Mommy almost bled to death" giving birth, having "already lost . . . three" other babies (The Roots). The birth space is clearly far from protected in this vulnerable economy, already situated in a too-close proximity to scenes of drinking, drug-taking, and prostitution. Yet Rucker's use of language makes these spaces cascade into each other even more intrusively when "Daddy" penetrates the home, as well as the bed and body of the bleeding mother, with his "Sweet . . . talk shit / Cookie's cheap lipstick / Hair grease, sperm, and jezebel juice" (The Roots). While "Daddy grunts and cursed drunk nothings in her bloodied ear," his speech is only ever framed in terms of obscenity and violence, and the mother's speech appears as soft "lullaby" or silent prayer to a private God:

she purged her scourge
With birth-blood and quiet tears
Watching as her fears and love and sacrifice
Lie there in his soft skin and new life
Breathing, dreaming, fresh from God's eye.
(The Roots)

Neither Daddy's language of violent aggression nor Mommy's self-talk and prayer accesses the transition between individual interiority and community, identified by Brathwaite as vital for the coherence of the individual's identity. In the formation of subjectivity, which is shaped by both the violent life of the street and the "expert testimony" which in the mass media so often frames such scenes, neither of these kinds of speech can be adequate to any claim to citizenship for the individual. This piece then shows the ways in which the family as a whole, and each member within it, is victimized by the violence both outside and within the home, and how the two are intimately linked. Rucker says: "If I ever attempt to enter that arena again, it's going to be difficult for me . . . It was very scary. For a long time I lied and would say to people that it wasn't really true" (Rucker). The distinctly "scary" nature of entering this kind of discursive territory relates not only to the fear of navigating traumatic memories, but also to the very real threats of violence which are made by the abuser against a victim who dares to speak out, and equally by a society which shows limited tolerance for black speakers who are considered to have the wrong kind of speech.

The third person narrative perspective to "The Return to Innocence Lost" is invested with a personal slant by "she two more born / One boy soon after / The girl much later," scoping the possibility that Rucker herself is the surviving daughter in the described scenario (*The Roots*). Though her position may be inexacty depicted, it also reflects "the thought of a third person" as haunting in Maeterlinck's sense. Thus the potential begins to be situated for accessing a terrain of voice in which the interiority not only of the abused narrator, but of all the disempowered subjectivities, inside and outside the home, might speak out of the structures of surveillance. As the son whose "womb-world was profaned" is described as growing older, he is shown turning speech into a weapon against his mother: "Blamed Mom for the wrong she let Daddy do to her" (*The Roots*). As he begins to "Erase wise, woeful words of Mother," he uses talk to pledge an allegiance to the same life of the street inhabited by his father, to "Speak street-family vows." The cycle of alcohol and drug abuse which follows ("Now . . . Daddy and him twins in addiction") leads finally to the son's death, and in the space of mourning, the mother and the father's relationship with the framing discourse undergoes a perceptible change:

Baby Sis awake for dawn on Christmas morn
 To Mommy's sobs and shakes
 Daddy's silhouettes of regret
 All past, omitted, and absolved by loss
 As they clung to each other
 Knowing . . .

(The Roots)

In this final tableau neither mother nor father speak, while the daughter appears invested with a new vision, a new capacity to see the trap which her parents inhabit. As the parents, never before able to speak in any way which connects interiority with community, they now lose the power of speech altogether and exist only as silhouettes, producing a silence which the daughter can speak into or beyond. Rucker does not here erase the knowledge of any potential descent into death the parents, or any other unnamed subjects from this

world might make, instead allowing the uncomfortable and compromised combination of speech, sound, silence, and movement to produce the space in which the horror of the urban landscape must be witnessed, and in which the daughter finally comes to encapsulate the new kind of citizen-subjectivity that is enabled by voice.

Louis Theroux, *Law and Disorder in Philadelphia*

Louis Theroux's documentary about the police in Kensington, one of Philadelphia's most deprived and troubled neighborhoods, over an apparently typical few days and nights on their watch, shows the surveillance society in distinctive view, where speech repeatedly fails to communicate. Here, in inner city scenes of continuous war between drug lords, civilians, and police, speech becomes a redundant act. People's lives and fates are controlled not by anything they might say or do, or even by any power within their sight, but by a system which operates by its own incomprehensible logic. Surveillance here is constituted not only on the unseen stage of the state, or in the ever-present machinery of the city police force, but also in a lucrative and exploitative economy of illegal drugs. Patricia Hill Collins offers a sense, similar to Brathwaite, of a traditional community which once served a protective function against the intrusions upon interiority, arguing that "after emancipation . . . Families, churches, fraternal organizations, and other institutions of the Black public sphere offered African-Americans protection from White surveillance" (Collins, *Fighting Words* 23). The setting which Theroux's film shows, however, is one in which the protective function of community, in nurturing individual interiority against the surveillance structure, is fractured beyond recognition.

Theroux's film is striking for its depictions of the depressing uniformity of urban desolation on the infamous drug turf of Philadelphia's 24th precinct. The documentary refers repeatedly to instances of young people being shot or killed in gun violence, and shows homes and neighborhoods ravaged by the abuse and violence inherent to the drug trade. Access to meaningful speech appears to have been altogether brutalized out of many citizens and police officers alike by the systems of surveillance in which they are operating. It is also of key relevance here that, as Angela Davis has pointed out, "Drugs were responsible for the receding of militancy and revolutionary impulses in Black communities all over the country" (Olsson 175). The uncanny sense in this film, of interiority dispossessed by speech itself, is strongly underscored by the effects which drugs have upon individual behavior, whether contributing to violence, to inappropriate laughter, or simply to incapacity and inaction. Every utterance is made as if it were a line spoken in a staged performance, which is without consequence, in ways which reveal "the ultimate truth of the capitalist utilitarian despiritualized universe," in Slavoj Žižek's formulation, "the dematerialization of 'real life' itself, its reversal into a spectral show" (Žižek 14).

The articulation of an everyday conflation between what is real in a scenario and what appears as imagination or hyperreal fantasy appears regularly in the documentary. Police officers exclaim in one scene, for instance, the "gun looked real enough to me for you to get shot," and elsewhere, when stopping a man for having tinted windows in his car: "That window's so dark, he could have been sitting there with a shotgun. And as soon as my

partner walked up to the window he could have shot him" (Theroux). In a system where law and order is protected neither by the state, nor by the police as apparatus of the state, neither civilians *nor* police officers truly have access to the kind of mask Arendt refers to, which might allow them to speak with political relevance or instrumental power. Yet in the midst of this raw exposure of the lawlessness of law enforcement, Theroux as a narrator is able to model *how to listen* in order to perceive the useful power of voice in the midst of the almost completely locked-down context of surveillance culture seen here. Police officers frequently can be seen playing a role here which is akin to the white patrons framing the traditional slave narrative. One instance shows a scene where an officer from the SITE Unit, "an elite team [which uses] aggressive tactics to shut down the highest crime areas," chases and catches a man who appears to be in possession of drugs (Theroux 0:6:40). The triumphant officer points breathlessly, with the light from his flashlight, to tattoos on the man's hands which read "BORN THUG" (Theroux 0:10:59). Giving a flourish, the officer appears to read these words as if they explain everything. The black body is thus made legible and safe, and serves as a means of the police articulating their power to frame the narrative of the individual's identity. Theroux has made tongue-in-cheek reference to "the secret of [my] interviewing technique" being "incompetence. Sometimes, by asking the wrong question or being a little bit awkward, people feel more at ease and they open up to you" ("You Ask the Questions"). In this case, Theroux asks an "awkward question": "why do you have 'born thug' on your tattoos?" The man answers, "To me, a Thug is just a way of life, you know . . . We out here struggling every day, so . . . what else?" (Theroux 0:11:10). Bodily self-presentation and the pathetic failure of speech here together gesture toward voice, an experiential space in which speech, a loss of words, and bodily expression combine to express something of the hopelessness of an individual's reach for identity.

Another officer offers his reading of what he calls the "textbook Philly corner mentality":

it's cool to be like that, and uh you know whether they really believe it or not, especially if they're in front of their peers, they just have to act that way, you know. And I know there's at least a good percentage of them that don't necessarily feel that way deep down, but they gotta put on that facade to not look like a punk in front of their boys. (Theroux 0:28:01)

Claiming to know civilians' feelings "deep down," like the white patron enclosing the slave narrative, the police officers express their frustration with a community which refuses to speak to them. These officers appear to be afflicted with a sense that if civilians were to speak to them more truthfully, the society they preside over would function better. It becomes increasingly clear though, that the police themselves are part of the structure of surveillance which problematizes civilians' access to speech.

In a scene which suggests a range of possibilities about the significance of speech, the refusal to speak, and the relationship between these practices in the culture of the street, Theroux approaches a group of young men standing on a corner. He asks, "Why is there so much crime and gun violence here?" and as his questioning proceeds, a range of discursive strategies is revealed in the young men's approach to speech and surveillance. The first strategy is to plead complete ignorance: "I don't even know for real. I couldn't even tell

you" (Theroux 0:25:27). When Theroux follows up with "Would you tell me if you did know?" the response is "No," revealing something then beyond simple ignorance of the causes and conditions for violence; that is, an agency and ability to resist being read. The interviewee then refers to "code number one": "No snitching! Never snitch!," again revealing another dimension of the approach to discourse in this culture of suffocating surveillance (Theroux 0:25:44). Beyond ignorance, and beyond the resistance to being read, is a code of honor rooted in a certain kind of community. This community, however, is far from a safe or nurturing space, and when Theroux asks a moment later, "If you had information about a homicide, someone getting killed, would you go to the police?" the interviewee responds in the negative, explaining "you never know how long you gonna live after you do that" (Theroux 0:25:48). In this culture which is under surveillance at all times not only by police but also by drug lords, and where individuals also watch each other closely with perceptions skewed by addiction, the conversation here reveals a thrashing around in the relationship with discourse. The consequences of being legible here are all too real. Here there is no failsafe way to protect yourself in a place where nothing—neither the law as represented by the police, nor the law of the streets—can be relied upon. After all, "they'll shoot anybody. They don't care who it is" (Theroux 0:38:07). If there is any textbook of rules which the policed individuals shown here are expected to follow, it would contain, like the framing discourse of the slave narrative, rules which are subject to change at the individual discretion of anyone who happens to have *any* power in any given moment.

A listening practice which seeks truly to discover ways in which individuals might develop an effective relationship with their own interiority, which is not completely violated by the culture of surveillance, *must* be willing to hear the sites of speech which resist interpretation, which guard the individual right not to be read. By exercising a special reach of empathy, it might be possible to understand a state of mind in which an individual who observes that his life is not valued, is, as Tupac once demonstrated, *not willing* to lay himself open as fully legible text. Oddly enough, Theroux's role as an Englishman and an outsider in a racially-charged situation is on this occasion quite helpful. Theroux is himself not heavily invested in the power dynamic here, and is thus able to show how asking simple questions from a relatively disinterested standpoint can offer a textured picture of the diverse social forces in which the individual resists legibility. Theroux himself is explicitly *not very articulate*, and Jacques Rancière helps to explain how inarticulate, or failed access to language, to speech itself, can act as the essence of what I am calling voice (but which Rancière calls "poetry"): "poetry is . . . the language of a humanity in transition from original silence to articulate speech by way of the image-gesture and the deafness of song. . . . poetry assures its status as symbolic language, as a language that speaks less by what it says than by what it does not say" (Rancière, *Mute Speech* 59). Rancière's interesting conclusion that "This consciousness inscribed in the language of poetic works is likewise found in the tools of agriculture, the institutions of law, and the emblems of justice" suggests that poetry merely foregrounds, merely *maps* processes of interrupted signification, second-degree dialogue, and uncanny speech (*Mute Speech* 59). Like the tools, institutions, and emblems of civil society, this poetic aspect of voice merely gestures to an interior world of innately human values which are not always easily articulated in language.

Conclusion: The Value of Voice in the Era of Black Lives Matter

The texts discussed here demonstrate that in conditions of radical disenfranchisement, the terms accorded norms of citizenship by Western tropes of civility are often explicitly unavailable. Arendt's mask of civility operates specifically as a kind of agreement between citizens of a certain type, and is predicated upon those citizens sharing certain kinds of privilege. What is available to those that Arendt marks, point blank, as "the slave" is instead the kind of compromised speech which is seen in the framing of the slave narrative by the authorizing white power structure (*On Revolution* 97). Voice represents a communicative strategy which not only gives some sense of the individual's relationship with her own interiority (however damaged that relationship might be, in the brutal conditions of the surveillance society), but also situates this interiority in ways which, however high the stakes, make a radical claim to an alternative kind of citizenship. Milette Shamir indicates a broader contemporary corollary for this discursive phenomenon when she points to a "revision in poststructuralist thought" in which the "private and exquisitely particularizing experience [forms] a springboard for a new type of politics, a new form of political belonging . . . a space meaningfully and, perhaps, promisingly divided between performance and its backstage: discourse and silence" (Shamir 12). In this new type of politics, subjectivities which begin to be situated in and amidst expressive words, movement, sound, and silence tell not only of the significance of the content of what is spoken, but of the even greater significance of that which cannot yet be spoken or heard, precisely because the encompassing state structure does not show the capacity to hear certain kinds of stories told by certain kinds of people. These forms of articulation which occur within what we can now clearly judge to be the *improperly* constituted political space, then occur as cry or howl, as judder of frustration which struggles within the boundaries of speech or language itself to be heard. The listening strategies I propose here can (or indeed *must*) be accessed in a variety of media, and learning to listen in different ways (as readers, viewers, or participants in discourse) attunes our sensitivity to this uncanny terrain, this second-degree discourse, this expanded sensorial experience which takes in information on various levels of visual, corporeal, and sonic discourse.

Black Lives Matter's use of voice situates a discourse which emerges from hearts raw with feeling, energized by an approach to black liberation which challenges any expectation situated by the larger programmed society:

Black Lives Matter . . . goes beyond the narrow nationalism that . . . keep[s] straight cis Black men in the front of the movement while our sisters, queer and **trans** and **disabled** folk take up roles in the background or not at all. Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, **Black-undocumented folks**, folks with **records**, **women** and **all Black lives** along the gender spectrum. ("About")

Like the poetic techniques used by Ursula Rucker, Black Lives Matter's vital, assertive discursive mode seeks to draw into its purview all of the varied identities which might be represented by Blackness. Yet there is an uncanny doubleness to the resonance of the "Lives" which are held balanced at the center of the movement's clarion call, which calls

for a specific kind of listening: these are lives which must be fought for because they are considered more disposable than white lives. Like the similar hashtag #ICantBreathe, which echoed the words spoken eleven times by Eric Garner as he died in a police officer's illegal chokehold in the streets of Staten Island, the words "speak . . . from the grave" and "symbolize . . . the circumstances faced by many who are being choked by a system that treats different races and classes of people unequally" (Jackson and Kim). The terrain in which voice must be heard, though poetic in nature, is not some esoteric space occupied only by literary critics. It is the space of the very strangeness of our contemporary surveillance society, where the individual must fight for the right to life, the right to breath, and the right to a private self which does not exist for any reader.

NOTES

1. See also Alexander.
2. My reading of Hannah Arendt is informed by Tony Burns.
3. Rancière draws these terms from the work of Maurice Maeterlinck, who he claims "most forcefully theorized this . . . form of . . . unconscious discourse, in his analysis of 'second-degree dialogue' in Ibsen's dramas. This dialogue expresses not the thoughts, sentiments, and intentions of the characters, but the thought of the 'third person' who haunts the dialogue, the confrontation with the Unknown, with the anonymous and meaningless forces of life." (Rancière, *The Aesthetic* 39–40)
4. Marshall's interesting article gives detailed testimony to the fact that this notion of hip hop as being originally essentially concerned with sampling is a misapprehension.

WORKS CITED

- "About the Black Lives Matter Network." Web. 16 Aug. 2015. <<http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>>.
- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2010.
- Andrews, Kehinde. "Policing the Plantation: Legalised Killings of the 'Bad Nigger.'" Web. <https://ncccs.wordpress.com/2014/12/08/policing-the-plantation-legalised-killings-of-the-bad-nigger-2/>
- Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. 1963. Introd. Jonathan Schell. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2006.
- . *Responsibility and Judgement*. Ed. Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2003.
- Beaulieu, Elizabeth Ann. *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999.
- Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*. London: New Beacon Books, 1984.
- Burns, Tony. "'The Right to Have Rights': Slavery, Freedom and Citizenship in the Thought of Aristotle, Hegel and Arendt." *Culture & Civilization: Cosmopolitanism & the Global Polity*. vol. 5. Ed. Gabriel R. Ricci. London: Transaction Publishers, 2013. 181–207.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 1990. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- . *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998.
- Davis, Charles T., and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. *The Slave's Narrative*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 1975. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, 1995.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*. 1919. Standard Edition 17. Ed. and trans. James Strachey. London: Vintage, 2001. 217–56.
- Gilroy, Paul. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. 1987. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2002.
- hampton, dream. "Hell-Raiser." *"And It Don't Stop": The Best American Hip Hop Journalism of the Last 25 Years*. Ed. Raquel Cepeda. New York: Faber and Faber, 2004. 131–46. Rpt. from *The Source* Sept. 1994.
- hooks, bell. "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness." *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press, 1990. 145–53.

- Jackson, Jesse, and Grace Ji-Sun Kim. "'I Can't Breathe': Eric Garner's Last Words Symbolize Our Predicament." *Huffington Post*. 18 Dec. 2014. Web. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/grace-jisun-kim/i-cant-breathe-eric-garner_b_6341634.html>.
- James, Joy, ed. *The New Abolitionists: (Neo)Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2005.
- Lee, James Kyung-Jin. *Urban Triage: Race and the Fictions of Multiculturalism*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004.
- Maeterlinck, Maurice. "The Tragical in Daily Life." *The Treasure of the Humble*. Trans. Alfred Sutro. Allen, 1904. 95–120.
- Marable, Manning. *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945–2006*. 3rd ed. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2007.
- Marshall, Wayne. "Giving Up Hip-Hop's Firstborn: A Quest for the Real after the Death of Sampling." *Callaloo* 29.3 (2006): 868–92.
- Morrison, Toni. "Nobel Lecture." *NobelPrize.org*. 7 Dec. 1993. Web. <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1993/morrison-lecture.html>.
- Obama, Barack. *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance*. 1995. Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2007.
- Olsson, Göran Hugo. *The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013.
- Phillips, Jerry. "Slave Narratives." *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*. Ed. Richard Gray and Owen Robinson. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004. 43–57.
- Rancière, Jacques. *The Aesthetic Unconscious*. 2001. Trans. Debra Keates and James Swenson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.
- . *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory, and Politics*. Trans. James Swenson. New York: Columbia UP, 2011.
- Remnick, David. *The Bridge: The Life and Rise of Barack Obama*. London: Pan Macmillan, 2010.
- The Roots, featuring Ursula Rucker. "The Return to Innocence Lost." *Things Fall Apart*. Geffen Records, 1999.
- Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1994.
- Royle, Nicholas. *The Uncanny: An Introduction*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003.
- Rucker, Ursula. "Things Fall Apart' Turns 15: Interview with Ursula Rucker On 'The Return to Innocence Lost.'" *HipHopDX.com*. 24 Feb. 2014. Web. <<http://hiphopdx.com/videos/id.15621/title.the-roots-things-fall-apart-turns-15-interview-with-ursula-rucker-on-the-return-to-innocence-lost->>.
- Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.
- Schaap, Andrew. "Enacting the Right to Have Rights: Jacques Rancière's Critique of Hannah Arendt." *European Journal of Political Theory* 10.1 (2011): 22–45.
- Scott, Anna. "It's All in the Timing: The Latest Moves, James Brown's Grooves, and the Seventies Race-Consciousness Movement in Salvador, Bahia-Brazil." *Soul: Black Power, Politics, and Pleasure*. Ed. Monique Guillory and Richard Green. New York: New York UP, 1998. 9–22.
- Shakur, Tupac. "No Peace Treaty Black Expo Speech." 1993. *YouTube.com*. Web. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYunZt59f0>>.
- Shamir, Milette. *Inexpressible Privacy: The Interior Life of Antebellum American Literature*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006.
- Smith, Valerie. "Neo-slave narratives." *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*. Ed. Audrey Fisch. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. 168–85.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. 2nd ed. Oxford: Routledge, 2006. 28–37. Rpt. of *Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. By Spivak. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999.
- Theroux, Louis. *Law and Disorder in Philadelphia*. BBC iplayer. Web. <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00fy4cz/louis-theroux-law-and-disorder-in-philadelphia>>.
- "These Savvy Women Have Made Black Lives Matter the Most Crucial Left-Wing Movement Today." *Justice Not Jails*. 22 Nov. 2015. Web. <<https://justicenotjails.org/black-lives-matter-movement/>>.
- Thompson, Ahmir "Questlove," and Ben Greenman. *Mo' Meta Blues: The World According to Questlove*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2013.
- "You Ask the Questions: Louis Theroux." *Independent*. 7 Nov. 2001. Web. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/you-ask-the-questions-louis-theroux-9218133.html>>.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. London: Verso, 2002.